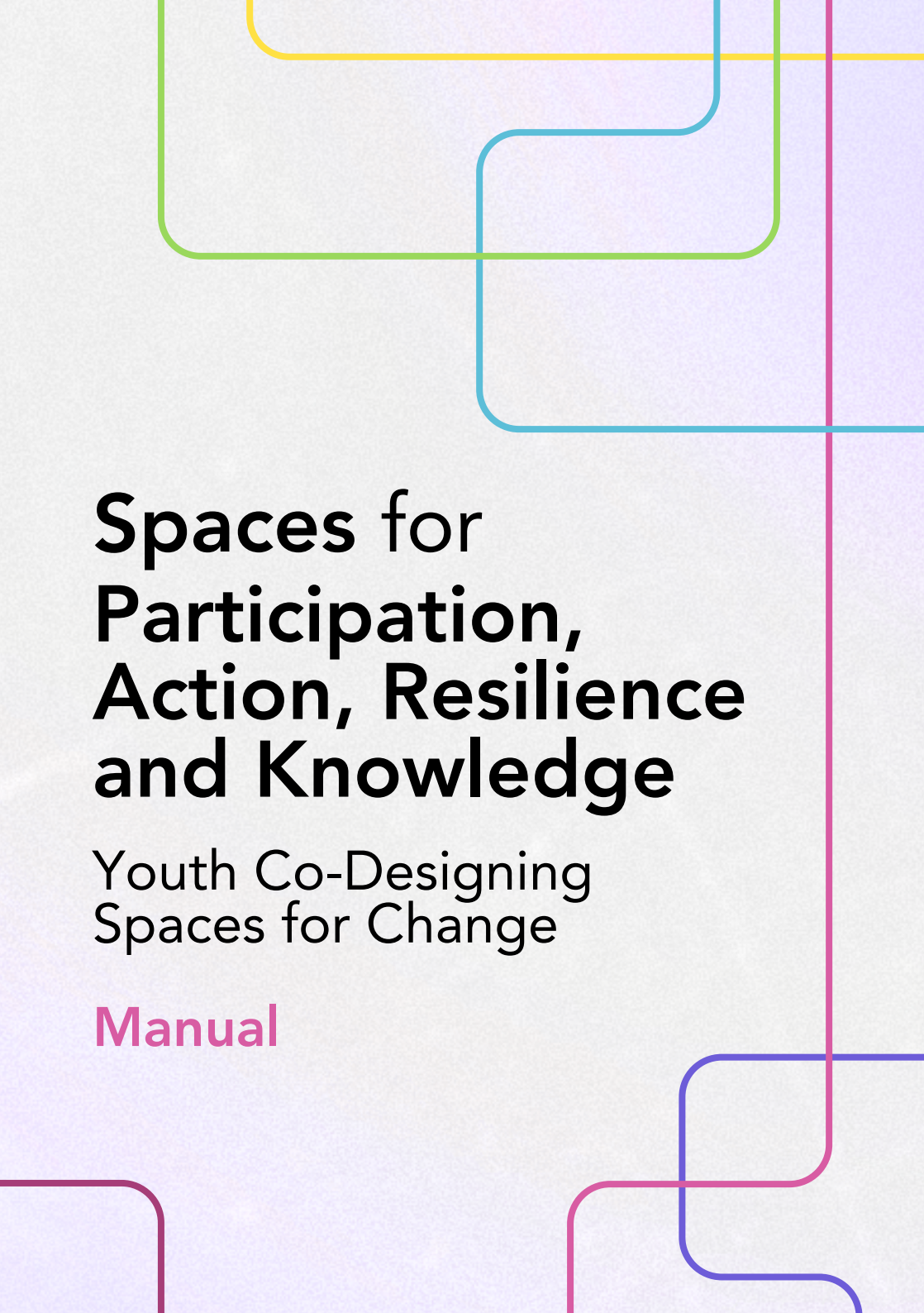




Spaces for Participation, Action, Resilience and Knowledge

Youth Co-Designing
Spaces for Change

Manual

MANUAL

SPARK

Spaces for Participation, Action, Resilience and Knowledge

Learn more about the project:



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This publication was developed by the SPARK Project team, a collaboration between Roter Baum Berlin (Germany), Curba de Cultură (Romania), and Municipality of Macerata (Italy).



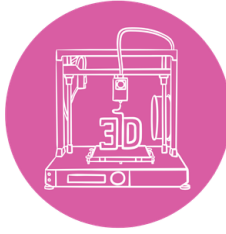
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S.P.A.R.K

Spaces for Participation, Action, Resilience and Knowledge

Youth Co-Designing Spaces for Change

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INDEX

INTRODUCTION

06

- 1.1 Purpose and objectives 08
- 1.2 Target Groups of the Toolkit 10
- 1.3 European Values and the Vision of Social Spaces 12
- 1.4 Partnership and Cooperation 16
- 1.5 How to Use the Toolkit 19

PRINCIPLES OF CO-DESIGN IN YOUTH WORK

22

- 2.1 Real Participation and Youth Protagonism 24
- 2.2 Non-formal Education and Learning by Doing 25
- 2.3 Ethics and the Creation of Safe Spaces 26
- 2.4 Concrete Actions and Tangible Outcomes 27
- 2.5 Ownership and Sense of Belonging 28
- 2.6 Transforming Spaces into Youth-Friendly Environments 28

SPARK - CO-DESIGN METHODOLOGY

30

- 3.1 Activation and Context Analysis 32
- 3.2 Team Building 38
- 3.3 Co-Design and Ideation 43
- 3.4 Prototyping and Testing 50
- 3.5 Presentation, Ownership, and Dissemination 58
- 3.6 Participatory Evaluation in Youth-Led Projects 62

HOW TO FACILITATE CO-DESIGN

68

- 4.1 The Role of the Youth-Worker as Facilitator, Mediator, and Translator 71
- 4.2 Managing Participation and Expectations 73
- 4.3 Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces 74
- 4.4 Trust Building and Motivation 76
- 4.5 Ethical Considerations in Co-Design 77
- 4.6 Practical Facilitation Tips 78

CASE STUDIES

80

- 5.1 Painting the New Youth Center (Germany) 83
- 5.2 Zentrale - Ground Up (Germany) 85
- 5.3 ASK - Art Social Kitchen (Italy) 87
- 5.4 Build the Future (Italy) 89
- 5.5 RadioTin (Romania) 91
- 5.6 Parks and Recreation (Romania) 93

CONCLUSIONS AND MOTIVATION

95

- 6.1 References and Further Reading 99
- 6.2 Credits 102

INTRO- DUCTION

OSI



This chapter introduces the SPARK project, its vision, objectives, and methodological foundations. It explains how participatory co-design can support youth participation, social inclusion, and the creation of more accessible and youth-friendly spaces across different community contexts.

1.1 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

Welcome to the **SPARK Toolkit**. If you are youth workers, educators, representatives of youth organisations, policymakers, or active young people, you are aware of the importance of creating **inclusive, participatory, and stimulating spaces**. Designing environments that truly respond to the needs of young people is a complex challenge, but also an important opportunity to promote active citizenship, social innovation, and sustainable development. It is within this context that the SPARK Toolkit was created.

SPARK - Spaces for Participation, Action, Resilience and Knowledge is an international project funded by the European Union's Erasmus+ Programme, under Key Action 2 - Cooperation Partnerships in Youth (KA220-YOU). The project aims to **strengthen young people's participation** by directly involving them in the **design and prototyping of spaces created for their needs**. The project has a duration of 24 months, from 13 December 2025 to 12 December 2027, with a total budget of €120,000.

What is SPARK?

SPARK is an innovative initiative that promotes **co-design practices** as a tool to involve young people in the **transformation of public and community spaces**. Through a practical and collaborative approach, participants develop creative, technical, and social skills, becoming **active contributors to change**.

Why was SPARK created?

In a European context marked by social, economic, and environmental transformations, young people are increasingly **excluded from decision-making processes** concerning public and community spaces. Many youth centres and gathering places are still designed through **top-down processes**, resulting in spaces that do not adequately respond to the actual needs of young people. SPARK was created to fill this gap by promoting a **collaborative approach that directly involves young people** in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the spaces designed for them.



The project adopts a **practical and experimental approach**, based on **co-design labs, creative workshops, and prototyping activities**. Through these experiences, young people develop practical and social competences, strengthen their sense of belonging to the community, and contribute to the creation of sustainable and youth-friendly environments.

SPARK aims to support young people in becoming **active co-creators of their communities**, and to promote active citizenship, social inclusion, and innovation in youth work. The project also encourages the exchange of good practices among European organisations, contributing to the development of replicable and sustainable approaches at the international level.

Project Objectives

The overall objective of SPARK is to experiment with participatory and co-design approaches in order to develop, test, and validate a structured and replicable methodology for the design of youth and public spaces, strengthening the quality and innovation of youth work in Europe.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- To promote **meaningful participation among young people** by involving them in decision-making processes related to community spaces
- To develop a **replicable co-design methodology** applicable to urban, rural, and peripheral contexts
- To improve the **quality and innovation of youth work** through practical tools and training pathways
- To strengthen the **skills and competences of young people and youth workers**, particularly in participatory design, collaboration, and problem solving
- To foster **social inclusion and diversity**, ensuring equal opportunities for engagement
- To promote **active citizenship, community engagement, and a sense of belonging**
- To develop **sustainable and modular solutions** by prototyping and testing activities
- To encourage **European cooperation** through the exchange of knowledge and good practices among partners

1.2 TARGET GROUPS OF THE TOOLKIT

The SPARK Toolkit is addressed to a **wide range of stakeholders** involved, in different capacities, in the design, implementation, and enhancement of youth and community spaces. Through an open and collaborative approach, the toolkit fosters **collaboration** among young people, professionals in the field, institutions, and local communities, contributing to the creation of sustainable and socially innovative environments.

This Toolkit is addressed to:



- Young People and Informal Groups
- Youth Workers, Educators, and Trainers
- Youth organisations and Civil Society organisations
- Local Authorities, Institutions, and Policymakers
- Universities, Researchers, and Local Communities

Young People and Informal Groups

Young people aged 14 to 30 represent the core of the SPARK project. Involved in design and prototyping processes, they take on an active role in transforming the spaces designed for them. The Toolkit provides tools and opportunities to develop transversal skills, strengthen their sense of belonging to the community, and become active contributors to social change. This dimension is closely connected to the principles of authentic participation and youth protagonism outlined in the following chapters.

Youth Workers, Educators, and Trainers

The Toolkit is designed as an operational resource for youth workers, educators, and trainers engaged in both formal and non-formal education. It provides methodologies, tools, and guidelines to facilitate participatory processes, promote experiential learning, and support the development of young people's skills and competences. In particular, the chapters dedicated to co-design principles and methodology offer a practical and pedagogical framework to support their role as facilitators.



Youth organisations and Civil Society organisations

The toolkit is also addressed to youth organisations, cultural associations, and third sector entities operating at local, national, and European levels. For these actors, the Toolkit represents a valuable resource to design participatory initiatives, strengthen the quality of youth work, and promote social innovation. The case studies presented in the toolkit offer concrete and replicable examples.



Local Authorities, Institutions, and Policymakers

The Toolkit is also intended for public bodies, local administrations, and policymakers interested in promoting inclusive and sustainable youth policies. Thanks to its methodological approach, SPARK contributes to integrating co-design processes into territorial development strategies, fostering the creation of youth-friendly public spaces and strengthening the dialogue between young people and institutions.



Universities, Researchers, and Local Communities

Finally, the toolkit is addressed to universities, researchers, and local communities interested in developing and disseminating innovative practices in the youth sector. The Toolkit represents a valuable resource for research, experimentation, and dissemination of participatory methodologies, contributing to the growth of a culture of collaboration and shared learning.



1.3 EUROPEAN VALUES AND THE VISION OF SOCIAL SPACES

The SPARK project is grounded in the belief that **young people should be recognised as active contributors** in the development of the communities in which they live. Through co-design methodologies and collaborative practices, the project promotes the creation of accessible, democratic, and sustainable social spaces in which young people are not merely recipients of services or policies, but **co-creators of environments that respond to their needs, aspirations, and everyday realities**.

Funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, SPARK is fully aligned with the **strategic priorities and fundamental values of the European Union**. The project contributes to strengthening youth participation, innovation in youth work, social inclusion, and democratic engagement, while promoting intercultural dialogue, collaboration, and active citizenship.

Through practical and collaborative co-design processes, SPARK supports young people in becoming active contributors to community life and local transformation. This approach reflects the European Union's commitment to promoting **inclusive and innovative learning opportunities** that address contemporary social challenges and strengthen democratic participation.

Alignment with Erasmus+ Priorities and European Youth Policies

SPARK directly contributes to several key priorities of the Erasmus+ Programme and the European Union Youth Strategy (2019–2027), particularly through the principles of:

- **Engage** → Encouraging democratic participation and active citizenship
- **Connect** → Strengthening cooperation, inclusion, and intercultural dialogue
- **Empower** → Supporting autonomy, competence development, and youth agency

The project specifically promotes:

- **Inclusion and diversity**, ensuring equal opportunities for engagement among young people from different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds
- **Quality and innovation in youth work**, through the development of replicable co-design methodologies
- **Active citizenship and democratic participation**, by involving young people in concrete decision-making and transformation processes
- **Solidarity and European cooperation**, through collaboration among partners from Germany, Italy, and Romania

The **transnational dimension of SPARK** enables the exchange of experiences, approaches, and good practices across different territorial and cultural contexts, contributing to the creation of sustainable and transferable approaches to youth participation.

Creating Youth-Centred Social Spaces

The vision of SPARK takes shape through the creation and transformation of social spaces that foster interaction, creativity, learning, and community engagement. These spaces are not understood simply as physical environments, but also as **relational and symbolic places** in which young people can develop a sense of belonging, civic responsibility, and social connection.

Research on participatory planning and youth work highlights that young people engage more actively when participation is rooted in **everyday contexts** such as neighbourhoods, schools, youth centres, and public spaces. For this reason, SPARK promotes **co-design processes that start from young people's lived experiences** and encourage their active involvement in shaping the environments around them.

In this perspective, participatory social spaces contribute to:

- **Strengthening** democratic participation and intergenerational dialogue
- **Promoting** accessibility, inclusion, and diversity
- **Encouraging** creativity, collaboration, and social innovation
- **Supporting** community engagement and civic responsibility

- **Fostering** ownership and long-term sustainability of projects and spaces

Youth Agency, Trust, and Co-Design

A central principle of the project is **youth agency**. Through co-design, young people actively participate in **all phases of the process**, from needs analysis and ideation to prototyping, implementation, and evaluation. This approach supports the development of practical and transversal competences, including collaboration, critical thinking, communication, leadership, and problem solving.

Participatory processes become more effective when they include **concrete and visible actions**. Temporary interventions, prototypes, creative installations, and community activities allow young people to **move from ideas to action**, strengthening motivation, ownership, and civic engagement.

Trust also plays a fundamental role within co-design processes and develops gradually through transparency, continuity, dialogue, and shared responsibility. When young people see that **their ideas can influence real outcomes**, participation becomes more meaningful and relationships with institutions and communities become stronger.

Ethical and Pedagogical Foundations

The SPARK Toolkit is guided by a **shared ethical and pedagogical framework** that informs all project activities and working methods. These principles are aligned with European recommendations in the fields of youth work, participation, and social research.

Core values include:



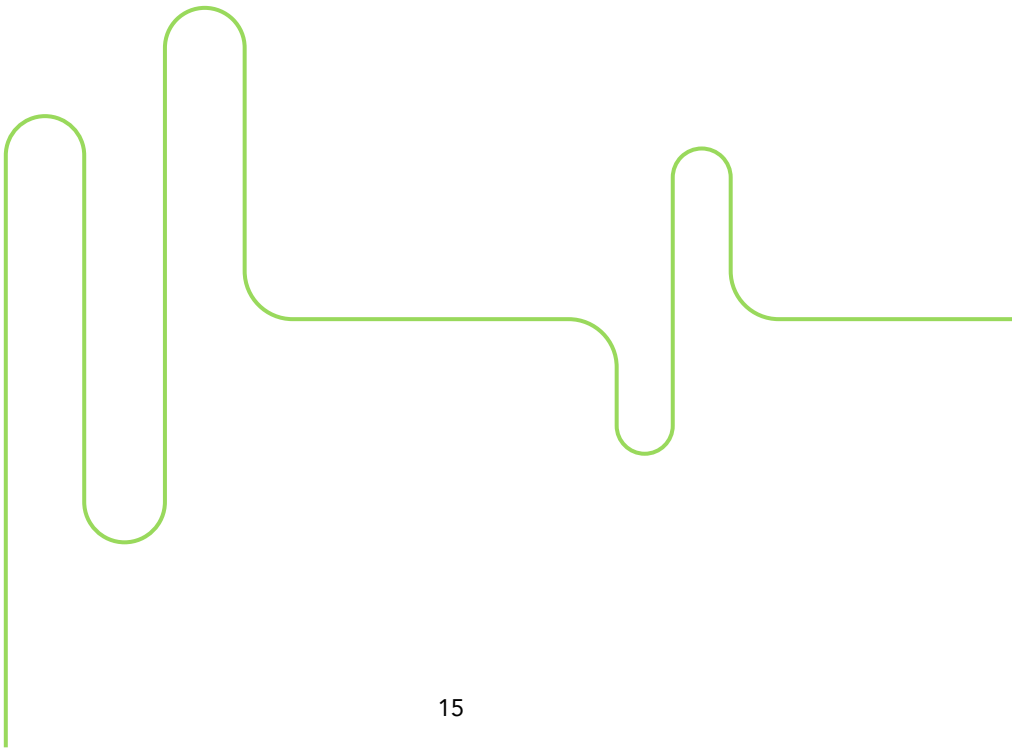
- Meaningful and inclusive participation
- Youth empowerment and co-responsibility
- Non-formal education and experiential learning
- Creation of safe and respectful spaces
- Transparency and informed consent
- Protection of privacy and personal data
- Equity, diversity, and accessibility

- 
- Sustainability and social responsibility
 - Ownership and sense of belonging

The ethics of co-design concern not only the outcomes of participation, but also **the ways in which participation itself takes place**. Co-design therefore requires attention to **dignity, inclusion, respect, emotional wellbeing, and genuine involvement** throughout the entire process.

Through the SPARK Toolkit, the project aims to contribute to the development of a stronger culture of youth participation and social innovation, supporting young people as active contributors to more democratic, resilient, and youth-friendly communities.

The **ethical and methodological principles** introduced here will be explored further in **Chapter 2**, dedicated to the foundations of co-design in youth work.



1.4 PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATION

The project is the result of the **collaboration between three European organisations from Germany, Italy, and Romania**. The partnership brings together complementary expertise in the fields of youth work, non-formal education, social innovation, and public policies, ensuring a multidisciplinary and transnational approach. This cooperation fosters the exchange of good practices, the development of innovative approaches, and the creation of sustainable and replicable outcomes at the European level.

Through the synergy between **civil society organisations and a public authority**, SPARK promotes youth participation and strengthens the quality of youth work, contributing to the creation of more inclusive and resilient communities.



- **Roter Baum Berlin** (Germany)
- **Curba de Cultură** (Romania)
- **Municipality of Macerata** (Italy)

Roter Baum Berlin (Germany)

Roter Baum Berlin UG is a non-governmental organisation founded in 2011 by "Roter Baum" e.V., established in 1993. It manages the projects of the Roter Baum network in the city of Berlin, particularly in the district of Marzahn-Hellersdorf, supporting the social and cultural development of young people through non-formal education and youth participation. The organisation implements educational projects, cultural events, international initiatives funded by the European Union, including Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, and summer camps for young people with fewer opportunities.

Within the SPARK project, Roter Baum Berlin acts as the coordinator, ensuring the overall management of the consortium, administrative and financial supervision, communication with the European Commission, and monitoring the quality of project outcomes.



It also contributes to the development of the co-design methodology, the facilitation of the Co-Design Labs, prototyping activities, and the dissemination of project outputs.

Municipality of Macerata (Italy)

The Municipality of Macerata is a public authority located in the Marche Region, in central Italy. With approximately 40,000 inhabitants, the city is known for its historical and cultural heritage and for the presence of important cultural institutions, such as the Sferisterio, home of the Macerata Opera Festival. The municipal administration promotes educational, social, and cultural policies for young people through its offices and Youth Centre, fostering youth participation and social inclusion. It also has extensive experience in managing European projects.

Within the SPARK project, the Municipality of Macerata plays a key role in the development and validation of the co-design methodology. It contributes to the research and publication of the Toolkit, coordinates the Kick-off Meeting, and implements pilot activities at the local level. It also participates in prototyping and testing activities and in the drafting of the toolkit, ensuring the integration of project results into public policies and their long-term sustainability.

Curba de Cultură (Romania)

Curba de Cultură is a non-governmental organisation committed to youth development in rural areas of Romania. The organisation promotes non-formal education, culture, and youth participation, with the aim of improving educational opportunities and community engagement for young people, while contributing to the revitalisation of rural territories. Based in Izvoarele, in Prahova County, it works primarily with adolescents and young people, providing them with tools and opportunities to become active contributors within their communities. Its work is based on the creation of safe and inclusive spaces, the protection of young people's rights, and strengthening the youth sector at local, national, and European levels.

Within the SPARK project, Curba de Cultură plays a central role in methodological development and training.



It contributes to needs analysis and data collection from target groups, supporting the development of co-design approaches and project activities. It also organises the International Training Course for Youth Workers, contributes to the facilitation of the Co-Design Labs, participates in prototyping activities and dissemination of results, and brings strong expertise in engaging young people from rural contexts and in using non-formal education as a driver for participation and development.

1.5 HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT

The SPARK Toolkit is the **main practical and methodological resource** developed within the project. It is conceived as an **adaptable guide** to promote youth participation through co-design. It provides a theoretical and operational framework for youth workers, organisations, institutions, and active young people, supporting them in designing and transforming sustainable, accessible, and youth-friendly spaces.

This toolkit has been developed to guide readers through a **progressive path**: from understanding the principles of co-design to applying tools and approaches in practice. Thanks to its **modular structure**, the Toolkit can be used both as a complete guide and as a reference resource for specific project activities. It can support the design of an entire co-design process, or help users select individual tools and practical insights to adapt to their own contexts.

The practical participatory tools and workshop methods connected to the different phases of the methodology are collected in the Appendix, where they can be adapted and combined according to the context, participants, and objectives of each project.

Structure of the Toolkit

The toolkit is structured into **six main chapters**, each designed to provide knowledge, tools, and inspiration for supporting co-design processes in youth work.

-  **Chapter 1** → Introduction
-  **Chapter 2** → Principles of Co-Design in Youth Work
-  **Chapter 3** → SPARK Co-Design Methodology
-  **Chapter 4** → How to Facilitate Co-Design
-  **Chapter 5** → Case Studies
-  **Chapter 6** → Conclusions and Motivation



Chapter 1 → Introduction

Introduces the context of the SPARK project, clarifying the vision, objectives, and relevance of the Toolkit. It presents the connection with European priorities, the partnership, and the ethical principles guiding the toolkit, offering a shared understanding of its purpose and impact.



Chapter 2 → Principles of Co-Design in Youth Work

Defines the ethical and pedagogical foundations that guide the entire Toolkit. These include meaningful participation and youth agency, non-formal education and experiential learning, the creation of safe spaces, a sense of belonging, and the importance of concrete and visible outcomes. The chapter also introduces the role of the youth worker within co-design processes.



Chapter 3 → SPARK Co-Design Methodology

Presents a structured and replicable methodological framework organised into adaptable phases. These include context analysis, ideation, prototyping, experimentation, evaluation, and dissemination. The chapter clarifies objectives, actors involved, and expected outcomes, highlighting the role of young people and youth workers throughout the process.



Chapter 4 → How to Facilitate Co-Design

Explores the role of youth workers in facilitating co-design processes, with particular attention to trust-building, inclusion, communication, ethical practice, and the balance between guidance and youth autonomy. The chapter also reflects on conflict management, participation dynamics, and the creation of safe and supportive environments for collaboration.



Chapter 5 → Case Studies

Presents concrete examples and good practices derived from research and partners' experience. The cases are connected to different phases of the co-design process and demonstrate how the methodology can be applied across diverse contexts, resources, and levels of technology.



Chapter 6 → Conclusions and Motivation

The final chapter summarizes the key messages of the Toolkit and offers a concluding reflection addressed to youth workers and young people. It encourages experimentation, initiative, and trust in co-design processes, promoting the creation and care of inclusive and youth-friendly spaces.

How to Navigate the Toolkit

The SPARK Toolkit does not require a strict reading order and can be used flexibly according to the users' needs and project objectives.

Here are some ways to use it:

- **Read** the toolkit from beginning to end for a broad understanding of the methodology
- **Explore** individual chapters according to specific interests or project phases
- **Support** workshops, co-design activities, and youth work practices
- **Adapt** tools and approaches to different local contexts and target groups
- **Integrate** co-design methodologies into educational, social, and cultural projects

The Toolkit is intended as a **flexible and adaptable resource** rather than a fixed model. Users are encouraged to experiment, reflect, and adapt the proposed approaches according to their own realities and communities.

Use this Toolkit as a **compass for change**: explore, experiment, and co-design. With SPARK, every space can become an opportunity for participation, collaboration, and growth.



PRINCIPLES OF CO-DESIGN IN YOUTH WORK





This chapter explores the ethical, pedagogical, and collaborative principles that underpin the SPARK Toolkit. It highlights how co-design can support meaningful youth participation, non-formal learning, a sense of ownership, and the creation of safe and youth-friendly spaces.

Co-design in youth work is more than a methodology: it is a way of recognising young people as **active contributors** to the environments, communities and projects that shape their lives. Rather than treating young people as passive beneficiaries of activities or services, co-design approaches place them at the centre of **identifying needs, generating ideas, making decisions and implementing actions**.

Research and practice across Europe demonstrate that co-design processes can strengthen **participation**, increase young people's **sense of ownership and belonging**, and create more relevant and **youth-friendly spaces and initiatives**. Co-design also supports learning, confidence-building, and civic engagement by enabling young people to **move from ideas to action** through direct involvement in real processes.

This chapter presents the key principles that underpin the Toolkit and provide a shared **ethical and pedagogical foundation** for all co-design activities explored in the following chapters.

2.1 REAL PARTICIPATION AND YOUTH PROTAGONISM

At the heart of co-design lies the principle of **meaningful youth participation**. Young people should not only be consulted, but actively involved as **co-creators, decision-makers, and contributors** throughout the process.

This approach is closely linked to the idea of **youth protagonism**, recognising young people as capable actors with valuable knowledge, experiences, and ideas. Co-design processes are most effective when young people can **influence real outcomes**, rather than participating symbolically or tokenistically.

Research on youth participation highlights that young people engage more actively when they see that their contributions can lead to **visible change** and when they are involved in **concrete decision-making processes**. Traditional top-down participation formats often fail to engage a diverse range of young people, especially when participation remains abstract or disconnected from their everyday realities.

In practice, this means:



- Involving young people **from the earliest stages** of a project
- Creating space for **their ideas to shape outcomes**
- Creating **shared decision-making processes**
- Recognising different forms of participation and expression
- Valuing **lived experience as expertise**

Youth workers play an important role in ensuring participation is **genuine and not merely performative**. Their task is not to control the process, but to **facilitate conditions** in which young people can actively contribute and take ownership.

2.2 NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND LEARNING BY DOING

Co-design processes are deeply connected to the principles of **non-formal education (NFE)**. Young people learn best when they are actively engaged in practical experiences, reflection and experimentation.

Learning by doing is therefore a central principle of co-design. Rather than discussing participation only theoretically, young people experience it through **direct involvement in real processes and actions**.

Through designing, building, testing, discussing, and reflecting together, young people develop a range of competences, including:



- Teamwork and communication
- Problem-solving and creativity
- Project planning and organisation
- Civic engagement and democratic participation
- Confidence and self-expression

Research on experiential and collaborative approaches shows that **hands-on activities and practical experimentation** help maintain motivation and strengthen young people's identification with projects and spaces.

Small-scale interventions, temporary actions and **prototypes** are often particularly effective because they allow participants to quickly see the **impact of their contributions**.

Co-design therefore treats young people not simply as participants in activities, but as **active learners, researchers, and creators**.

2.3 ETHICS AND THE CREATION OF SAFE SPACES

Ethical practice is essential in all co-design processes involving young people. Participation can only be meaningful when young people feel **respected, included, and emotionally safe**.

Creating **safe spaces** means establishing environments where young people can express ideas, concerns and emotions without fear of judgement, exclusion, or ridicule. This is particularly important when working with young people from marginalised or underrepresented backgrounds.

Research emphasises that **barriers to participation must be actively reduced** through accessible methods, supportive facilitation and attention to inclusion. Participation should adapt to young people's realities rather than expecting young people to adapt to rigid institutional formats.

Ethical co-design practice includes:



- Ensuring **voluntary participation**
- Respecting **privacy and consent**
- Recognising different communication styles and abilities
- Adapting methods to **participants' needs**
- Addressing **power imbalances** between adults and young people
- Valuing **emotional wellbeing** alongside project outcomes

Safe spaces are not created automatically; they require intentional facilitation, trust-building and continuous reflection by youth workers, and organisers.

2.4 CONCRETE ACTIONS AND TANGIBLE OUTCOMES

One of the strengths of co-design in youth work is its focus on **concrete and visible outcomes**. Participation becomes more meaningful when young people can see that **their ideas lead to real action and visible change**.

Research on community projects demonstrates that temporary interventions, prototypes and micro-projects help sustain engagement and reinforce ownership. Young people are often more **motivated** by practical, achievable actions than by long-term abstract planning processes.

Tangible outcomes may include:



- Redesigned youth spaces
- Temporary installations
- Exhibitions or public presentations
- Murals or creative interventions
- Community events or campaigns
- Prototypes and models
- Community improvements

The value of these actions does not depend only on their scale. Even **small changes** can strengthen young people's **confidence, visibility, and sense of agency** when they experience that their ideas matter and can influence their surroundings.

Celebrating achievements and making young people's contributions visible to the wider community are important elements of this process.

2.5 OWNERSHIP AND SENSE OF BELONGING

Co-design processes help young people develop stronger **emotional connections to spaces, communities, and projects**. When young people contribute to shaping an environment, they are more likely to care for it, use it actively, and identify with it.

Participation rooted in **young people's everyday environments**, such as neighbourhoods, youth centres, schools or public spaces, tends to encourage stronger and more meaningful engagement. Starting from places that already matter to young people helps bridge the gap between participation and daily life.

Ownership does not mean individual control, but rather a collective sense that:

- "This place reflects us"
- "Our ideas are valued"
- "We helped create this"

This sense of **belonging** strengthens social inclusion, community engagement, and long-term participation. It can also encourage young people to become more active citizens within their local communities.

2.6 TRANSFORMING SPACES INTO YOUTH-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS

Co-design contributes to making physical and social spaces more welcoming, accessible, and meaningful for young people. **Spaces influence how young people interact, learn, feel, and participate.**

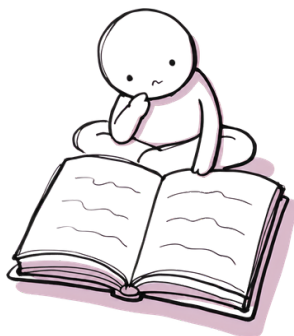
Youth-friendly spaces are not only functional; they are spaces where young people feel comfortable, visible, and respected. Through co-design, young people can shape spaces according to their needs, interests, and identities.

This may involve:



- Improving accessibility and inclusion
- Creating opportunities for creativity and informal interaction
- Rethinking how spaces are used
- Transforming underused or neglected areas into active community spaces

Research highlights that co-design processes are particularly effective when connected to spaces young people already use and care about. Even small-scale spatial interventions can positively influence young people's relationship with their environment and encourage greater community engagement.



SPARK CO-DESIGN METHODOLOGY





This chapter presents the SPARK co-design methodology and its main phases, from activation and team building to ideation, prototyping, dissemination, and participatory evaluation. The methodology is designed as a flexible framework that can be adapted to different youth work and community contexts.

3.1 ACTIVATION AND CONTEXT ANALYSIS

This phase focuses on **understanding young people's realities**, experiences, and relationships with spaces and communities, while building initial motivation.

DIMENSION	DESCRIPTION
Objective	To understand young people's experiences, needs, and relationships with spaces and communities , while creating motivation, curiosity, and initial engagement in the co-design process.
Process	Exploration → Observation → Reflection → Identification of needs and opportunities. The process is participatory, experiential, and grounded in young people's everyday realities.
Expected Outputs	Shared understanding of local needs and challenges , identification of priorities and opportunities , visual documentation such as maps, photos and observations, increased motivation for participation, and initial group cohesion and trust.
Actors Involved	Young people as active explorers and contributors , youth workers as facilitators and trust-builders, partners and institutions providing contextual support and access to resources, and community members contributing local knowledge and perspectives .

Objective

The activation and context analysis phase is the **starting point of the co-design process**. Its main objective is to understand the **needs, experiences, and perspectives of young people** in relation to the spaces, communities, or issues being addressed. At the same time, it aims to create initial interest, curiosity, and emotional connection with the project.

In co-design processes, participation begins from **young people's everyday lives** rather than from predefined institutional agendas or adult assumptions. Young people are more likely to engage when the process connects to spaces they already use, challenges they already experience, or changes they would genuinely like to see in their environment.

This phase therefore seeks to:



- Explore how young people experience a space or community
- Identify **needs, challenges, and opportunities**.
- Create **motivation and interest for participation**
- Encourage young people to **reflect critically on their environment**
- Build the foundation for later collective decision-making and action

The objective is not only to collect information, but also to help young people feel that their perspectives and experiences matter.

The Process

The activation phase should feel **exploratory, collaborative, and accessible** rather than technical or overly formal. Young people often engage more easily through creative and **practical experiences** than through structured consultations or discussion-only formats.

For this reason, youth workers begin by **meeting young people where they already are**: in youth centres, schools, parks, sports clubs, neighbourhood spaces, or online environments. Informal conversations, playful activities, and small visible actions are often more effective than formal invitations to participate.

The process may include:



- Neighbourhood walks and observations
- Mapping exercises
- Photography or photovoice activities
- Storytelling and group discussions
- Interviews with community members
- Identifying spaces young people use, avoid, or value
- Reflecting on what feels welcoming or excluding within a space

At this stage, the goal is not to immediately develop solutions, but to create **space for exploration, listening, and collective reflection.** Young people need time to analyse their environment, express frustrations, and share ideas before moving towards design proposals.

Participation becomes stronger when young people can quickly experience that their engagement leads to visible action or change. Small creative interventions, temporary activities, or practical actions therefore play an important role in **maintaining energy and motivation** during this phase.

For example, even simple actions such as creating a visual map of favourite places, organising a small outdoor activity, or temporarily transforming a corner of a youth space can help participants feel: **“We are already shaping this process together.”**

Expected Outputs

The outcomes of this phase are **both practical and relational**. Beyond collecting information about the space or community, the activation phase should strengthen young people's sense of connection and ownership throughout the process.

Expected outputs may include:



- **A shared understanding of the needs and challenges** within the space or community
- Identification of **priorities, opportunities, and themes** for future action
- **Visual or creative documentation** of the space (maps, photos, drawings, observations)
- Increased motivation and curiosity among participants
- Stronger **emotional connection** between young people and the project
- **Initial group cohesion and trust**

The outputs do not need to be highly technical or formalised. In youth work contexts, **creative and collaborative forms of documentation** are often more accessible and engaging than formal reporting.

Actors Involved

Young People

Young people are the **central actors** in this phase. They contribute their experiences, perceptions, and knowledge of the space or community.

Through observation, discussion, and creative exploration, they help identify **what matters to them and what kinds of changes they would like to see**. Their role is not only to provide opinions, but also to **actively investigate and interpret their environment**.

Youth Workers

Youth workers play a crucial role in **creating the conditions** in which young people feel safe, motivated, and capable of contributing.

In this phase, youth workers act mainly as:

- Facilitators.
- Trust-builders.
- Motivators.
- Mediators.
- Process guarantors.

Their role is to encourage engagement without controlling the process.

They help make participation accessible, support reflection, and ensure that quieter or more marginalised participants are also included.

Youth Workers should



- Actively listen to young people's experiences
- Use creative and inclusive methods
- Encourage curiosity and exploration
- Remain transparent about possibilities and limitations
- Validate participants' perspectives and ideas
- Create an atmosphere of emotional safety and respect

At the same time, youth workers should avoid



- Imposing adult interpretations too early
- Rushing towards solutions
- Over-structuring participation
- Dominating discussions or decision-making
- Creating unrealistic expectations about outcomes

Partners and Institutions

Schools, municipalities, cultural organisations, or community partners may contribute **contextual information, access to spaces, or institutional perspectives**. Their involvement can help connect young people's ideas to broader community processes and potential implementation opportunities. However, partners should support rather than dominate the process.

Community Members

Residents, local users of the space, or other community actors may contribute **local knowledge, stories, and experiences**. Their involvement can **strengthen intergenerational dialogue** and help young people better understand the broader social context surrounding the space.

3.2 TEAM BUILDING

This phase aims to create **trust, group cohesion, and a shared sense of ownership** among participants involved in the co-design process.

DIMENSION	DESCRIPTION
Objective	To build trust, group cohesion, and a shared sense of ownership among participants, creating the social and emotional foundations necessary for effective collaboration throughout the co-design process.
Process	Relationship Building → Trust Development → Group Agreements → Shared Responsibility. The process combines experiential activities, collective reflection, and the co-creation of group culture and participation structures.
Expected Outputs	A cohesive and motivated group , increased trust and sense of belonging, shared agreements and communication methods, established participation structures, clearer roles and responsibilities, and stronger collective ownership of the process.
Actors Involved	Young people as active contributors to group culture and decision-making , youth workers as facilitators of group dynamics and inclusion, partners providing resources and support, and community actors contributing mentorship, expertise, or opportunities for collaboration.

Objective

The objective of the team-building phase is to **create a collaborative and inclusive group** capable of working together throughout the co-design process. Co-design is not only about improving spaces or generating ideas; it is also about building relationships, collective responsibility, and a shared sense of ownership.

Young people are more likely to remain engaged in a project when they feel **connected to the group, emotionally safe, and recognised as valuable contributors**. Motivation within collaborative processes is therefore strongly linked to trust, belonging, and positive group dynamics.

This phase aims to:



- Build **trust and relationships** among participants
- Create a **safe and inclusive group environment**
- Establish **shared ways of working together**
- Strengthen motivation and commitment
- Encourage **collective responsibility and ownership**
- Support young people in gradually taking active roles within the process

Team building is not a one-time activity, but an ongoing process that continues throughout the project.

The Process

Building a co-design group requires balancing **structure and flexibility**. At the beginning, the focus should be on helping participants feel comfortable with one another and creating a positive group atmosphere.

This process may include:



- Getting-to-know-each-other activities
- Games and energisers
- Informal conversations and shared breaks
- Collaborative creative exercises
- Discussions about **expectations and motivations**
- **Co-creating group agreements and communication guidelines**
- Deciding meeting frequency and participation formats together

Co-design groups function best when young people participate in **shaping the group culture itself**. Rather than imposing rules from above, youth workers should involve participants in defining **how they want to work together**.

Discussions may include:



- Respectful communication
- Inclusion and anti-discrimination
- Confidentiality and emotional safety
- Decision-making processes
- Punctuality and commitment
- How to manage disagreements or conflicts

This shared definition of **group culture** helps strengthen ownership and collective responsibility.

It is also important to recognise that **participation may not be consistent for all young people**. School, work, family situations, or confidence levels may affect attendance and engagement. Flexible participation structures can help make the process more accessible and sustainable.

Young people should also have opportunities to **contribute in different ways**. Some participants may enjoy public speaking and leadership roles, while others may prefer creative, practical, or organisational tasks. **Valuing different forms of participation** helps prevent exclusion and supports more balanced group dynamics.

Expected Outputs

The expected outcomes of the team-building phase are primarily **relational and organisational**.

These may include:



- The creation of a **cohesive and motivated group**
- Increased trust and sense of belonging among participants
- **Shared group agreements and communication methods**
- Established meeting structures and participation formats
- **Clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities**
- Stronger collective ownership of the co-design process
- Increased confidence and willingness to participate actively

An effective team-building phase creates the **emotional and social foundation** necessary for collective decision-making and co-creation in the later stages of the project.

Actors Involved

Young People

Young people are active contributors to the **creation of group culture**. They help define how the group works, how decisions are made, and what kind of environment they want to create together.

Their involvement in **shaping the process itself** is essential for developing ownership and long-term engagement.

Youth Workers

In this phase, youth workers act as:

- Facilitators of group dynamics
- Mediators
- Inclusion monitors
- Emotional support figures.

- Process guarantors.

Youth workers are responsible for **creating conditions in which young people feel safe, valued, and encouraged to participate**. They help balance structure and autonomy while supporting participants in gradually taking greater responsibility within the process.

Youth workers should



- Encourage participation from all group members
- Create enjoyable and informal moments
- Monitor group dynamics continuously
- Support quieter or less confident participants
- Address tensions early
- Adapt methods and structures to participants' realities

At the same time, youth workers should avoid



- Imposing overly rigid structures
- Allowing dominant participants to control the process
- Overloading young people with responsibility too quickly
- Ignoring exclusion or conflict within the group
- Treating team building as a one-time exercise

Partners and Community Actors

Partners may support the group by **providing spaces, resources, expertise, or visibility**. Their role should reinforce rather than weaken youth ownership of the process.

Community actors may also contribute mentorship, local knowledge, or opportunities for intergenerational collaboration.

3.3 CO-DESIGN AND IDEATION

This phase supports young people in transforming experiences, needs, and ideas into **shared concepts and proposals** through **creative and collaborative methods**.

DIMENSION	DESCRIPTION
Objective	To transform young people's experiences, needs and ideas into shared design concepts for spaces, services or activities
Process	Exploration → Ideation → Selection → First concept development. The process is iterative and based on creative and participatory methods
Expected Outputs	Shared priorities, visualised ideas such as maps, drawings, and moodboards, and initial concepts ready for prototyping
Actors Involved	Young people as co-designers, youth workers as facilitators, partners providing technical support, and community stakeholders contributing feedback and validation

Objective

The objective of the co-design and ideation phase is to **transform young people's experiences, observations, and needs into shared concepts and possible solutions** for spaces, services, or community activities.

In youth work, co-design is a collaborative process in which young people are recognised as active contributors in **shaping priorities, proposals, and solutions**. Rather than being consulted only at specific moments, participants are involved throughout the development of activities, proposals, and spaces.

Co-design processes are more effective when young people clearly understand:



- What can be changed
- What constraints exist
- How decisions are made
- How their ideas influence the process

For this reason, transparency, feedback, and shared reflection are essential elements of participatory practice.

Why Co-Design Matters

In projects related to youth spaces, schools, neighbourhoods, or public services, co-design helps **move beyond adult assumptions** and creates opportunities for young people to express how they experience spaces, what they value, and what they would like to change.

Co-design matters because young people experience public spaces, institutions, and services **differently from adults**. Their everyday experiences often remain invisible within traditional planning and decision-making processes.

When young people are excluded from shaping spaces, projects risk becoming **disconnected from the realities, rhythms, and social practices of everyday life**.

Participation becomes more meaningful when connected to young people's lived environments and daily experiences, such as mobility, social interaction, safety, belonging, and opportunities for informal gathering.

Meaningful co-design can also generate **broader educational and social impacts**, including:



- Confidence and agency
- Communication and collaboration skills
- Civic engagement
- Trust in institutions
- A stronger sense of ownership and belonging

In this sense, co-design is not only a method for developing ideas and spaces, but also a process of learning and active citizenship.

Co-design also requires **moving beyond symbolic participation**. For this reason, young people should clearly understand:



- **What decisions are open to participation**
- **What limitations or constraints exist**
- **How ideas will be evaluated**
- **What level of influence participants will have**

Frustration often emerges not because limitations exist, but because they are unclear or hidden. **Honest communication** about resources, timelines, and institutional frameworks is therefore essential.

Genuine co-authorship depends on **two interconnected elements**:



- **Real opportunities for contribution**
- **Transparent communication about possibilities and limitations**

Good co-design does not require pretending that all decisions are open. It requires **clarity** about where young people's perspectives can genuinely shape the process.

The Process

Co-design becomes more effective when it starts from young people's everyday experiences rather than from adult assumptions about how spaces should function.

Young people often value informal and flexible uses of space, such as:



- Spending time with friends
- Listening to music
- Observing others
- Staying in-between activities
- Simply being present without being moved away

These practices may appear insignificant to adults, but they often represent **important forms of social interaction, identity-building, and belonging.**

For this reason, the ideation phase should not move too quickly toward predefined solutions. Before asking young people what they want to create, **it is often more useful to explore:**



- **Where they spend time**
- **Which places feel welcoming or excluding**
- **What they value or avoid**
- **What kind of changes they would like to experience**

Methods such as collaborative mapping, storytelling, photovoice, observation walks, and visual diaries can support this exploration process. Young people do not all express themselves in the same way, and co-design processes should therefore **avoid relying only on verbal discussion or written feedback.**

Multimodal approaches can make participation more accessible because they allow different communication styles, abilities, and confidence levels to coexist.

Useful methods may include:



- Mapping activities
- Collage and moodboards
- Photography and photovoice
- Storytelling exercises
- Model making
- Collaborative drawing
- Sticker voting and prioritisation activities

Combining creative, visual, practical, and dialogic methods often creates richer and more inclusive discussions. Rather than relying on a single workshop format, youth workers should create **sequences of complementary activities** that allow participants to reflect, revise, and build on one another's ideas over time.

For example:

- An exploration walk may be followed by a photo discussion
- Mapping activities may lead into collaborative collage creation
- Group discussions may support prioritisation and concept development
- Simple models or prototypes may help visualise ideas and stimulate feedback

This **layering of methods** gives young people multiple opportunities to **engage, think critically, and contribute in different ways.** The process should remain iterative and flexible. Ideas often evolve through reflection, discussion, experimentation, and feedback rather than through a linear sequence of steps.

Expected Outputs

A well-facilitated co-design and ideation phase should **not be evaluated only by the number of ideas produced**. Its value also lies in:



- The quality of participation
- The inclusiveness of the process
- The sense of ownership created
- The clarity provided for future stages of the project

By the end of this phase, youth workers should aim to have:



- A clearer understanding of young people's experiences and priorities
- **Shared themes and directions for action**
- **Visualised or narrated concepts**
- **Initial concepts ready for prototyping**
- Stronger collaboration and group ownership

Equally important, participants should leave the process feeling that **their perspectives were taken seriously** and that their ideas can contribute to real change.

In this sense, co-design is successful not only when it generates ideas for prototyping, but also when young people feel **recognised as active contributors** in shaping the spaces and communities around them.

Actors involved

Young People

Young people are the **central actors in the co-design and ideation phase**. They contribute experiences, ideas, creativity, and knowledge of the spaces and communities involved.

Their role is not only to provide opinions, but also to actively:

- Explore and interpret their environment
- Identify priorities and challenges
- Generate ideas and proposals

- Collaborate in decision-making
- Contribute to concept development

Young people may participate through discussion, visual methods, practical activities, prototyping, storytelling, or collaborative problem-solving.

Youth Workers

In this phase, youth workers act mainly as:

- Facilitators
- Mediators
- Inclusion monitors
- Process guarantors
- Trust-builders

Their role is to **create the conditions in which young people can contribute actively and confidently**. Youth workers support dialogue, creativity, collaboration, and reflection while ensuring that young people remain central throughout the process.

Youth workers should:



- Use creative and inclusive methods
- Encourage multiple forms of participation
- Support quieter or less confident participants
- Remain transparent about limitations and possibilities
- Help groups move from ideas to shared priorities
- Encourage experimentation and reflection

At the same time, youth workers should avoid:



- Imposing adult solutions too early
- Over-structuring creativity
- Filtering young people's ideas without transparency
- Privileging only the most confident participants
- Rushing towards final decisions

3.4 PROTOTYPING AND TESTING

This phase focuses on **transforming ideas into tangible experiments**, allowing young people to test, adapt, and improve solutions through practical action.

DIMENSION	DESCRIPTION
Objective	To transform ideas into tangible experiments , enabling young people to test, adapt, and improve solutions through practical action, experimentation, and collective learning.
Process	Concept Development → Prototyping → Testing → Reflection → Adaptation. The process is iterative, participatory, and based on experimentation, feedback, and continuous improvement.
Expected Outputs	Tested concepts, prototypes, mock-ups, or temporary interventions , improved project ideas, participant and community feedback, increased confidence and ownership, and a clearer understanding of feasibility and implementation needs .
Key Principles	Learning by doing , experimentation, visibility of action, iterative development , collective problem-solving, and acceptance of failure as part of the learning process .
Actors Involved	Young people as makers, testers, evaluators, and co-creators, youth workers as facilitators and reflection supporters, partners and institutions providing technical expertise and resources, and community members contributing feedback and practical perspectives.

Objective

The objective of the prototyping and testing phase is to **move from abstract ideas to concrete experimentation**.

After identifying priorities and developing initial concepts, young people begin to explore **how their ideas can function in practice** through temporary actions, mock-ups, prototypes, spatial experiments, and collaborative testing activities.

In co-design processes, prototyping is **not only a technical stage focused on producing solutions**. It is also a participatory and educational process that allows young people to **learn through action, reflection, adaptation, and collaboration**. Through experimentation, participants can better understand the strengths, limitations, and potential impact of their ideas while remaining actively involved in shaping outcomes.

This phase aims to:



- Transform concepts into practical and visible experiments
- Encourage learning through direct action and experimentation
- Test ideas before permanent implementation
- Strengthen ownership and motivation through tangible participation
- Support collective problem-solving and adaptation
- Gather feedback from participants, communities, and stakeholders
- Improve proposals through reflection and iterative development

Rather than searching immediately for perfect or final solutions, prototyping encourages **exploration, flexibility, and continuous learning**.

Why Prototyping Matters

Young people often engage more actively when participation becomes **visible and concrete**. While discussions and brainstorming are important, motivation frequently increases when participants can physically **build, test, modify, or temporarily transform spaces and ideas**.

Research on participatory design and placemaking highlights that **experimentation and temporary interventions** can reduce the distance between imagination and implementation. Small-scale prototypes help participants visualise possibilities, discuss ideas more concretely, and identify practical challenges early in the process.

Prototyping is particularly valuable because it allows ideas to **remain open and adaptable**. Instead of treating the first proposal as a final solution, participants can **test alternatives, receive feedback, and revise their concepts collaboratively**. This process helps reduce fear of failure and encourages creativity, curiosity, and collective learning.

Temporary interventions and **low-threshold experiments** are often especially effective in youth work contexts because they allow young people to quickly experience visible change. Even small transformations — rearranging furniture, creating temporary installations, testing activities in public space, building simple structures, or redesigning part of a room — can strengthen participants' sense of agency and ownership.

In this sense, prototyping is not only about “testing ideas”, but about creating opportunities for young people to **actively shape their environment through experimentation and shared action**.

The Process

The prototyping and testing phase should remain flexible, participatory, and iterative. Co-design processes rarely develop through linear sequences, and ideas often evolve significantly once participants begin experimenting in practice.

This phase may include several interconnected steps:

1. Developing Concepts into Experiments

Young people begin transforming initial concepts into **practical forms that can be explored, visualised, or tested**. Depending on the project, this may involve:

- Sketches and spatial layouts
- Cardboard or physical models
- Temporary rearrangements of space

- Mock-ups and low-fidelity prototypes
- Role-play activities and simulations
- Digital prototypes or media experiments
- Collaborative self-building activities
- Temporary events or interventions in public space

At this stage, prototypes **do not need to be technically perfect or permanent**. The goal is to make ideas **tangible enough to generate discussion, observation, and reflection**.

2. Testing and Experimentation

Once prototypes or temporary interventions are created, participants can begin **testing how they function in practice**. This may involve observing how people interact with a space, collecting feedback from peers and community members, or experimenting with different configurations and uses. Testing activities may include:

- Observing movement and interaction within a space
- Gathering informal feedback and reactions
- Experimenting with alternative layouts or uses
- Testing accessibility and comfort
- Evaluating usability and inclusion
- Documenting experiences through photos, videos, or notes

Testing should encourage **curiosity rather than judgement**. The objective is not to “prove” whether an idea is right or wrong, but to understand how it can be improved.

3. Reflection and Adaptation

Reflection is an essential part of prototyping. After testing activities, participants should have opportunities to collectively discuss:

- What worked well
- What felt challenging or unclear
- How people responded to the intervention
- What could be adapted or improved
- Which ideas remain realistic and sustainable

This reflective dimension helps young people understand that co-design is a continuous learning process rather than a one-time decision-making activity. **Revising and adapting ideas should be recognised as a positive and necessary part of participation.**

Methods and Tools

A variety of **practical and creative methods** can support prototyping and testing activities. The selection of tools should depend on participants' interests, available resources, and the scale of the project.

Useful approaches may include:



- Rapid prototyping workshops
- Collaborative model making
- Self-building activities
- Temporary installations
- Tactical urbanism interventions
- Role-play and scenario simulation
- Prototyping with recycled or low-cost materials
- Testing spatial arrangements and furniture layouts
- Feedback mapping and observation activities
- Participatory evaluation discussions

Low-tech and accessible approaches are often particularly effective because they **reduce barriers to participation** and allow experimentation to happen quickly and collaboratively.

Expected Outputs

The outcomes of this phase are **both practical and educational**. Beyond producing physical prototypes or temporary interventions, the prototyping process should strengthen young people's confidence, collaboration skills, and sense of ownership.

Expected outputs may include:



- Tested concepts and practical experiments.
- Prototypes, mock-ups, or temporary installations.
- Improved and adapted project ideas.
- Participant and community feedback.
- Increased confidence and motivation among participants.
- Stronger ownership of the process and outcomes.
- Clearer understanding of feasibility and implementation needs.
- Practical learning through experimentation and reflection.

Importantly, **not all prototypes need to become permanent solutions**. Even unsuccessful experiments can generate valuable learning and contribute to future improvements.

Actors Involved

Young People

Young people are the main actors in the prototyping and testing phase. They actively contribute to building, experimenting, testing, observing, and improving ideas. Their role extends beyond consultation: they become **makers, testers, evaluators, and co-creators** of practical solutions.

Participants may contribute through **creative, technical, organisational, or communicative roles** according to their interests and abilities.

Youth Workers

In this phase, youth workers mainly act as:

- Facilitators
- Coordinators of experimentation processes

- Inclusion and safety monitors.
- Reflection facilitators.
- Process supporters.

Their role is to **support experimentation without taking control away from participants**. Youth workers help maintain a balance between creativity, feasibility, inclusion, and safety while ensuring that young people remain central throughout the process.

Youth workers should:



- Encourage experimentation and flexibility.
- Support collaborative problem-solving.
- Help participants reflect on successes and difficulties.
- Ensure accessibility and emotional safety.
- Provide practical and organisational support where needed.
- Avoid judging ideas too quickly or imposing adult-led solutions.

Partners and Institutions

Partners, municipalities, schools, designers, architects, or community organisations may contribute **technical expertise, materials, permissions, or logistical support**. Their role should strengthen the feasibility of experimentation while respecting youth ownership of the process.

Community Members

Community members, local users of the space, or other stakeholders may contribute **feedback, observations, and practical perspectives during testing activities**. Their involvement can help participants better understand how prototypes interact with broader community needs and expectations.

Visible Action, Ownership, and Motivation

One of the strengths of prototyping is its **ability to make participation visible**.

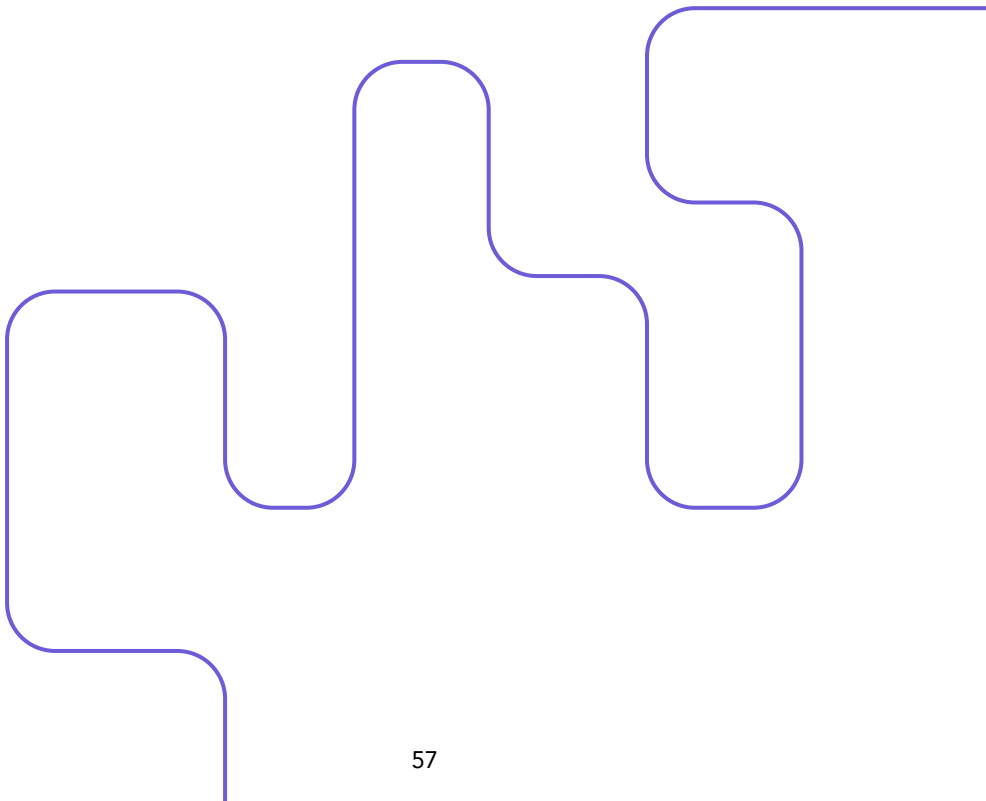


Young people often develop stronger motivation and attachment to a project when they can **physically see the impact of their ideas** within a space or community.

Temporary transformations, prototypes, and visible experiments can create a **sense of achievement** and reinforce the idea that participation leads to concrete action. This visibility also helps communicate the value of youth participation to communities, institutions, and other stakeholders.

At the same time, prototyping encourages participants to see projects as **evolving processes rather than fixed outcomes**. Ideas can be adjusted, improved, simplified, expanded, or reimaged according to experience and feedback.

In this sense, prototyping represents an important **bridge between imagination and implementation**, allowing co-design to become an active and collective process of experimentation, learning, and transformation.



3.5 PRESENTATION, OWNERSHIP AND DISSEMINATION

This phase focuses on **making participation visible** by supporting young people in presenting, communicating, and sharing the outcomes of the co-design process.

DIMENSION	DESCRIPTION
Objective	To make participation visible by enabling young people to present, communicate, and share the outcomes of the co-design process while strengthening ownership, recognition, and long-term engagement.
Process	Reflection → Interpretation of Results → Communication Design → Public Presentation → Dissemination → Follow-up Actions. The process is participatory, creative, and centred on youth-led communication and storytelling.
Expected Outputs	Public presentations, exhibitions, campaigns, films, digital content, events, or other dissemination products; increased visibility of young people's contributions; strengthened ownership; and wider awareness of project outcomes among different audiences.
Key Principles	Youth ownership, authenticity , accessibility, visibility, shared responsibility, and meaningful participation in communicating results and shaping future actions.
Audience and impact	Peers, families, schools, community members, local authorities, organisations, and online communities are engaged through formats that promote dialogue, recognition, advocacy , and future opportunities for participation.
Actors Involved	Young people as storytellers, presenters, advocates, and communicators; youth workers as facilitators and support figures; partners and institutions as amplifiers of visibility and impact; and community members as audiences, contributors, and potential collaborators.

The final stage of a participation project is **not simply about “showing results”**. It is about making sure that young people can present their ideas, feel ownership over the process and outcomes, and **share their work with others in meaningful ways**. This phase is essential because it **closes the participation cycle**: young people see that their contributions matter, that their voices are heard publicly, and that their work can create change beyond the project itself.

In many youth participation projects, dissemination is treated as an afterthought. Adults often write the reports, decide how findings are presented, and communicate outcomes to stakeholders without involving the young participants. Research on youth participatory action projects shows that this can reduce young people’s sense of agency and make participation feel symbolic rather than meaningful. Studies on participatory evaluation stress that youth should be actively involved not only in data collection or workshops, but also in **interpreting, presenting, and communicating the results** (Gaye & Tanaka, 2011).

Ownership is a key principle during this stage. Young people should feel that the project belongs to them, not only to the organisation facilitating it. Ownership can be encouraged by allowing participants to decide **how they want to present the outcomes**, which messages are most important to communicate, and which audiences they want to reach. This may include exhibitions, public presentations, podcasts, short films, magazines, digital campaigns, performances, social media content, or community events. **The format should match the interests, skills, and communication styles of the participants themselves.**

Research on meaningful youth dissemination highlights that young people engage more deeply when dissemination processes are **relationship-based, flexible, creative, and connected to real audiences**. One study exploring youth-led dissemination found that young participants valued opportunities where they could strengthen relationships, influence real conversations, and **maintain control over how their stories and ideas were shared**. The authors describe dissemination not as a technical communication task, but as a process of “relational accountability”, where respect, trust, and shared responsibility remain central until the very end of the project (Reich et al, 2017).

Facilitators should therefore **avoid taking over the final communication stage**. Instead of editing everything into a professional adult-led format, it is often better to support young people in presenting their **own language, visual styles, and perspectives**. **Authenticity is more important than perfection**. Young people may choose forms of communication that feel more accessible to their peers and communities than formal reports. For example, a short video created by participants may have a stronger impact on local decision-makers and other youth than a long written document.

Presentation activities can also become **empowering learning experiences**. When young people speak publicly about their work, they develop confidence, communication skills, and a stronger sense of civic participation. Participatory evaluation research has shown that youth involvement in presenting findings can strengthen critical thinking, leadership, and community engagement (Wells et al, 2009). Public presentations also create **visibility for young people's expertise** and challenge the common assumption that adults are the only legitimate voices in planning and decision-making processes.

Dissemination should include **different audiences**. Some projects focus only on funders or institutions, but young people often want to communicate with peers, families, schools, neighbourhoods, local authorities, or online communities. It is useful to discuss together questions such as:

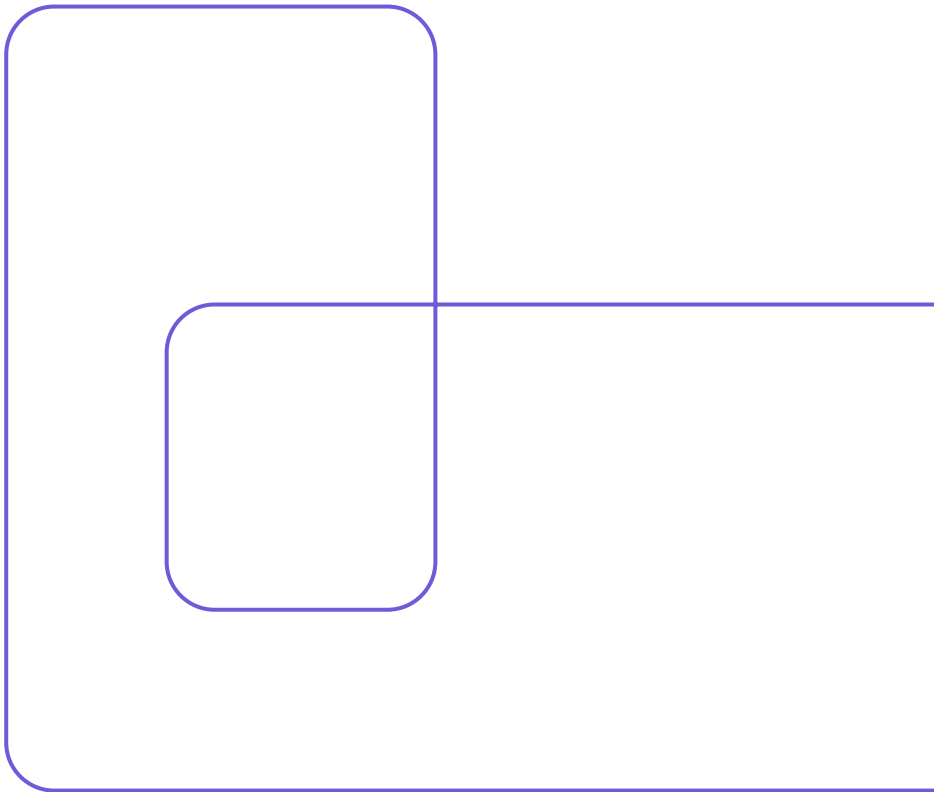
- **Who needs to hear these results?**
- **What change do we hope to create?**
- **Which formats will reach people effectively?**

Accessibility should also be considered. Information should be presented in clear language and formats that different audiences can understand. **Visual methods, storytelling, creative arts, or multilingual materials** may help make dissemination more inclusive and engaging. Studies on youth participation in planning and community projects show that participation becomes more effective when communication methods are adapted to **young people's everyday realities and forms of expression** (Hennig et al., 2024).



Finally, dissemination should **not mark the “end” of participation**, but rather **open possibilities for future action**. Young people should be informed about what happens after the project is completed: How will the results be used? Which recommendations may be implemented? Are there opportunities for continued involvement? Research on youth-led campaigns and participatory action research demonstrates that young people remain more motivated when they can see **concrete follow-up actions and long-term impact** (Christison, 2025).

A strong presentation, ownership, and dissemination phase therefore, ensures that participation is **visible, meaningful, and sustainable**. It allows young people not only to contribute to a project, but to **publicly claim their role as creators of knowledge, active citizens, and agents of change**.



3.6 PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION IN YOUTH-LED PROJECTS

This phase explores how evaluation can become a **collaborative and reflective process** that strengthens learning, ownership, and continuous improvement within youth-led projects.

DIMENSION	DESCRIPTION
Objective	To assess and improve youth-led projects through collaborative reflection, learning, and shared decision-making , while strengthening ownership, empowerment, and continuous improvement.
Process	Reflection → Data Collection → Collective Analysis → Interpretation of Findings → Action Planning → Adaptation. The process is participatory, cyclical, and focused on learning and improvement rather than judgment.
Expected Outputs	Shared evaluation findings , identified strengths and areas for improvement, recommendations for future action , increased ownership of project outcomes, and enhanced skills in reflection, communication, and critical thinking.
Key Principles	Inclusivity, empowerment, transparency, collaboration, dialogue, utilisation of findings, adaptability, and continuous learning .
Methods and Tools	Focus groups, interviews, surveys, reflective discussions, participatory workshops, visual evaluation tools , rating exercises, collaborative analysis activities , and other creative evaluation methods.
Actors Involved	Young people as evaluators and co-researchers, youth workers as facilitators and mediators, partners and organisations contributing expertise and support, and community stakeholders providing feedback and diverse perspectives.

Participatory evaluation has increasingly become a central approach in assessing social and community-based projects, particularly those led by young people. Unlike traditional evaluation models that rely primarily on external experts, participatory evaluation **actively involves stakeholders, in this case the project participants, in all stages of the evaluation process**. This shift reflects a broader transformation in how knowledge, power, and decision-making are distributed within projects, emphasising collaboration, inclusivity, and learning.

Introduction

At its core, participatory evaluation is grounded in the idea that **those who are directly involved in or affected by a project should play a key role in evaluating it**. This includes not only the youthworkers or facilitators, but specially the participants, community members, and, in the case of youth-led initiatives, young people themselves. Their engagement can range from helping **define evaluation questions to collecting and analysing data and interpreting findings** (Sette, n.d.).

This approach emerged as a response to more traditional, **top-down evaluation models** that often excluded the voices of beneficiaries. Rather than viewing evaluation as a neutral, purely technical exercise, participatory approaches recognise that evaluation is inherently shaped by **values, perspectives, and social dynamics**. Therefore, involving diverse stakeholders helps ensure that **multiple viewpoints are considered**, increasing both the relevance and legitimacy of the evaluation process (Arts et al., 2024).

Participatory evaluation can also be understood along a spectrum. On one end, it focuses on improving the **practical use of evaluation findings**, and on the other, it emphasises **empowerment, learning, and social change**.

In youth projects, these two dimensions often intersect: evaluation is both a **tool for improving programmes** and a process through which young people develop skills and confidence.

Key Principles

Several principles underpin participatory evaluation and are especially relevant in youth contexts:

- **Inclusivity** is fundamental. A wide range of stakeholders should be involved, ensuring that marginalised or less powerful voices, including young people, are heard (Kranias, 2017).
- **Empowerment** is another central principle. By participating in evaluation activities, young people can develop critical thinking, communication, and analytical skills. More importantly, they gain confidence in their ability to influence decisions that affect their lives and communities.
- **Transparency** ensures that all participants understand the purpose, methods, and outcomes of the evaluation. Open communication fosters trust and accountability, which are essential when working with diverse groups.
- **Collaboration and dialogue** are also crucial. Participatory evaluation is not simply about gathering input, but about creating spaces for meaningful exchange, where different perspectives can be shared, debated, and negotiated (Arts et al., 2024).
- **Utilisation and adaptability** ensure that evaluation findings are practical and responsive to changing needs. In youth projects, where contexts can evolve quickly, flexible and action-oriented evaluation processes are particularly valuable (Kranias, 2017).

Participatory Evaluation in Youth Projects

Participatory evaluation is especially well-suited to projects led by young people. Youth initiatives often aim not only to achieve specific outcomes, but also to foster personal development and empowerment. In this context, evaluation becomes both a **learning process and a space for reflection**.

Engaging young people in evaluation can strengthen their sense of ownership over the project. When they contribute to **defining what success looks like and how it should be measured**, they are more likely to be invested in the outcomes and motivated to implement improvements (Arts et al., 2024).

Moreover, participatory evaluation supports the development of a **“culture of reflection”**. Rather than being a one-time activity at the end of a project, evaluation becomes an **ongoing cycle of action, reflection, and adaptation**. This process is particularly meaningful for youth groups, as it encourages continuous learning and innovation (Kranias, 2017).

Methodologies and Tools

Participatory evaluation employs a wide range of methods such as **focus groups, interviews, surveys, and participatory workshops**. These methods are often complemented by more creative and interactive techniques that encourage engagement and expression.

For example, evaluative discussions allow participants to **collectively reflect on experiences** and identify strengths and areas for improvement. Structured reflective interviews provide a safer, more focused space for individuals to share their perspectives. Visual and interactive tools such as rating exercises or diagrams can help participants **express complex ideas in accessible ways** and facilitate group analysis (Sette, n.d.).

An important feature of these methodologies is that they are **not purely extractive**; they integrate data collection and analysis into participatory processes. Participants are not just sources of information but **active contributors to meaning-making**. This collaborative analysis enhances the validity and depth of the findings, as interpretations are grounded in lived experiences.

Additional participatory tools, workshop methods, and practical activities connected to the different phases of the SPARK methodology are collected in the Appendix.

Benefits of Participatory Evaluation

Participatory evaluation offers several advantages, particularly in youth-led projects. It is:

- **Increasing the relevance and accuracy of the evaluation.** By involving those with direct experience of the project, the evaluation is more likely to address meaningful questions and capture nuanced realities (Kranias, 2017).
- **Fostering ownership and commitment.** When young people are involved in generating findings, they are more likely to accept and act on them. This can lead to more effective implementation of recommendations and sustained project improvements (Arts et al., 2024).
- **Contributing to capacity building.** Participants acquire skills in data collection, analysis, communication, and critical reflection. These competencies are valuable beyond the project itself, supporting personal and professional development.
- **Strengthening democratic engagement.** By creating spaces for dialogue and deliberation, participatory evaluation encourages active citizenship and collective decision-making (Arts et al., 2024).

Challenges and Limitations

Despite its advantages, participatory evaluation also presents significant challenges. One major issue is the **time and resource intensity** of the process. Meaningful participation requires careful planning, facilitation, and ongoing support (Kranias, 2017; Sette, n.d.).

Another challenge relates to **power dynamics**. Not all participants have equal ability or confidence to express their views. Without careful facilitation, **more dominant voices may overshadow others**, undermining the inclusivity of the process (Arts et al., 2024).

There is also a **risk of bias and reduced methodological rigor**. Participants may have vested interests in the project, and their involvement in data collection and analysis can affect objectivity. Additionally, **limited technical expertise** may impact the quality of the evaluation if not adequately supported (Arts et al., 2024).

Finally, participatory processes can sometimes lead to **conflict or inefficiency**. Diverse perspectives may result in disagreements that are difficult to reconcile. While such conflicts can be productive if managed well, they can also slow down decision-making.

To address these challenges, certain conditions must be met:

- Participants, especially young people, need **adequate information, training, and support**. This enables them to engage meaningfully in the evaluation process and reduces inequalities in participation (Arts et al., 2024).
- It is important to create **safe and inclusive spaces** where all participants feel comfortable sharing their views. This includes paying attention to group dynamics and using facilitation techniques that encourage **equitable participation** (Kranias, 2017).
- The evaluation process should be **well-structured but flexible**. Clear planning is essential, but there should also be room to adapt methods and objectives in response to emerging insights and changing contexts (Kranias, 2017).

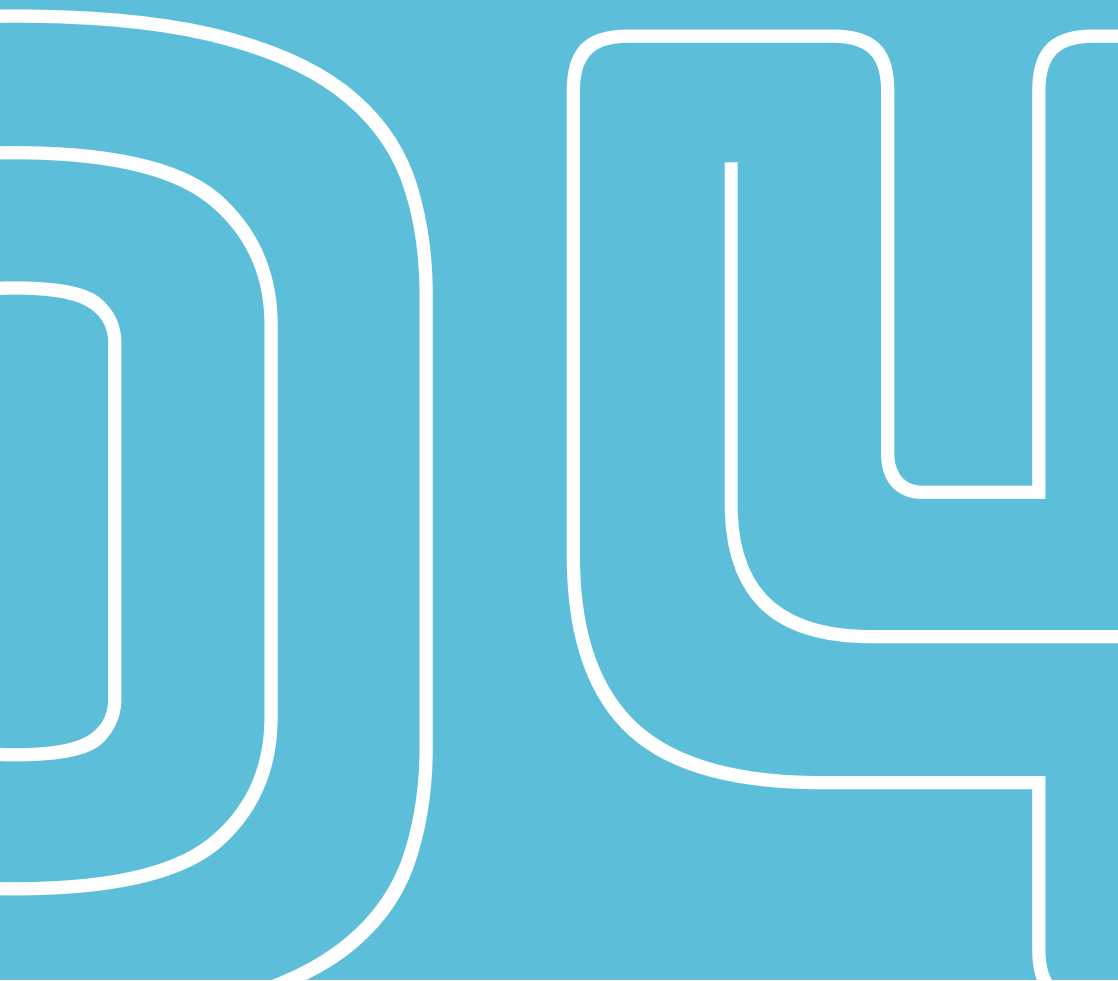
For these reasons, it is important the presence of the **youth worker as a facilitator or mediator**, supporting dialogue and ensuring that **diverse perspectives are integrated into the evaluation** (Arts et al., 2024).

Conclusion

Participatory evaluation represents a powerful approach for assessing and improving youth-led projects. By involving young people and other stakeholders as **active contributors**, it enhances the **relevance, legitimacy, and impact** of evaluation processes. At the same time, it fosters learning, empowerment, and democratic engagement.

However, participatory evaluation is not without its challenges. It requires **time, resources, and skilled facilitation** to navigate issues of power, bias, and complexity. When these conditions are met, participatory evaluation can move beyond a purely technical exercise to become a **transformative process**, one that not only measures change but actively contributes to it.

HOW TO FACILITATE CO-DESIGN





This chapter focuses on the role of youth workers in facilitating co-design processes. It explores how facilitators can support participation, trust-building, inclusion, communication, and ethical practice while helping young people gradually take ownership.

Co-design is highly dependent on the **quality of facilitation**, in addition to the methods and activities used throughout the process. Effective facilitation creates the conditions for young people to participate actively, express their perspectives, contribute to decision-making, and **gradually assume responsibility within the process**.

In this context, the role of the youth worker shifts from being mainly an organiser or instructor to becoming a **facilitator, mediator, translator, and process guarantor**. Youth workers help create supportive environments in which dialogue, collaboration, reflection, and participation can develop effectively, while ensuring that **young people's ideas remain central**.

Youth workers and youth organisations also act as **bridges between young people, institutions, partners, and local communities**. They help translate youth perspectives into realistic proposals, clarify opportunities and constraints, support dialogue with stakeholders, and **advocate for young people's contributions within decision-making processes**.

This chapter explores the practical **role of facilitation within co-design**, focusing on trust-building, inclusion, communication, ethical practice, conflict transformation, and the balance between guidance and youth autonomy throughout the different phases of the process.

The Appendix complements this chapter with **adaptable participatory tools and facilitation methods** that youth workers can use throughout the co-design process.



4.1 THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH WORKER AS FACILITATOR, MEDIATOR, AND TRANSLATOR

ASPECT	WHAT TO DO	WHAT TO AVOID
Facilitation	Create safe and inclusive spaces , use diverse methods, and ensure all voices are heard	Allow facilitators or more confident participants to dominate discussions
Mediation	Translate between young people and institutions , making ideas understandable and actionable	Filter, reshape, or interpret young people's ideas without transparency
Process management	Clarify steps, timelines, and decision-making processes, and ensure continuity	Organise isolated workshops without follow-up or continuity
Expectations management	Be transparent about limitations (budget, feasibility, and decision-making power)	Promise outcomes that cannot be delivered or create unrealistic expectations
Conflict management	Recognise tensions, facilitate dialogue , and value different perspectives	Ignore conflicts, avoid difficult conversations, or silence disagreement
Trust-building	Provide feedback, show progress, and create continuity	Ask for participation without showing visible results or progress
Safety and ethics	Ensure voluntary participation , informed consent, and data protection	Collect personal information without transparency or expose participants to unnecessary risks

In co-design processes, youth workers **do not develop ideas on behalf of young people**, nor should they disappear into a false neutrality. Their role is to **create the conditions** in which young people can actively express themselves, collaborate, make decisions, and influence outcomes. This means acting simultaneously as **facilitators, mediators, translators, and process guarantors**.

As facilitators, youth workers design participatory environments that encourage dialogue, creativity, reflection, and collaboration. They support inclusive engagement and help **balance different communication styles, confidence levels**, and forms of participation within the group.

As mediators, they help navigate relationships between young people, institutions, community actors, and other stakeholders. Co-design processes often involve **different expectations, priorities, and forms of power**. Youth workers therefore play an important role in supporting dialogue, reducing misunderstandings, and protecting young people's ownership throughout the process.

Their role as translators is equally important. Young people may communicate priorities through **stories, emotions, images, humour, frustrations, or informal language**, while institutions often operate through procedures, technical criteria, budgets, and administrative constraints. Youth workers help translate between these different forms of communication without distorting or appropriating young people's perspectives.

Facilitation also happens on **two interconnected levels**:

Frontstage Facilitation, this refers to the visible dimension of the process:



- Designing workshops and activities
- Selecting participatory methods and tools
- Facilitating discussions and reflection
- Managing group dynamics and participation rhythm

Backstage Facilitation, this refers to the organisational and relational work that often remains invisible:



- Maintaining continuity between meetings
- Communicating with partners and institutions
- Adapting the process to practical constraints
- Documenting progress and feedback
- Protecting the coherence and inclusiveness of the process throughout its development

For this reason, successful co-design depends not only on creative workshops, but on a **well-supported facilitation structure based on continuity, transparency, collaboration, and trust.**

A good co-design facilitator knows when to step in, when to step back, and how to support participation without taking control away from young people.

4.2 MANAGING PARTICIPATION AND EXPECTATIONS

During activation and context analysis, the youth worker's role extends beyond facilitation. The youth worker is responsible for creating a process that feels **accessible, inclusive, and relevant to participants.**

Many young people may initially feel **uncertain about participation or doubt whether their opinions will truly matter.** Building trust therefore becomes one of the youth worker's most important responsibilities.

Youth workers should **support participation gradually,** recognising that young people engage **in different ways and at different paces.** Some participants may contribute verbally, while others may express themselves more comfortably through creative or practical activities.

Conflict management is also important during this phase. Different perceptions, frustrations, or priorities may emerge when discussing spaces and community issues.

Youth workers should encourage respectful dialogue and help participants understand that disagreement is a natural part of collaborative work.

Clear communication about limitations and expectations is equally essential. **Young people should understand:**



- What can realistically be changed
- The timeframe and available resources
- The role of institutions and decision-makers
- The level of influence participants will have

Transparency helps prevent frustration and tokenistic participation.

The youth worker must also help manage expectations and responsibilities within the group. **Young people should clearly understand:**



- The level of commitment expected
- The possibilities and limitations of the project
- How decisions will be made
- What support is available from adults and institutions

Ultimately, managing participation means creating a process in which young people feel that their contributions matter and that participation can lead to visible and concrete outcomes.

4.3 CREATING SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SPACES

During the team-building phase, the youth worker plays a central role in **maintaining healthy group dynamics** and inclusive engagement.

Conflict is a natural part of collaborative work. Differences in opinions, communication styles, or levels of commitment may emerge within the group.

Youth workers should not attempt to eliminate all conflict, but rather help young people learn how to navigate disagreements **respectfully and constructively**.

This includes:



- Encouraging active listening
- Supporting dialogue and mediation
- Addressing exclusion or harmful behaviour early
- Promoting collaborative problem-solving
- Helping participants reflect on group dynamics

Creating safe and inclusive spaces is not a separate activity, but a continuous responsibility throughout the co-design process. Safety should be understood not only in physical terms, but also as emotional and relational wellbeing.

Depending on the context, youth workers may need to address:



- Safeguarding during outdoor activities or site visits
- Consent and privacy when using photography or interviews
- Accessibility and inclusion requirements
- Emotional safety during discussions
- Respectful communication within the group

Special attention should also be given to:



- Bullying or exclusion
- Discriminatory behaviour
- Emotional pressure or burnout
- Safeguarding and child protection
- Ensuring that all participants feel respected, included, and heard

Youth workers should pay continuous attention to **group atmosphere, inclusion, balance of participation, and emotional wellbeing** throughout the process.

Ultimately, the role of the youth worker is to create a process in which young people feel that they belong, that their contributions are valued, and that they are capable of shaping both the group and the spaces around them.

4.4 TRUST BUILDING AND MOTIVATION

Trust is not an automatic starting point in co-design with young people. In many cases, trust is low at the beginning because many young people have previous experience of being ignored, managed, or consulted without real consequences. This is particularly true when they are invited into institutional processes that adults have already framed. For this reason, trust should be treated as a **deliberate practice** rather than a vague atmosphere (Trustmaking project; European Commission, 2021).

Trustmaking begins with clarity. **Young people need to know:**



- What the project is about
- What they can influence
- What the timeline is
- What kind of follow-up is realistic

Trust also depends on **recognition**. Young people's everyday uses of space, including informal or low-intensity uses, **should be recognised as legitimate forms of knowledge**.

Trust grows further when **ideas become visible** through posters, models, mock-ups, temporary interventions, exhibitions, or public presentations. Tangible outputs help demonstrate that **participation has concrete consequences**.

Finally, trust depends on continuity. A one-off workshop can generate ideas, but it rarely creates long-term commitment on its own. **Repeated contact, shared reflection, and feedback loops** are what gradually transform participation into an ongoing and meaningful relationship (Knabe, 2024; Trustmaking project; Hagemann et al., 2024).

4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN CO-DESIGN

Co-design with young people is not only a methodological choice; it is also an **ethical practice**. Because co-design involves voice, visibility, expectations, and often personal experiences, participation processes should be designed with **care, responsibility, and transparency**.

European ethical guidelines for social research emphasise that participation should be **voluntary, informed, and sensitive to vulnerability**. When children and young people are involved, assent, parental or guardian consent where required by law, opt-out possibilities, and the **minimisation of psychological or social harm** become especially important (European Commission, 2021).

In practice, ethical co-design requires **continuous attention throughout the process**.

First, **informed consent should be treated as an ongoing practice** rather than as a single form signed at the beginning. Young people should be able to reconsider what they feel comfortable sharing, especially when photos, videos, interviews, quotes, maps, or public exhibitions are involved.

Second, facilitators should remain attentive to **unequal power relations** both within the group and between young people and institutions. Participation can unintentionally reproduce exclusion or pressure if some voices dominate decision-making spaces.

Third, **privacy and visibility should be actively protected**. Research on urban youth visibility shows that public exposure may become socially sensitive or risky, particularly in digitally mediated contexts where **images and performances can circulate beyond the original setting** (Ballesys et al., 2024).

Ethical co-design therefore requires reflection not only on participation itself, but also on visibility, representation, and control over information:



- Who sees what
- Where materials circulate
- How information is used
- Who remains in control of representation and visibility

4.6 PRACTICAL FACILITATION TIPS

The following table connects **common facilitation challenges** within co-design processes with a selection of participatory tools presented in the Appendix. The tools are not intended to function as fixed solutions, but as **adaptable resources** that youth workers can combine and modify according to the context, participants, and objectives of the project. The table is designed to support navigation throughout the toolkit and help facilitators identify methods that may be particularly useful in different phases of the co-design process.

FACILITATION AREA	WHAT TO AVOID	SUGGESTED TOOLS
Understanding youth needs and experiences	Assuming needs without direct youth involvement	Focus Group, Community Mapping, Walking Focus Group, Photovoice
Encouraging inclusive participation	Privileging only verbal or highly confident participants	World Café, Applied Theatre Workshop, Mapping Lab, Digital Storytelling
Managing group dynamics and conflict	Ignoring tensions or allowing exclusionary behaviours	World Café, Applied Theatre Workshop, Trustmaking Workshop

FACILITATION AREA	WHAT TO AVOID	SUGGESTED TOOLS
Building trust and motivation	One-off consultation processes without feedback or follow-up	One-to-One Buddy System, Trustmaking Workshop, Visual Visibility of Co-Creation
Supporting co-design and idea development	Over-structuring the creative process or imposing adult solutions	Model Building, Participatory Scenography Workshop, Youth-to-Youth Interviews
Testing and improving ideas	Treating first ideas as final solutions	Rapid Prototyping, PDCA Cycle, Co-Creation of Urban Furniture
Connecting with institutions and stakeholders	Filtering or reshaping youth voices without transparency	Public Space Analysis with Youth, Collective Mapping
Visibility, dissemination, and advocacy	Treating dissemination as documentation only	Digital Storytelling, Co-created Film Making, Visual Visibility of Co-Creation

CASE STUDIES



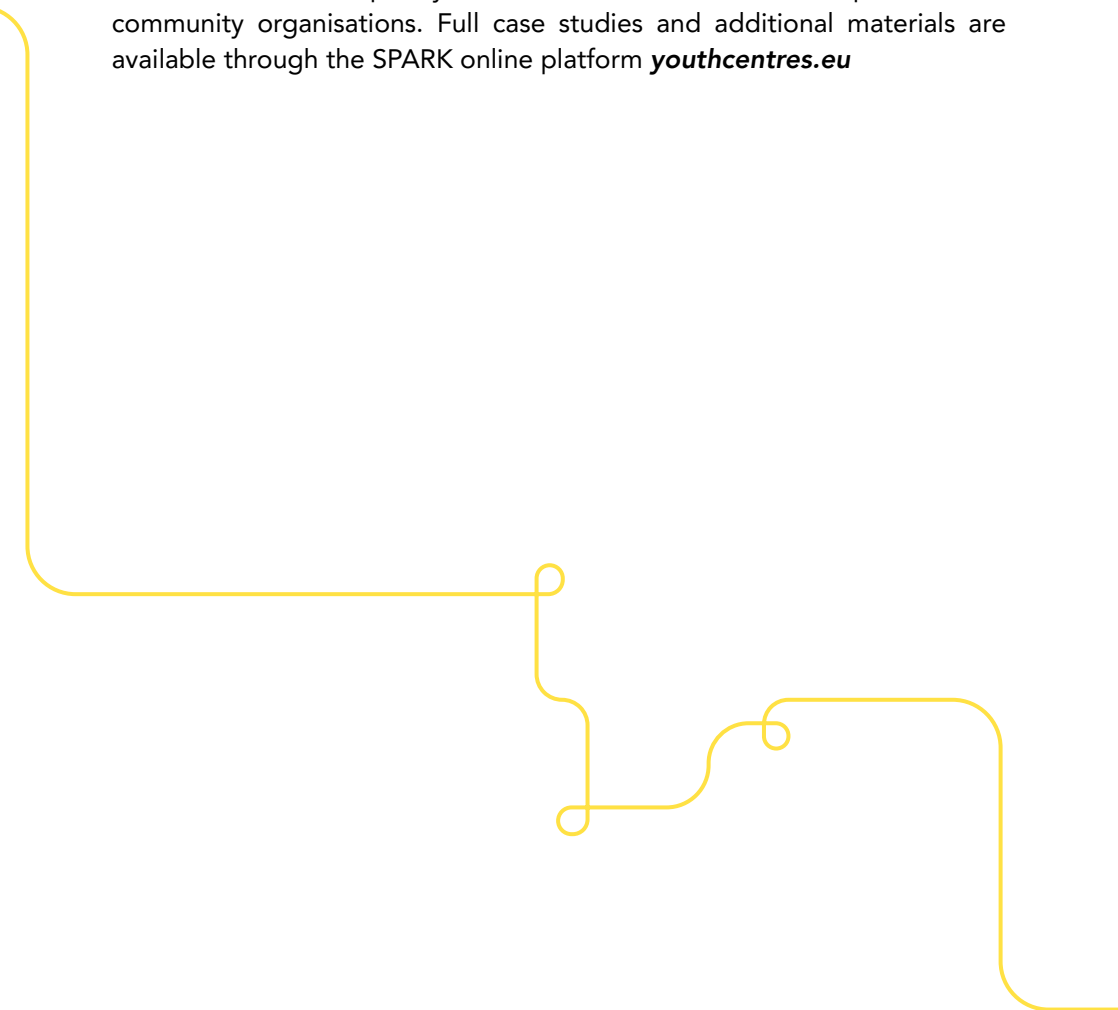


This chapter presents a selection of case studies and participatory practices developed in Germany, Italy, and Romania. The examples illustrate how co-design methodologies can be applied in different youth and community contexts, highlighting transferable methods, challenges, and practical lessons for youth work.



The selected experiences demonstrate **different approaches to participatory placemaking**, including youth centres, schools, community projects, artistic interventions, and rural youth participation. Although developed in different contexts, the practices share common principles: **experiential learning, collaboration, creativity, and tangible transformation of spaces.**

The objective of this chapter is not to provide exhaustive documentation of each practice, but to highlight **transferable methods and practical lessons** that can inspire youth workers, educators, municipalities, and community organisations. Full case studies and additional materials are available through the SPARK online platform ***youthcentres.eu***



5.1 PAINTING THE NEW YOUTH CENTRE (GERMANY)



Context, Target Group, and General Approach

During the first weeks after the opening of the “Jugendzentrum - Unterm Dach” in Berlin, the space still required basic interventions such as painting walls and arranging furniture. Since no stable youth group had yet been involved in the centre, the team initiated **mobile youth work activities in the neighbourhood** to build relationships and gradually engage young people. A small group of boys and girls aged 13–14 later became regular participants, making it possible to launch an initial co-design experience.



Methodology

The activity was based on **simple and accessible actions**: collective selection of colors, shared preparation of the space, collaborative painting sessions, shared meals, and spontaneous customisation of T-shirts. The process was intentionally low-threshold and did not require any specific technical skills. Participation was grounded in informal relationships, experiential learning, and direct involvement in the physical transformation of the space. Young people were not only consulted, **but actively contributed to shaping the environment through concrete actions**.



Lessons Learned

The experience showed that **low-threshold and hands-on activities** are effective tools for activating participation, building trust, and creating a sense of ownership. Informal and convivial environments helped strengthen relationships. The case also highlighted the importance of **continuity and outreach work**, especially in contexts where no established youth group already exists. Mobile youth work proved essential in the initial phase, while long-term engagement strategies were necessary to consolidate participation over time.



Relevance for SPARK

This practice represents an effective example of **accessible and initial co-design**, demonstrating how simple and practical interventions can activate participation and encourage young people to leave a visible mark on a space. The case highlights the importance of **outreach work, gradual engagement, tangible transformation, experiential learning, and low-threshold participation methods** in building participation processes from the ground up. For the SPARK Toolkit, it offers a transferable model for initiating participatory processes in contexts where youth involvement still needs to be progressively developed.

CASE	CONTEXT	TYPE OF SPACE/ PROJECT	LEVEL OF RESOURCES REQUIRED	MAIN PHASE OF THE SPARK METHOD
Painting the New Youth Centre	Berlin, Germany, Jugendzentrum Unterm Dach; initial phase of activation of the youth centre	Participatory regeneration of a permanent youth space through collaborative painting and shared setup	Low (low-tech, simple materials and educational facilitation)	1. Activation and Context Analysis

Methodological Elements Emerging from the Analysis:

The case highlights the value of low-threshold and hands-on activities in building trust, activating participation, and creating visible forms of ownership through the transformation of space. The experience also demonstrates the strategic role of **mobile youth work and experiential learning** in gradually engaging young people and creating the foundations for future co-design processes.

5.2 ZENTRALE – GROUND UP (GERMANY)



Context, Target Group, and General Approach

Zentrale – Ground Up focused on the participatory renovation of the central hub of Roter Baum Berlin, located in the Marzahn-Hellersdorf district. The space functions as a coordination centre where staff and young people develop activities, exchange ideas, and create youth-led initiatives. The renovation aimed to improve the accessibility, functionality, and inclusiveness of the environment, transforming it into a more welcoming and participatory space for both young people and the organisation itself.



Methodology

The project used the **Planning for Real method**, a participatory planning approach based on hands-on and collaborative processes. Young people, staff members, and international participants involved in a youth exchange contributed to the redesign of the space through discussions, feedback collection, and collective decision-making activities. A **three-dimensional physical model played a central role in the process**, helping participants express ideas, priorities, and spatial solutions in a concrete and accessible way. The methodology combined visual tools, post-its notes, collaborative discussions, and community sharing moments to support inclusive participation.



Lessons Learned

The experience demonstrated that **tangible and visual tools can make co-design processes more accessible**, even for participants without technical skills. The use of physical models helped transform abstract ideas into realistic and shared proposals, strengthening dialogue and collaboration. The project also highlighted the importance of time, facilitation skills, flexibility, and continuous communication throughout participatory processes. **Managing expectations proved essential**, as not all proposals could be implemented in practice.



Relevance for SPARK

Zentrale – Ground Up demonstrates how participatory regeneration can support collaboration, inclusion, and shared decision-making through **practical and visual methods**. In particular, the use of a three-dimensional model emerges as a highly **transferable tool for supporting communication**, creativity, spatial reflection, collaborative planning, and co-design processes. For the SPARK Toolkit, the case offers a practical example of how participatory design can contribute to the creation of more functional, inclusive, and youth-friendly environments.

CASE	CONTEXT	TYPE OF SPACE/ PROJECT	LEVEL OF RESOURCES REQUIRED	MAIN PHASE OF THE SPARK METHOD
Zentrale – Ground Up	Berlin, Germany, Roter Baum Berlin, Marzahn-Hellersdorf district; participatory renovation of the organisation's central hub	Participatory regeneration of an organisational and community space (youth hub and Youth Office)	Medium-high (facilitation tools, three-dimensional model, international coordination, and renovation interventions)	3. Co-design and ideation

Methodological Elements Emerging from the Analysis:

The case highlights the effectiveness of the **Planning for Real method**, which uses tangible and visual tools **to make co-design accessible and understandable even for participants without technical skills**. The experience also demonstrates how participatory planning can strengthen collaboration, shared ownership, and collective decision-making while translating ideas into concrete spatial solutions.

5.3 ASK – ART SOCIAL KITCHEN (ITALY)



Context, Target Group, and General Approach

ASK - Art Social Kitchen is a community-based project developed in Recanati, Italy, by APS Fonti San Lorenzo. Conceived as an **intergenerational and participatory space**, the initiative involves people of different ages, with young people playing a central role as co-designers, decision-makers, and active contributors. The project combines conviviality, creativity, and social innovation, promoting the idea of **space as a shared common good** built collectively through participation and collaboration.



Methodology

The project was developed through a **self-building approach** focus-ed on the collaborative construction of **modular furniture and shared community spaces**. Young people, residents, architects specialised in self-building, a carpenter, and international participants worked together to design, prototype, and test tables and chairs adaptable to different uses. The process combined **hands-on learning, experimentation, intercultural collaboration, and collective use of space**. Participation was embedded not only in the design phase, but also in the everyday life of the environment, strengthening relationships, responsibility, and a sense of belonging.



Lessons Learned

The experience demonstrated how self-building activities can strengthen collaboration, ownership, and community activation. The transformation of the physical space became a **tool for creating relationships, trust, and social inclusion**. At the same time, the project highlighted that participatory regeneration requires time, experimentation, and the ability to overcome social and cultural barriers. The case also showed the importance of **imagination and collective “dreaming”** in sustaining long-term motivation and transformative processes.



Relevance for SPARK

ASK represents a strong example of community-based co-design and participatory regeneration. The project demonstrates how young people can actively shape both the physical and social meaning of a space through **self-building, collaboration, and shared responsibility**. For the SPARK Toolkit, the case highlights the importance of combining material transformation, creativity, inclusion, and community-building within participatory processes. It also offers a transferable example of how co-design can generate not only regenerated spaces, but also stronger relationships, active citizenship, and collective ownership.

CASE	CONTEXT	TYPE OF SPACE/ PROJECT	LEVEL OF RESOURCES REQUIRED	MAIN PHASE OF THE SPARK METHOD
ASK – Art Social Kitchen	Recanati, Italy, community project promoted by APS Fonti San Lorenzo in a medium-sized urban context	Participatory regeneration of a community space through self-building, conviviality, and social innovation	Medium (technical skills, self-building materials, professional support, and community coordination)	4.Prototyping

Methodological Elements Emerging from the Analysis:

The case highlights the value of **community-based self-building** as a co-design tool, in which the **collaborative construction of furniture** and shared spaces becomes a collective learning process fostering empowerment and community activation. The experience also demonstrates how the **physical transformation of space can strengthen relationships, participation, and a sense of belonging** while promoting participatory and sustainable regeneration practices.

5.4 BUILD THE FUTURE (ITALY)



Context, Target Group, and General Approach

Build The Future is an educational and participatory project developed in the province of Macerata, involving **children and early adolescents at different stages** of their school journey. The initiative combines education, participation, and active citizenship, supporting the development of personal and civic competences through transformative experiences connected to school and public spaces. The project progressively involves primary and lower secondary school students, promoting **long-term educational continuity** and youth empowerment from an early age.



Methodology

The project was structured through **three interconnected phases: psycho-social workshops, participatory design, and implementation of transformations**. Students first participated in activities aimed at strengthening emotional, relational, and social competences. They then identified needs and opportunities within school and urban environments, developing proposals for regeneration through co-design activities. Finally, the proposed interventions were **implemented in collaboration with schools and local administrations**, making young people's contributions visible and concrete. The process combined experiential learning, active participation, and practical transformation of spaces.



Lessons Learned

The experience demonstrated that **combining education and participatory design** can strengthen life skills, creativity, civic responsibility, and a sense of belonging. Young participants developed greater awareness of their **ability to influence and improve the spaces around them**. The project also highlighted the importance of **continuity in participatory educational pathways** and the need for collaboration between schools, local administrations, and communities to sustain the transformations achieved over time.



Relevance for SPARK

Build The Future represents a significant example of **educational co-design**, showing how participatory processes can begin **from early childhood and become part of long-term learning pathways**. The project demonstrates how non-formal education, active citizenship, and spatial regeneration can be integrated to support youth empowerment. For the SPARK Toolkit, the case offers a transferable model for involving young people in the transformation of **school and public spaces** while promoting more inclusive, meaningful, and youth-friendly environments.

CASE	CONTEXT	TYPE OF SPACE/ PROJECT	LEVEL OF RESOURCES REQUIRED	MAIN PHASE OF THE SPARK METHOD
Build The Future	Province of Macerata, Italy, educational project implemented in collaboration with schools and local administrations	Educational co-design and participatory regeneration of school and public spaces	Medium (educational facilitation, institutional coordination, materials for workshops and regeneration interventions)	4. Prototyping

Methodological Elements Emerging from the Analysis:

The case highlights the effectiveness of educational co-design, in which **participatory design and life skills development are integrated** to promote empowerment and active citizenship from an early age. The experience also demonstrates the value of **continuous and experiential learning pathways**, in which the concrete transformation of spaces makes young people's contributions visible and strengthens their sense of belonging and responsibility toward the community.

5.5 RADIOTIN (ROMANIA)



Context, Target Group, and General Approach

RadioTin is a **youth-led online radio station** created in Izvoarele, Romania, within a **rural context where opportunities for youth expression are often limited**. Initially developed by a small group of young people, the project gradually expanded to involve a wider youth community. Rather than functioning as a temporary activity, RadioTin became a participatory space for communication, creativity, and self-expression, where young people could discuss topics relevant to them, experiment with active roles, and **develop their own public voice**.



Methodology

The project developed progressively through different stages, beginning with inspiration from another local radio experience and the creation of a development plan supported through a European Solidarity Corps project. Young participants contributed to **setting up the radio studio, organising schedules and playlists, developing a website, and producing regular podcasts and live broadcasts**. Over time, the process evolved into a youth-led initiative, with some participants **taking responsibility for coordination and management**. The methodology combined co-design, experiential learning, technical experimentation, and gradual empowerment.



Lessons Learned

The experience demonstrated that **youth-led media projects can strengthen empowerment, technical competences, responsibility, and social connection**. The informal atmosphere and strong relationships within the group contributed significantly to the success of the initiative. At the same time, the project highlighted the importance of **continuity, mentoring, and organisational support** in maintaining participation over time. The case also showed that youth-led initiatives require a **balance between spontaneity and structure**, allowing creativity to develop while ensuring sustainability and coordination.



Relevance for SPARK

RadioTin is particularly relevant for SPARK because **it expands the concept of co-design beyond physical spaces**, showing how participatory processes can also involve communication tools and media infrastructures. The project demonstrates how young people can become **active creators of participatory environments** when provided with trust, support, and meaningful opportunities for expression. For the SPARK Toolkit, the case offers a **transferable example of youth-led participation in rural contexts**, highlighting the value of creativity, empowerment, and non-formal learning in building inclusive and meaningful spaces for young people.

CASE	CONTEXT	TYPE OF SPACE/ PROJECT	LEVEL OF RESOURCES REQUIRED	MAIN PHASE OF THE SPARK METHOD
RadioTin	Izvoarele, Romania – rural context	Participatory media space and youth-led online radio	Medium (technical equipment, training, mentoring, and organisational support)	4.Prototyping

Methodological Elements Emerging from the Analysis:

The case highlights how **co-design can extend beyond physical environments to include media infrastructures** and digital participatory spaces managed by young people. The experience also demonstrates that youth-led processes can foster empowerment, skills development, and the **creation of a public voice**, while requiring continuity, mentoring, and organisational support to remain sustainable over time.

5.6 PARKS AND RECREATION (ROMANIA)



Context, Target Group, and General Approach

Parks and Recreation is a youth participation project developed in Teișani, Romania, aimed at involving young people in the **co-design of public leisure spaces within a rural context**. Young participants acted as co-designers and consultants, contributing to the identification of community needs and the transformation of public spaces. The project promoted **participatory placemaking** as a tool for improving quality of life and strengthening the role of young people as active agents in local development.



Methodology

The project followed a structured **participatory process** combining research, collaboration with experts, and institutional dialogue. Activities included regular meetings with young participants, community needs analysis supported by an anthropologist, intensive design workshops and camps, consultations with local authorities, and the **presentation of proposals to the local council**. One of the proposed projects was later implemented, allowing young people to participate in **all phases of the process, from analysis and ideation to the concrete realisation of a public space**.



Lessons Learned

The experience demonstrated that young people can become **active agents of territorial change** when supported through mentoring, facilitation, and collaboration with experts and institutions. The project strengthened participants' confidence, sense of ownership, and active citizenship. At the same time, the case highlighted **the importance of dialogue with local authorities to ensure sustainability and implementation**. It also showed that participatory processes require mediation skills, long-term support, and the ability to **navigate political and administrative challenges**.



Relevance for SPARK

Parks and Recreation represents a strong example of **youth-led placemaking in rural contexts**, demonstrating how co-design can generate tangible transformations in public space while strengthening empowerment and community participation. The project shows that participatory design can be successfully applied even in contexts with limited resources when collaboration between young people, experts, and institutions is effectively supported. For the SPARK Toolkit, the case offers a **transferable model of participatory regeneration based on inclusive design processes**, territorial engagement, and youth agency.

CASE	CONTEXT	TYPE OF SPACE/ PROJECT	LEVEL OF RESOURCES REQUIRED	MAIN PHASE OF THE SPARK METHOD
Parks and Recreation	Teișani, Prahova County, Romania – rural context	Participatory placemaking project for the co-design of public leisure spaces	Medium–High (research, expert support, institutional collaboration, and infrastructural implementation)	3. Co-design and ideation

Methodological Elements Emerging from the Analysis:

The case demonstrates the effectiveness of participatory placemaking as a tool for territorial development, involving young people in all phases of the process, from needs analysis **to the concrete realisation of spaces**. The experience also highlights how collaboration between young people, experts, and local authorities can strengthen ownership, support sustainability, and make co-design processes replicable even in rural contexts with limited resources.

CONCLUSIONS AND MOTIVATION





This final chapter reflects on the main lessons emerging from the SPARK project and encourages youth workers, organisations, and young people to continue experimenting with participatory co-design. It highlights the importance of trust, collaboration, creativity, and youth agency in building more inclusive and democratic communities.



This Toolkit makes clear that **co-design is more than a methodology, it is also a relational, educational and democratic practice.** The experiences in this Toolkit show that meaningful participation does not depend on large budgets, sophisticated technologies, or perfect conditions. **Participation often begins with small actions:** painting a wall together, redesigning a youth centre, creating a prototype, organising a discussion, building trust within a group, or simply listening seriously to young people's experiences and ideas.

SPARK has taught us that **participation is a process, not a single activity.** Trust, ownership, collaboration and inclusion develop gradually through continuity, transparency, dialogue and shared experiences. Young people engage more meaningfully when **they can see visible outcomes, influence decisions, and feel recognised as active contributors** within their communities.

The Toolkit also highlights that **co-design is never completely linear or predictable.** Participatory processes inevitably involve challenges, tensions, experimentation and adaptation. Not every idea will become reality, and not every process will develop smoothly. It is clear that even **small-scale participatory experiences can generate important learning processes,** strengthen relationships and create new possibilities for engagement and transformation.

For young people, co-design is a chance to **discover their own abilities, build confidence, make friends and see that what they have to say really matters.** We all know that getting involved is a great way to improve spaces, but it's also about building community, belonging, and active citizenship.

This Toolkit is like a **box of tricks that you can play with and adapt to suit your own community,** whatever it may be. It's full of ideas, methods, and inspirations that you can tweak to make it your own. **Every context is different,** and every co-design process will develop its own unique rhythms, challenges, and outcomes.



What matters most is **continuing to create opportunities** where young people can imagine, discuss, build, test and transform together.

Participation becomes meaningful when young people are trusted not only to take part, but also to shape outcomes, influence decisions, and **contribute to the future of their communities.**

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