



YouthWorkAndYou.org

Tallinn University, Estonia
in collaboration with
Victoria University,
Australia

Unit 3

Youth Participation and Non-formal Learning

**Concepts and models in youth
work**

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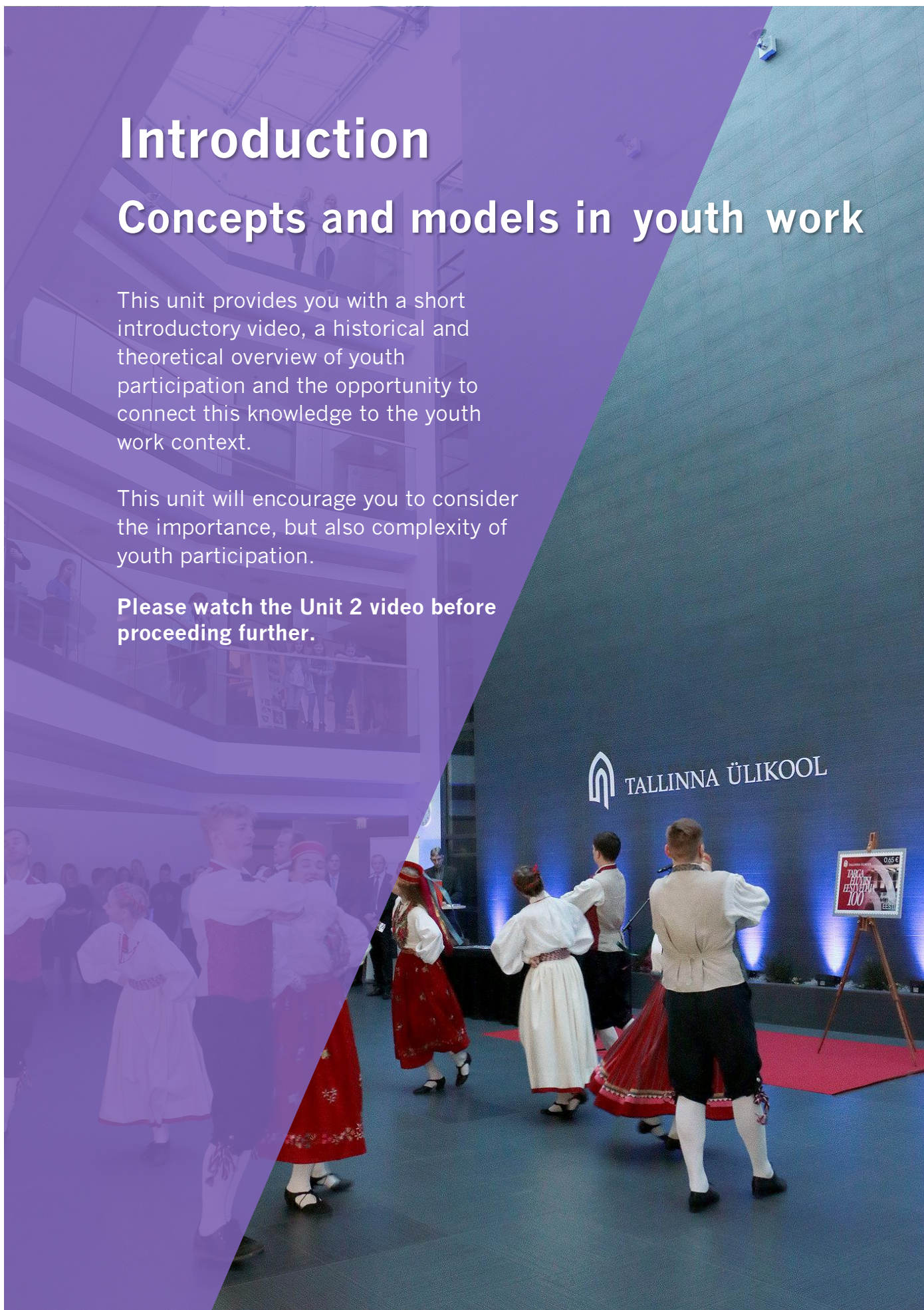
Introduction

Concepts and models in youth work

This unit provides you with a short introductory video, a historical and theoretical overview of youth participation and the opportunity to connect this knowledge to the youth work context.

This unit will encourage you to consider the importance, but also complexity of youth participation.

Please watch the Unit 2 video before proceeding further.



Setting the Scene

From Unit 1, we determined that people learn in many ways and in different environments. We not only learn at school, we can learn in non-formal environments and informally - amongst our friends and family. Participation is one of those topics requiring skills and knowledge which we cannot simply obtain from text books or at school.

Participation is about being part of the process and especially being part of decision-making. Participation sometimes takes courage, especially if your status is perceived as lower within a group or community. You will look up to your family, friends and possibly youth workers – as examples below will demonstrate. You will learn from people around you.



Remember when you first stood up for yourself or for someone else? Remember when you were part of organising something bigger and better, maybe in your local community or maybe at school? Remember how you first gave your vote - maybe it was online for a campaign?

As a youth worker you want to give young people opportunities to experience the same and grow in participation!

What you will learn

Unit 2 Youth Participation - Concepts and Models in Youth Work covers the following:

- Gaining an understanding of the definition and historical developments of youth participation.
- Knowing different models and levels of youth participation
- Connecting the theory behind youth participation with youth work contexts.



Unit 2 Contents



1. Gaining an understanding of definition and historical developments of youth participation.

We will look at human rights issues and how participation is connected with children and young people having a right to make decisions.

2. Knowing different models and levels of youth participation.

We will look at different types of participation models and identify what their main focus is. We will also look at different levels of participation.

3. Connecting the theory behind youth participation within youth work contexts.

We will mention some theories behind participation, and acknowledge many aspects behind the very complex participation concept. We will think about the youth worker's role in participation.

Questions

What are the important qualities, skills and models of practice for youth work in diverse societies?

How important is self-awareness in community youth work practice?

In order to explore these questions we will make links between models of anti-oppressive practice, inclusion, participation and self-awareness in practice.

Engaging with the Interactive Video Content

1. Historical overview of youth participation

Discussions regarding children and young people making decisions about their own lives and participating in community life have existed for centuries. Questions about children and young people being mature enough to have a say about their own lives have intrigued people for long time - and still do. You can take a look into the arts or literature; for example, stories about Tom Sawyer or Jane Eyre give us some ideas of the struggles from the past about being young in an 'adult world'. Struggles still exist and some new challenges have risen.

The first official declaration on the rights of the child was adopted in 1923 by International Save the Children Union in Geneva, endorsed by League of Nations in 1924 and taken over by the United Nations in 1946. A more official and binding step for countries was taken in 1959 when the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child was adopted. In 1989 the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted. This is the main document describing the rights to participation of children and young people. In this way, participation of children and young people became clearly connected with rights. Therefore, human rights issues have become important in youth work - especially in the digital era amongst rising populism, nationalism (Farrow, 2018) and radicalization.

Although 196 states have ratified the Convention, the rights of children and youth around the world are not equally guaranteed. There are still issues

like child labour, poverty, human trafficking, violence and abuse, lack of educational possibilities and lack of access to health care etc. So, when talking about youth participation and rights we can also be more specific: can young people access education, do they have freedom of speech, do they get the same payment for work as adults, can they vote, can they initiate changes in community, can they express their worries and act to save this planet etc.?

Finally, it takes us to the question: if young people are excluded or if they are discriminated based on their age, then who stands beside them or is their ally in the matter of young people's rights to be included and participate?

2. Defining youth participation and its levels

Numerous definitions on participation exist, stressing that participation is a process and it is about having a say and making decisions. "Youth participation is a process where young people, as active citizens, take part in, express views on, and have decision making power about issues that affect them" (Farrow, 2018). Although this definition emphasizes active citizenship: participation on social (for example, cultural groups, civil society) and public (formal structures of decision making) levels, participation starts at the individual level (individual choices and decisions). Participation is always about power (ibid.): adults willing to share or give away some of

their power. This is evident in most of the participation models.

3. Models of participation

There are at least 36 different participation models (Karsten, 2012). In the video we saw 3 of them: Hart's Ladder of Participation, Shier's Pathways to Participation and De Backer and Jan's Triangle of Participation.

These models were not chosen because they show different approaches in understanding youth participation. For example, the metaphor of the ladder is used in other models and represents possible progress towards including young people in decision making, usually starting from descriptions of non-participation. Pathways, or in some other model steps or degrees, keep focus on the process as well, but they also focus on conditions which enable participation and move away from the idea that participation develops only hierarchically (Karsten, 2012). Instead, possibilities for supporting youth participation are demonstrated through different circumstances and you could start from where you are. Shier's model emphasizes the relationship between participation and empowerment and draws more attention to the role of the adults, which also is the critique to the model (Cahill, Dadvand, 2018).

The triangle and some other models try to conceptualize youth participation and connect different aspects of the process, conditions

and roles. For example, in De Backer and Jan's case the importance of challenge that it must be interesting or relevant to youth is stressed.

Thus the process and the conditions for participation are important:

- Providing information, providing safe and friendly environment for discussions, consultations or brainstorming etc.
- The role and relationship between adults and young people (or where the power lies) is important. Is the participation process initiated and led by adults and/or youth? Are the results useful for adults and/or youth etc.?

If you want to spend more time getting to know different participation models, please look at the links at the end of this booklet!

4. Theories behind youth participation

Although participation models are built on rather different theoretical approaches, it can be stated that because of the power issues, Critical Theory is the first place to turn to because it deals in a broader sense with issues of emancipation, liberation and oppression in society (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy). Together with a feminist approach or citizenship research, these theories can help to understand youth participation (Cahill, Dadvand, 2018). Conversely, if we are interested in what meaning is given by young people themselves to participation, we might want to turn to a social constructivism approach. If we are more interested in the process and the effects of

participation, we might want to turn to the Theory of Change.



To understand the complexity of youth participation as a concept, please have consider how positioning, power and privilege can influence participation opportunities. The P7 Framework is created by Cahill and Dadvand (2018) as a thinking tool for visioning, planning, enacting and evaluating youth participation.

See Fig. 1

5. Youth work and youth participation

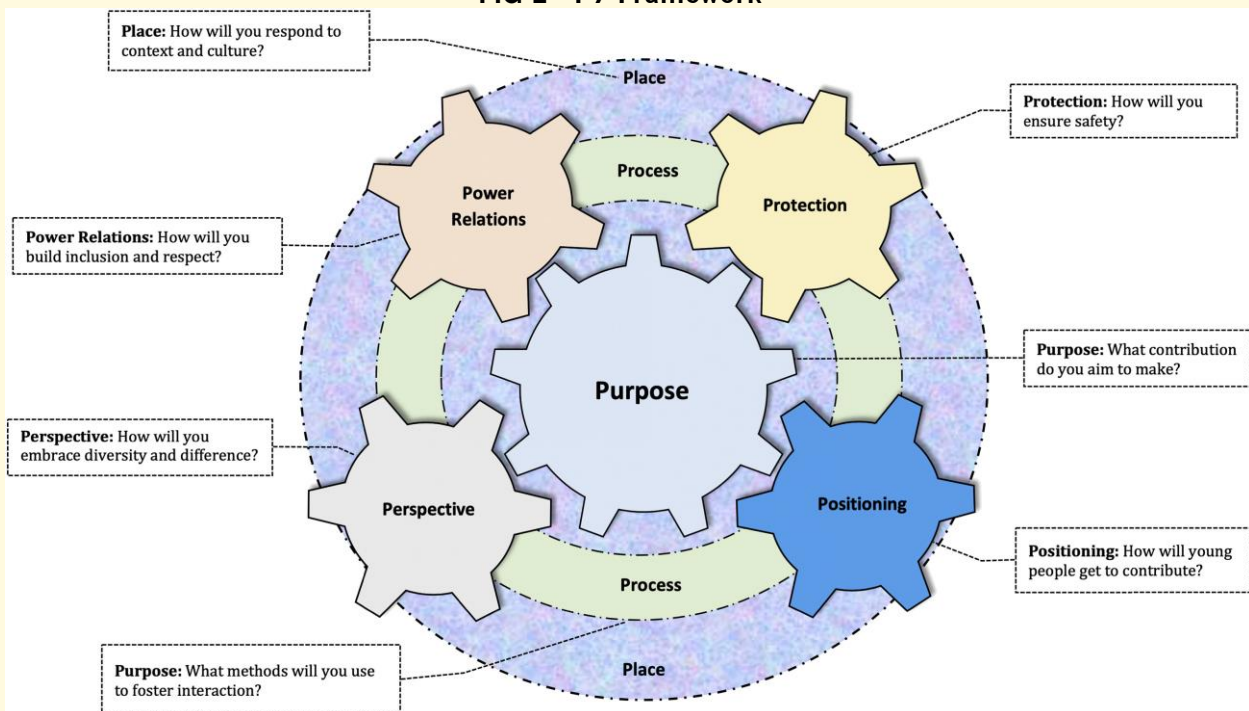
Although there is no final agreement on what youth work is, except may be on the aspect of youth work being very contextual and therefore culture- or country specific, we still have agreed on some aims and roles of youth work: these being advancing democracy and human rights, citizenship, participation, equal opportunities and voice; promoting peace-building, tolerance

and combating radicalization; dealing with social change; strengthening positive identity, agency and autonomy; upholding civil society; engaging in partnership... (The 2nd European ...).

It has become clear that young people need allies on their way to authentic participation and youth workers can be important allies. As a (future) youth worker please answer questions below:

1. How do you balance power positions with young people in your practice?
2. What participation model would work best for your practice and why?
3. Choose any project you as a youth worker or you as a young person have been in and assess it through P7 Framework. What would you change and why?
4. What are the main challenges regarding youth participation in your country? In your region? In your local area?

FIG 1 - P7 Framework



Links to other Information and Reading

Here is a list of additional information which will assist you to explore youth participation concepts and models further as well as resources that you can use while working with young people.

Articles

- Cahill, H.; Dadvand, B. (2018). "Re-conceptualising youth participation: A framework to inform action." *Children and Youth Services Review* 95 (2018) 243-253
- Checkoway, B. (2011). "What is youth participation?" *Children and Youth Services Review* 33 (2011) 340-345
- Farrow, A. (2016). "Children, Young People and Participation." *Youth Policy Working Paper 3*. Available at https://www.youthpolicy.org/library/wp-content/uploads/library/Youth_Policy_Working_Paper_03_2016071.pdf
- Karsten, A. (2012). *Participation Models. Citizens, Youth, Online*
- Siurala, L. (2000). "New forms of youth participation. Round Table." *Youth Policy Papers*. Available at <https://rm.coe.int/168070240f>

Books

- Blasco, A.L.; McNeish, W.; Walther, A. (2003). *Young People and Contradictions of Inclusion. Towards Integrated Transition Policies in Europe*. The Policy Press
- Daly, A.; Ruxton, S.; Schuurman, M. (2016). *Challenges to Children's Rights Today: what do children think?* Council of Europe
- Loncle, P; Cuconato, M.; Muniglia, V.; Walther, A. (2013). *Youth Participation in Europe. Beyond discourses, practices and realities*. Bristol University Press.
- Percy-Smith, B.; Thomas, N. (2009). *A Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation. Perspectives from Theory and Practice*. Routledge
- Youth Partnership (2018). *Perspectives on Youth: Young people in digitalised world*. Council of Europe Publishing

Websites

SALTO Think Tank on Youth Participation: closer to the edge of participation and activism.

https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3830/Raport_210x210mm_sm.pdf

Participation Models. Citizens, Youth, Online.

https://www.nonformality.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Participation_Models_20121118.pdf

Growing Inclusion and Participation. An Inspirational Guide.

<https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3094/GrowingInclusionParticipation.pdf>

SALTO Think Tank on Youth Participation: a seat at the table for everyone.

https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3921/A_seat_at_the_table_for_everyone_a4_bleed3mm_SALTO_PI.pdf

The 2nd European Youth Work Declaration

https://pjp.eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262187/The+2nd+European+Youth+Work+Declaration_FINAL.pdf

Wrapping Up

Youth participation has many elements and raises many questions, but the most important one is addressed to adults: 'are you ready to share or give away your power to young people?' Participation is the right of children and young people, but to ensure this right, young people need allies - are youth workers willing to take this role?

Conclusion

1. Youth participation is a process that requires special attention and conditions, but mostly willingness from adults to share or give away their power or step down from their positions.
2. Youth participation means that young people make decisions and those decisions matter!
3. Youth participation usually starts from an individual level and in everyday life but leads into social and public participation.
4. To 'grow' youth participation at all levels, young people need allies and youth workers can be those allies as youth work principles and roles support this growth. Youth workers can use non-formal learning to 'grow' participation.
5. Although youth participation is declared a right of young people, in reality there are still many problems around the world regarding children's and young people's rights, inclusion and non-discrimination. There is currently not a lot of research available on the topic of youth participation.

Acknowledgements

- Jane Hickey, Lecturer in Youth Work, College of Arts and Education, Victoria University, Melbourne
- Dr. Halliki Põlda, Lecturer of lifelong learning, School of Educational Sciences, Tallinn University
- Gertha Teidla-Kunitsõn, Visiting Lecturer, School of Educational Sciences, Tallinn University
- Estonian Association of Youth Workers
- Tallinn University Media Hub
- Photos by Elin Lemberg, Tarmo Truss, C. Salem, Piret Räni and Sasin Tipchai



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Unit 2

Rannala, Ilona and Polda, Halliki (2019) *Youth Participation and Non-formal Learning Units 1, 2 and 3*. Youth Work eLearning Partnership (YWeLP). Available at

<https://www.youthworkandyou.org/ywelp-module-two/>

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Ulster University, Northern Ireland

Supported by:

Estonian Association of Youth Workers, The Kanuuna Network, National Youth Council of Ireland, YouthAction Northern Ireland, Youth Workers' Association, Victoria

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