



Mental maps (workshop)

“Mental Maps”: Paths and forms of Participation - Co-Shaping Democracy and Diversity

The workshop aimed at involving the participants in reflecting and discussing upon the role of young citizens in co-shaping institutions and decision-making processes. By means of discussion tables, the participants reflected upon the meaning of the words “Participation, Democracy and Diversity”, both regarding to their own context and in general.

Methodology: Group work, plenary discussion

Activity:

1. Group work

A. The whole group has been divided in three small groups and each of them had to make a brainstorming about one of the three words “participation, democracy and diversity”. The participants had 10 minutes of time to write down on a big flipchart-paper all the terms they connected with these words.

B. In a second step the flipchart papers changed the group and each of the groups had then to work with the brainstorming about one of the three terms made by another group. They should select the most important for them related to participation, democracy or diversity and put them in order: the most important as the first one and so on.

C. In a last step the flipchart papers changed again and each group had to work then about the last one of the three main words. With the ten most important terms chosen by the other group they had to prepare a definition of “participation, democracy and diversity”.

Feedback and presentation group work

After the group work, each group had to present the elaborated definition explaining the process in the group work and the difficulties they had to face working with terms elaborated by other people.

3. Plenary discussion

In a final plenary discussion the whole group discussed about the three terms and the presented definitions. The group discussions have been facilitated by EURAC who provided inputs on examples of participatory democracy and governance in multi-level systems.

Commonly elaborated definitions of these words are the bases of further discussions on the rights and duties of both young citizens and the institutions in providing paths of participation.

4. Presentation: Forms of participation

For every investment project, the most suitable form must be chosen. The starting point for each decision should be a detailed analysis of the situation. Basically, in youth work the following forms are distinguished:

Project-related forms

Parliamentary forms

The forms of participation differ particularly in terms of their temporal dimension, the binding nature and the type of integration (accessible to all or delegate system). In practice, child and youth participation often takes place in a combination of different forms. For example, a youth council initiates a survey on citizens' meeting for young people to define the priorities of their own activity.

Open forms

Open forms enable children and adolescents to express their opinions. An important feature of open forms of participation is that there is no obligation to be regular. They are manageable and demarcated. Open forms are for example office hours, surveys, studies, internet voting by young people or even youth meeting tables.

Project-related forms have a clear structure and are limited in time and space. In most cases, these are activities that lead to relatively timely solutions for manageable and identifiable problems or concrete planning projects. Results and successes are usually immediately visible and increase the identification with the project. Examples of project-related forms are the creation of a transport concept with children and adolescents, the planning of a youth room or center, or the design of playgrounds and sports fields.

Parliamentary forms

Parliamentary forms are characterized by continuity and commitment as well as formal structures similar to those of adults. Children or adolescents are either seconded by their peers or appointed by adults. Examples of parliamentary forms are youth advisory councils at parish or state level, as well as student participation panels.