



Service Design in the Youth Field

Theoretical and practical tools for how to use service-design methodology in youth work.

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INTRO

This publication explores the concept of “youth-focused service design”. The aim is to adapt and develop a new methodology to involve youth in creating better services that cater for their needs.

Pål Isdahl Solberg, Editor.

Lecturer at the University of South-Eastern Norway | President of The Participation Agency.

The structured approach of service design can be helpful to improve services. Meanwhile, the values of youth work, participatory theory, facilitation and advocacy can help us understand how we can listen to youth, and make sure their voices are given due weight in the process.

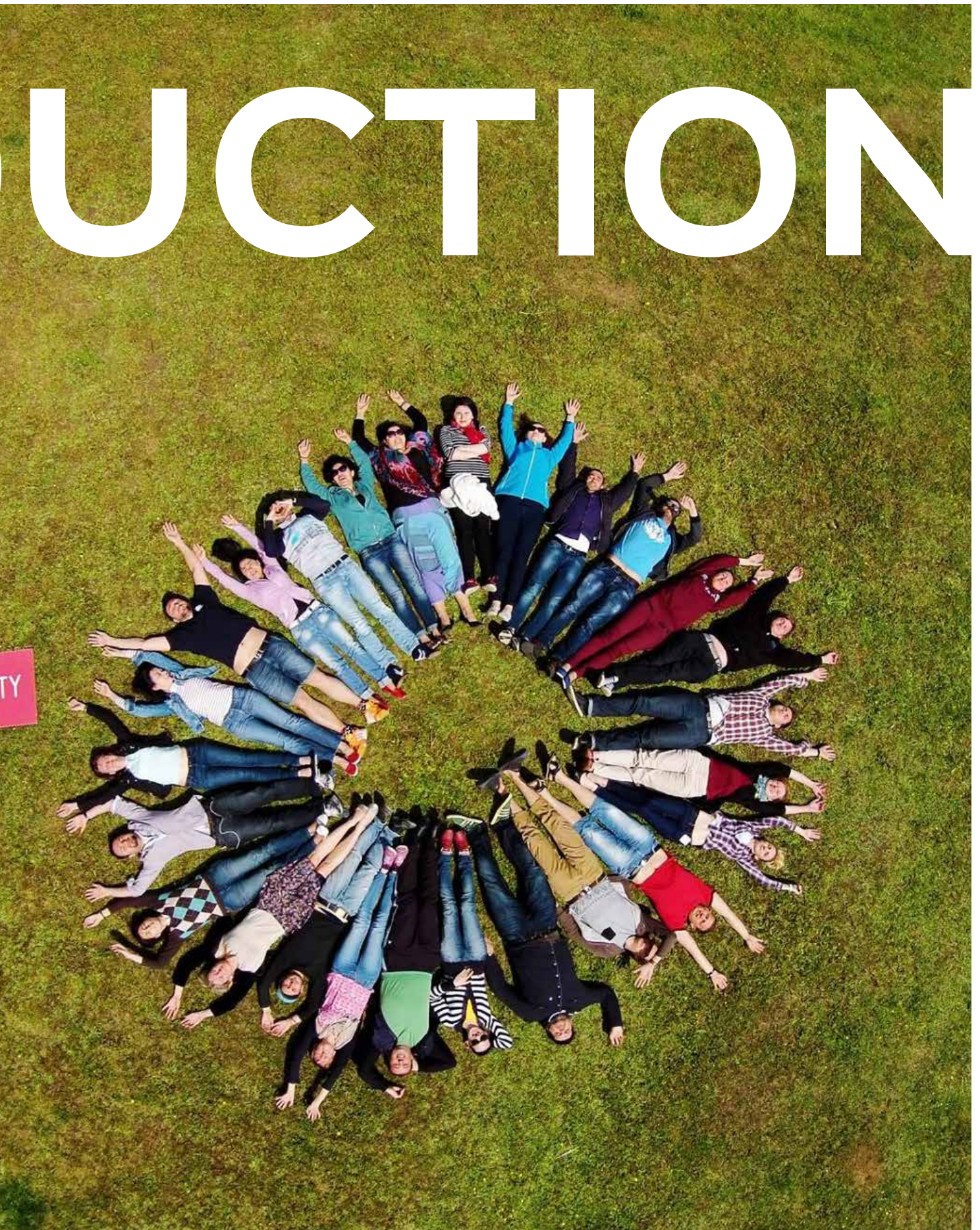
The strengths and weaknesses of these two ways of engaging with youth complete each other in a good way. Service design is a quite structured process. Still, it remains dynamic through its continuous interaction with users. Further, the field of youth work has developed a very good understanding of how we make sure youth can express themselves and how to involve them in everyday decisions. This is done not only with different methods and tools, but also through the basic values and ethics that informs youth work.

This project has been funded by the Erasmus+ Youth in Action program and involved youth organisations from 5 countries around Europe: Norway, Lithuania, Portugal, Poland and Slovenia. Through trainings, workshops and dissemination events we developed an understanding of the two topics, and tried to develop a model for Youth Oriented Service Design that could work in, or be adapted, to the different countries and organisations.

The results of the project is that we developed a method to interact with youth in a structured way, putting their needs at center stage when developing services for them. In addition, we got a tool that suggest how society as a whole can cater for the needs of young people. Combining the two approaches gave us an instrument to develop the services of the organisations involved, both directly and indirectly. And last, we got a tool to analyse where society as a whole either not provide enough support, or maybe at some points provide overlapping services.

An example of this came up when we analysed the universities. Looking at secondary education, we found that there is a lot of support for young people at risk of dropping out. But when they reach the university level, the support mechanisms seem to disappear in many countries. This happens even if the drop out rate of higher education is higher than for secondary schools. Using the tools of *youth-oriented service design*, the project managed to pinpoint this as an issue that needs to be explored further.





When working across institutions and sectors, we need to clarify how we define and understand youth.



WHAT IS YOUTH?

Understanding what youth is can seem relatively straightforward. Still, when you dig into the term, you can identify many different ways of understanding youth.

Pål Isdahl Solberg

Lecturer at the University of South-Eastern Norway | President of The Participation Agency

If you talk to a doctor, a youth worker, university staff, bureaucrats or parents, everyone will comprehend what the term “youth” means. However, their understanding of what it means may vary. The definition of youth also diverges between different countries, regions, and institutions, and not to say within these entities. It is actually hard to find a unifying definition of what youth is.

Making sure that we discuss the same thing is essential. That is why we need to clarify how we understand youth when working across institutions or with cross-sectoral approaches. For example, a municipal youth worker in Norway often defines youth as someone between the ages of 13 and 18 years. In the social welfare system, though, the category applies to anyone between 18 and 30. The life situation for a thirteen-year-old and a twenty-nine-year-old person differs a lot. And as their needs are different, we must customise our approaches and tools.

This article understands youth as a period of development: a transitional process from being a child to becoming an adult. Within this framework, it identifies three main ways to explain youth, both as a *biological*, *normative*, and *sociocultural* category.

The biological approach

The *biological* approach to youth regards it mainly as a period where the body transform. Even if our bodies change throughout our lives, they go through significant changes in puberty, when the body and the brain are “rebuilt”. On average, puberty start at the age of 10-

14 for girls and a year or two later for boys. The brain itself undergo considerable developments in this period, lasting until around the age of 25. One of the most significant changes occurs in the brain's limbic system, impacting a person's ability of self-control, decision-making, regulating emotions, and considering risks. Defining youth from a biological point of view, reaching from the start of puberty until the body has attained its "adult form", delimits youth as a category to the age span of 10-25.

The normative approach

Governmental institutions, NGOs and others also define youth by age. However, they usually determine this on other grounds than a mere biological approach. Through processes of law-making and politics, youth obtain certain rights and duties at certain ages. Different support systems intended for youth also define the youth period in varying age spans. Concerning youth exchange, the Erasmus+ program defines youth as anyone between the age of 13 and 30. In contrast, youth centres in Norway are often limited to young people between 13 and 18 years old. Then again, an NGO could define youth as being between 14 and 25. These, sometimes arbitrary, definitions can be understood as *normative*, meaning political or legal definitions of youth.

The reason why normative definitions often differ from each other can be explained with the stakeholders' need to set in place some limits. Such limits can either be for practical or political reasons. Moreover, it relates specifically to the making of legal rights and duties. The defined age span often relates to the different stakeholders' needs and missions, which is why political and legal definitions of youth can appear inconsistent across sectors or national borders.

The sociocultural approach

Understanding youth from a sociocultural point of view can also be a fluent exercise. This approach often regards the youth period as the transition from being totally dependent on a caretaker (parent, foster-parent, welfare system or other support mechanisms), to be totally independent, able to support oneself. However, the point of time when a person is expected to be independent varies from country to country, between rural and urban environments, and also depends on different cultural values. In one place, it may be natural to move away from home to study or work when you are in your late teens or early twenties. In another place, this point of time might be when you finish your education and form your own family, maybe in your late twenties or early thirties. As youth spend more and more years on education, or get married and get children later in life, the sociocultural understanding of the youth period changes over time and between places. In this context, a saying like "the thirties are the new twenties" makes sense, as many gain their "independence" later in life, compared to the situation some decades ago.

Many cultures also have rituals marking the transition between child and adult. Some of these rituals are short (like a ceremony), while others take weeks and even years. In some cultures, you are expected to make it on your own from before you reach the age of majority. Other cultures cherish support from the family for a much more extended period. Thus, cultural definitions of youth depend on the cultural circumstances, and can also vary significantly within a local community. Again, a point can be made that youth are gaining independence (at least financially) increasingly later in life than before. This may be the reason why the cultural definition of the youth age span has expanded in most countries during the last decades.

Summary

There is no single, universal definition of youth. Instead, there are different ways to explain youth in terms of a transformation period. When talking about youth or working with youth, we need to clarify what we mean by the term. This is especially important when working cross-sectorial or international. Both normative and sociocultural definitions depend highly on their contexts. These may vary significantly between different institutions, organisations, cultures and communities. These factors further impact the objectives and tools we use in our work. In the perspective of youth-oriented service design – where numerous institutions might have to see their role in a new light and in relation to others – it is essential to understand the term youth from multiple points of view. We also need to take this into account when we try to understand the needs of youth, and how we could provide services to them in an effective way.

Three dominant perspectives on youth:

Biological

Regards youth as someone going through a process where the body transform and the brain “rebuilds”. Starts with the puberty, sometime between 10 and 14 years of age, and lasts until about 25.

Normative

Define youth as a group with certain rights and duties at certain ages. Varying and inconsistent age spans, often due to different practical and political reasons, and also the stakeholders’ needs and missions.

Sociocultural

See youth as a transition from being totally dependent of a caretaker, to be fully able to support oneself. Dependent of economic conditions, it relates heavily to cultural values, social relationships, higher education, housing, etc. Changes over time and between places.

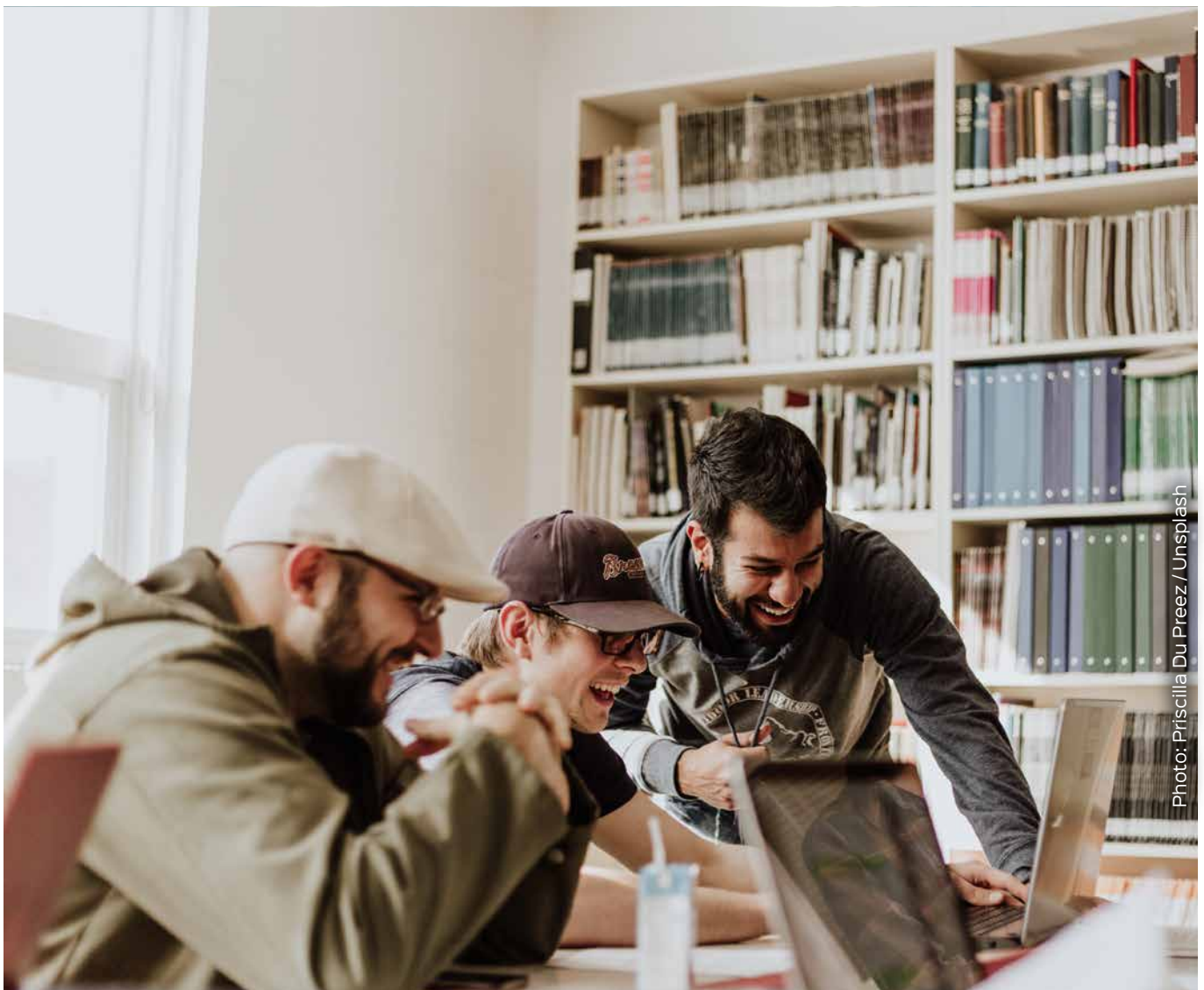


Photo: Priscilla Du Preez / Unsplash



Youth-oriented Service Design

This project understands youth-oriented service design as a method to systematically develop services in interaction with youth and users, to increase the accuracy and quality of the delivered services.

Youth-oriented service design aims to look at how your services could develop. Rather than approaching your service “from the inside”, you consult and adopt the views of youth users as the centre point of your development. You analyse your service from the youth’s perspective and try to maintain a holistic view. For example, does our service cater for the needs of youth? Are they delivered in a way that is accessible for them?

User-centred design is a design process in which designers focus on the users and their needs in each phase of the design process. When providing services to youth, this would mean that you look at how well your services cater for the actual needs of young people, develop your services from the standpoint of young people, and actively design the services together with young people. When doing this, you also avoid analysing yourself as an isolated unit – you consider your service in interaction with other services from a young person’s perspective.

For youngsters who participate in non-formal education or a municipal youth centre, these services naturally interact with the other activities, such as formal education, organised sports or other leisure activities. Adapting this holistic design idea, analysing the services from a youth’s point of view, help us understand what our role is and how we can achieve our objectives in a better way. This calls for a cross-sectoral approach, where youth are actively participating in developing the services that different institutions are providing for them. This can help us understand what services are overlapping or missing and can create opportunities for cooperation and coordinating services more efficiently, from the youth’s perspective.

It demands that we set our institutional objectives aside for a while and focus on understanding if this is in the youth’s best interest, and if we are actually delivering a service that is needed by the youth, or delivering it in a way that makes it accessible to youth.

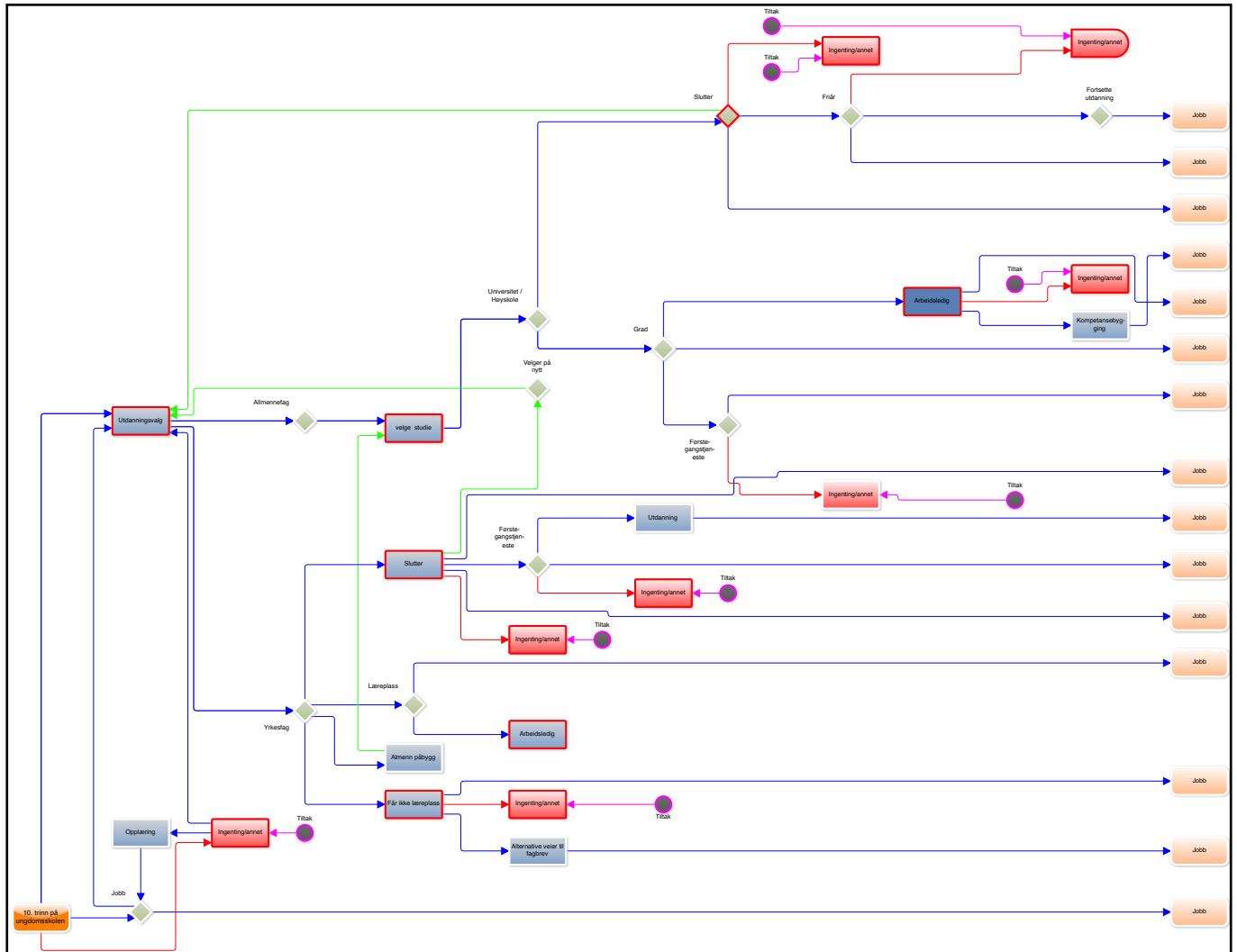
The “User Path”

One way of analysing the youth perspective in youth-oriented service design would be to look at your service as a flowchart of actions and interactions, see how a youth “travels” through your system, and at what points the youth and the service interacts (waypoints).

You can make a chart from both points of view – the youth’s and your organisation’s. Then you can use this as a tool to discuss how they interact with

each other. Allowing the youth themselves to analyse their own path might provide a new approach to the services we provide and understand whether our service fits or not, with how the youth interacts with the service.

Identifying the essential points of interaction will also allow you to understand better what works and not. By discussing the different waypoints, we can identify strengths, weaknesses, and figure out how to improve. This method also helps to analyse larger systems into smaller entities, pinpointing where improvements should be done or is needed the most.



An example of a user path map, visualising how a youth travels between different service providers, sectors and institutions. Illustration: Anders Nordanger/Fagforbundet Vestland.

Methodology and Mindset

This methodology is partly inspired by the use of flowcharts and interaction analysis in technological design, such as app and website development. However, it relies heavily on youth participation and its multiple methods to involve youth in decision-making processes. Merging these two mindsets into an effective structure aims to support youth and develop more precise services.

Youth-oriented service design is therefore both a mindset and a method. You need to be ready to listen to the youth and use their perspective to improve. It is also a method to analyse paths (flowcharts) and waypoints to structure the discussions and pinpoint where there is most need for improvement.

It can also be used on a societal level, not looking at one specific service or organisation, but tracking how youth “travel” in our community and which services they are provided within a municipality.

There are many other disciplines involved in creating a good process for youth-oriented service design, and we will try to cover more of these in later chapters. We need to understand how youth participation works, how to facilitate good processes, how to use the strength of non-formal methodology, and how to support youth better with a cross-sectoral approach.

Co-Creation

The term co-creation has gained momentum over the last few years. For the youth sector, it is very similar to a way of working and thinking already implemented. But how and when we let citizens participate in decision-making has changed over time. We are developing in a direction where the knowledge about how to achieve actual participation, and not only symbolic acts of “listening”, are in demand both from youth and service providers.

The recent years focus on user-oriented service design and co-creation between citizens and public services or organisations have led to a demand for sound methodologies and approaches. We see a need to structure the work with these issues. Youth-oriented service design can be a way to create a solid co-creation space, where youth and organisations can develop and cooperate to improve the services that are delivered to young people.



Youth Work Ethics as Guide for Service Design

How can the ethics of youth work be used to guide service design in the youth field?

Youth work aims to guide and support young people in their personal and social development so that they can understand themselves, their surroundings and relations in society in a better way. Ideally, such services help youth develop essential life skills and reach their potential. It is also important that such services respond to young people's own needs, rather than to shape them according to the ideals of adults.

The ethical norms of youth work

According to the Professional Open Youth Work in Europe (POYWE), all youth work must rely on voluntary participation and be open to anyone who wants to participate. POYWE's Declaration of Principles also states that youth work should be based on non-formal or informal methods for learning, separated from the mandatory education path, and adapt to the needs of the young people involved. Furthermore, it must be based on partnership and dialogue, involving the youth in defining goals, planning their learning paths and making decisions.

Such youth services must take place where young people are – physically, mentally, and emotionally. It should support and empower young people in marginalised or vulnerable situations, focus on the youth's talents, potentials, and interests. Basically, youth must be seen as an asset rather than a deficit. These norms can be phrased as three essential principles: voluntary attendance, partnership, and accessibility.

For participation to be voluntary and based on trust, it is highly important to create a safe space for youth work. POYWE define a safe space as a physical, temporal, digital or emotional space where young people can interact with their peers and youth workers in a positive and secure environment. This atmosphere must allow failure, cultivating young people to make their own decisions, and then later to evaluate the consequences of their actions, with full acceptance and without judgement. Encouraging trial and error let the youth discover their strengths, develop their skills and abilities, and better understand themselves and the social mechanisms they interact within. This allows youth to increase their confidence and self-esteem and strengthen their sense of agency.

The duality of ethics and profession

While the norms above are at centre stage in youth work, it is also a profession practiced by trained and educated personnel. Youth workers are recruited and paid, in most cases with public money. Thus, youth work is permeated by policy and can never be approached as a value-free area. Moreover, the plural positions of youth workers, implying varied and multiple duties, require them to act ethically and responsibly.

To maintain these values and work towards social justice, youth workers should think of two such main categories of principles. First, *ethical principles* that advice how youth workers should approach and treat young people, and towards which values they should guide youth. And second, *professional principles* that guide youth workers' professional praxis and accountability. (See scheme on the next page.)

This dual system of principles shows the complexity of professional youth work. However, the professional principles are worker centred and can also apply to varying professions outside the youth work field. They are not policy-related, and they do not affect young people directly. Conversely, the ethical principles revolve around young people and directly influence their learning process and outcomes, shaping their attitudes and actions. Thus, ethical principles should especially be considered in the youth service design process.

Ethical principles:

1. Treat young people with respect, value each individual and avoid negative discrimination.
2. Respect and promote young people's right to make their own decisions and choices, unless the welfare or legitimate interests of themselves or others are seriously threatened.
3. Promote and ensure the welfare and safety of young people, permitting them to learn through undertaking challenging educational activities.
4. Promote social justice for young people and in society in general, encourage their respect for difference and diversity, and challenge discrimination.

Professional principles:

1. Recognise the boundaries between personal and professional life; be aware of the need to balance your caring and supportive relationship toward young people with an appropriate professional distance.
2. Be accountable to young people, their parents or guardians, colleagues, funders, wider society and others with a relevant interest in the work, and that these accountabilities may be in conflict.
3. Develop and maintain the skills and competence required to do your job.
4. Work for conditions in employing agencies where these principles are discussed, evaluated and upheld.

The implications for service design

By distinguishing professional principles from ethical, youth workers, caseworkers and decision-makers can identify norms that should guide the design and development of services in the youth field. By adopting the ethical principles in the service design process, such services should promote:

- the voluntary involvement of young people;
- equality and inclusion with respect for differences in opinions, beliefs or values;
- advocacy of young people's interest and empowering young people's voice;
- to involve young people in decision-making and use co-creation as a working method whenever it is possible;
- partnership based on trust and mutual understanding;
- respect for young people, accepting their ideas, stories and experiences without judgement;
- development of young people's skills and attitudes, instead of solving problem behaviours;
- empowerment and inclusion of vulnerable and disadvantaged youth.

In an ideal cross-sectoral cooperation model, youth policies are created in cooperation with all actors: decision-makers, youth researchers and practitioners. Among these, the practitioners – the youth workers – are the ones who know how things work. Thus, they are responsible for promoting and introducing solutions that follow the values of the youth work (ex. voluntary participation, providing safe space or involving young people in the decision making). Therefore, maintaining the ethics and using them as guidelines already at the design stage, is an essential factor to foster a friendly environment, a proper flow of the education process and its best possible outcomes.

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Cross-sectorial cooperation: WHY and HOW?



Service Design in the Youth Field

Cross-sectorial cooperation

Why should we care about cooperation across institutional and organisational borders? And how can we do it with an eye for service design?

Cross-sectorial cooperation is a practice that demonstrates how one can consult rights holders in decision-making processes. Good practices of cross-sectorial cooperation are well defined both in the youth policy and youth work fields. As youth policy and youth issues are essential for various agencies and public policy fields, practices in the youth field are good examples of one can involve both the public sector, young right-holders, and the business sector.

Signing the “Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life”, European countries have committed to strengthening youth involvement in all areas of public life. This commitment should result in efficient youth policy and cooperation with youth organisations and youth. Further, it contributes to the sustainable and cohesive development of state and regional policies and the development of core competencies for effective democracy and civic education. The European practice of Structured Dialogue is one of the best examples of how cross-sectorial cooperation should be implemented involving various stakeholders.

Cross-sectorial cooperation is a crucial principle of youth policy and youth work implementation. However, the actual implementation of the principle is far from self-explanatory and deserves elaboration. At its core, cross-sectorial cooperation is complimentary, including representatives from different sectors such as government, government institutions (healthcare, education, etc.), NGOs, businesses, and the media. Good examples of cooperation are characterised by: (1) coordinated activities between partners; (2) a more efficient, coherent and systematic goal achievement than one institution would achieve alone; (3) well defined and synergic cooperation between the participating sectors or departments.

Youth work, youth information and counselling, and youth research are areas using the cross-sectorial cooperation principles to shape the political priorities and context.

What is Cross-sectorial cooperation?

Traditional frameworks that only consult and consider one’s own sector will fall short when implementing public policy. More and more, decisions taken in adjacent policy areas will imply essential preconditions which are relevant to your own implementation, complementing your initial objectives. This is a core assumption of cross-sectorial cooperation.

For example, it is often difficult to identify the differences between the objectives of the cultural and educational sectors. Thus, it is doubtful that one sector would be solely responsible for group gatherings whilst the other handles leisure activities.

So, who is responsible for organising the first day of a school event, the school or the local culture centre? Various countries and sectors use somewhat different terminology: terms such as “cross-ministerial”, “cross-departmental”, and “cross-institutional” cooperation are used as synonyms with the term cross-sectorial. Collaboration, partnerships, cooperation networks, and cooperation systems are further examples, and we might add agency cooperation, inter-organisational interaction, central and local government relations to the list of synonyms used to describe processes across and between organisations and sectors.

Cross-sectorial cooperation is a coordinating activity of two or more institutions responsible for different areas of public policy on a specific topic or area (e.g. youth policy) with a common objective. The main characteristic of cross-sectorial cooperation is that separate and independent institutions coordinate their activities.

The word cooperation means working together, whilst communication is having common affairs. However, despite the simple nature of the term, successful implementation is challenging. All over Europe, cooperating institutions struggle to create solid and shared senses of ownership to their strategies or processes. This specially occurs if the institutions involved compete to lead coordination or have different working cultures.

Each institution has its unique features: a specific working culture, a particular terminology, traditions, and typical behaviours of their specialists. To some extent, this explains differences in employee behaviours between municipalities, schools and youth centres. If the cooperating institutions lack flexibility or a willingness to understand each other and adjust, cooperation will become challenging.

To solve such challenges, the cooperators need a common strategy. This is where the service design methodology can play a highly constructive role. By putting youth and youth services at the centre stage, service providers can design and align their efforts, identify who should be involved and how different actors can contribute. For such an approach to be fruitful, it is crucial to consider the possibilities and challenges of cross-sectoral cooperation, and to pay attention to its impact on the process. The approach presuppose that several stakeholders are involved and willing to cooperate. Stakeholders are required to adopt the viewpoint of youth, asking how the users see and experience the services provided to them. This can serve as a departure for further analysis of how services can be developed to meet the needs of youth, and also how separate services might overlap or complement each other.

A Norwegian case: Sharing experiences across professions

In the municipality of Bergen, the trade union for municipal workers Fagforbundet has initiated a project of cross-sectoral cooperation. The initiative wanted to gather stakeholders in the youth field and develop a common ground to better understand their work and roles, aiming to provide better services to young people.

Professionals usually have a good understanding of their own field of expertise. However, young people are complex and experience many shifting phases and roles. They are also constantly developing – both as individuals and social groups. Thus, the different services offered to them must handle this complexity in cooperation, aiming to understand and support them. Further, professionals must be able to shift focus and look beyond their own field of expertise. Using service design as a method to map out the needs of young people, the initiative simultaneously drafted how cross-sectoral cooperation could be used to improve existing services.

The initiative started by mapping out stakeholders in the field of youth, including any organisational unit that meets or deals with young people. First, the initiator arranged separate conversations with each stakeholder and shared our ideas. After that, all of them were invited to a joint meeting. Putting the needs of young people centre stage, the participants explored how they understood their own role in meeting young people's shifting needs as professionals. Further, the process focused on how different professions can improve their understanding of each other. Of course, understanding the reasons for one's own practice is essential. However, it is equally important to understand what others are doing and why.

As an outcome, we now arrange regular joint meetings with the different stakeholders. Through this dynamic process and sessions, we learn from each other, develop shared understandings and expand our professional networks.







Youth Participation, Advocacy and Decision-making

Youth participation is both a prominent and debated topic. It is often regulated by laws and regulations, making it a mandatory task for many organisations and institutions to involve, engage, and co-create with youth.

Youth participation is often regarded as a value or aim. Many stakeholders, therefore, struggle to find the right tools and methods to create suitable spaces and processes for participation. However, both academics and practitioners have developed and tested methodology and theories for achieving quality youth participation.

“To participate” can mean several things. In the youth work sector, we are seldom talking about just being an active participant in an activity. It is profoundly connected to taking part in a decision-making process. From a youth worker’s perspective, a definition could be: to take an active part in, or have the opportunity to influence, a decision-making process.

We often think of decision-making processes as decisions made in governing bodies like a board, city council or a committee. At the same time, we make big and small decisions every day, affecting each other. For example, a youth worker in the youth centre might choose what activities to offer or what food to serve. These are decisions impacting youth. With this approach, participation can be seen as a method to involve youth in structured as well as arbitrary decision-making, aiming to empower youth. Whether the service provider is an organisation consulting youth or a youth worker in an everyday working situation – participation is all about our ability to let youth into decision-making processes.

This is also the case in youth-oriented service design. We must create a space where the input of youth at least influences the decisions we make in a structured way or allow youth themselves to be an active part in the decision-making process. Suppose we create a process where the input from youth is disconnected from the decision-making process. In that case, the participation will be largely symbolic, and the participatory process will have less or no impact.

The inherent values of youth work, facilitation, and non-formal learning methodology are well suited for creating a participatory environment. Combined with some tools and theories about participation and service design, it can also become helpful in developing more youth-friendly services.

Like many other practices, participation requires elements of the right attitude, knowledge, resources and tools to be effective. To get a better understanding of this, we will look at two perspectives of participation that fits well with creating an approach to youth-oriented service design.

The quality of participation

In 2008, environmental researchers Thomas Dietz and Paul C. Stern looked at how high-quality participation processes can be created. They claimed that:

When done well, public participation improves the quality and legitimacy of a decision and builds the capacity of all involved to engage in the policy process. It can lead to better results in terms of [...] quality and other social objectives” (Dietz & Stern, National Research Council . Panel on Public Participation in Environmental, Decision, & National Research Council . Committee on the Human Dimensions of Global, 2008)

They point out that participation, when done well, has several positive effects and strengthen multiple parts of the process. But they also pointed out that it has to be done well. There is a quality aspect of participation. How can we create high-quality participation? Inspired by their publication, one can identify some key elements of participation quality:

- Who are involved?
- At what stage, and how often, are they involved?
- Resources and capacity
- The level of impact
- The aim of the process

Looking at *who* is involved, the result gets stronger the more different voices and opinions that are represented. Getting input from a diverse group can provide you with multiple angles on problems and solutions, contributing to a stronger decision.

When you users are involved also impact quality. If users are included late in a process, fewer aspects are open for discussion, and key choices have already been made. Involving the users early and consulting them throughout the process will strengthen the quality of participation in the process.

You also need *sufficient resources* to organise participatory events, and youngsters must be able to participate in the process. Youngsters’ resources are often limited, and you need to design with this in mind. Do you schedule it in their leisure time? Do you provide support for transportation or food? Which language should you use? In what form do you design the meeting? Is it suitable, easy to take part and understand what is discussed? The form of the discussions and sessions needs to take age and capacity into account, so some methodology must be adapted. The youth work sector is uniquely qualified to lend their values and competencies to such youth-oriented service design processes.

The *level of impact* must also be considered. How will the input reach a decision-making process? Will the youngsters influence or take part in this process? (This topic is discussed in more detail below, looking at Harry Shier’s “Pathway to participation”.)

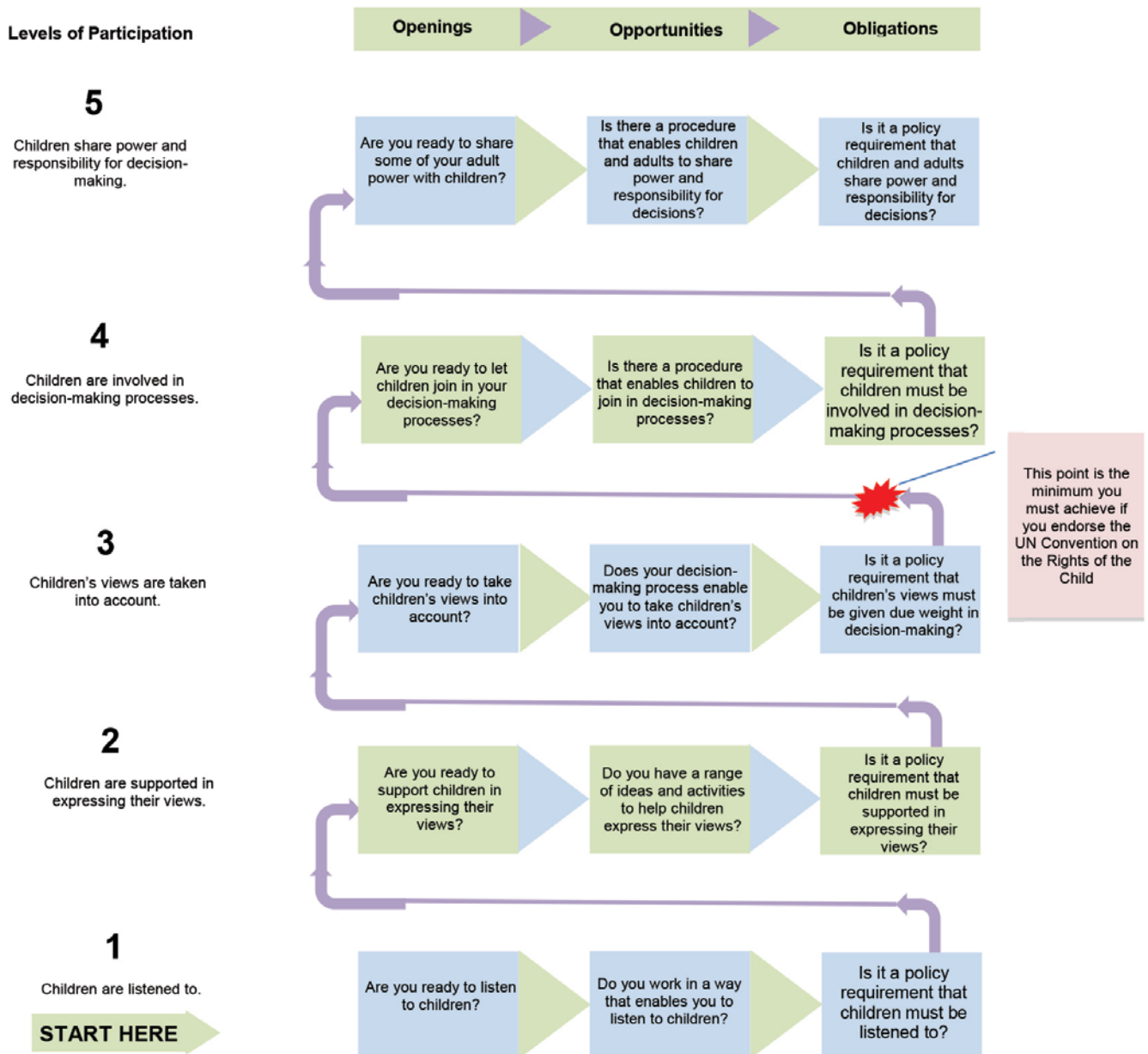
The *aim* of the process is also a factor in considering the quality of a participation process. What would we like to achieve? What is the motivation or interest of the participants and stakeholders in the process? For example, if the participating youth are looking for a change, and the stakeholders’ aim is to create support for their idea, there is a great potential of disappointment or conflict – at least if this is not made very clear from the start.

A pathway to participation

Another relevant model is Harry Shier’s “Pathway to participation”. This model investigates the relation between professionals and youth, and looks at values, tools and not least which obligations we should consider to create a solid participatory process. Inspired by the Child Convention, article 12, about children’s right to express their views and be heard, Shier’s model suggests a pathway to fulfil the minimum requirements of the article.

Openings

Shiers’ model first looks at the “openings” that occur when interacting with youth. It can be understood as your attitude towards involving youth. You have to be willing and ready to let youth participate in every level of the pathway, both on a personal and organisational level.



Harry Shier's model of Pathways to Participation. Source: Shier, H. (2001) 'Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations', *Children & Society*, Volume 15, 107-117. Illustration by Aleksandras Vitkovskis

Opportunities

If you are willing to involve youth, there also needs to be an opportunity to involve youth. This could be related to the way you work, and whether you have tools and resources to involve them in a meaningful way. It is also about organisational procedures to ensure that the participation is actually part of a decision-making process.

Obligations

Obligations deal with the regulatory and legal framework. It is not about what you are willing to do, but about what you are required to do. If participation is only to be dependent on individual motivation, we are not creating robust participatory structures. We often see good participation work deteriorate when youth workers or public bureaucrats that have been advocating participatory processes leave their jobs. Thus, it is vital that the participation not depend on individuals, but is required of you when working with or providing services to youth.

The crucial point of the pathway is the point where participators can impact the decision-making process. If you do not reach this level, you will not be meeting the minimum requirement of the Child Convention, according to Shier. Just listening to youth, or being willing to support their expression of their views, is not sufficient. Suppose the feedback of young people does not directly links to a decision-making process, and their views are not treated seriously or taken into account when making decisions. In that case, Shier claims you are not meeting the minimum legal requirements for society to implement article 12 in practice.

Shier makes it clear that youth participation has several components to consider. Your personal motivation, the way you work and the legal framework you work within. It is an excellent tool to analyse youth participation, and to design participatory structures independent of individuals.

Trying to implement Shier's model into a youth oriented service design model requires us at a minimum to make sure that the practice of involving youth is a obligation of some form, that we are willing to listen and use methodology to support youth in expressing their views, and to make sure that the input also are taken into account when we make decisions based on their input.

What is advocacy?

Another aspect of youth participation is advocacy. While participation broadly can be seen as influencing or participating in a decision making-process, invited by public institutions or individuals in position of power, advocacy can be seen as a process where stakeholders themselves take action to influence decisions, more or less independent of the wishes of those in power to decide on the matter.

Advocacy can be done by an individual or group that aims to influence decision making, and it includes activities to influence public policy, laws and budgets by using facts, relationships, media and messaging to educate decision makers and the public. Advocacy can include many activities from media campaigns, public speaking to commissioning and publishing research.

Advocacy in all its forms seeks to ensure that people, particularly those who are most vulnerable in society, are able to:

- Have their voice heard on issues that are important to them
- Defend and safeguard their rights
- Have their views and wishes genuinely considered when decisions are being made about their lives
- Advocacy is a process of supporting and enabling people to:
- Express their views and concerns
- Access information and services
- Defend and promote their rights and responsibilities
- Explore choices and options

(Source: Wikipedia)

Public decision-making

The basis for public decision-making is the principle of popular sovereignty. Through elections, people delegate authority to political representatives in elected bodies (Olsen, 1983). Whether on a central, regional or local level, these elected bodies then delegate public authority further to executive politicians, who use an administrative apparatus to implement the policies decided on by the elected and executive bodies.

A major precondition for a democratic political process is that this 'parliamentary chain' works smoothly: people should be able to influence decisions and policies by changing their representatives. Elected bodies can appoint and control political executives, and the executive political leaders can control the administrative apparatus. Decision effectiveness and representation supplement these principles; hence, the political-administrative system can define and solve public problems. The political actors represent the people, either through their opinions and actions or through their social-economical characteristics (Christensen et al., 2007).

One of the reasons that youth participation is such an important topic is related to the fact that young people are often under-represented in public decision-making bodies. Youth below the age of 18 seldom have the right to vote and therefore have no way of directly impacting the decisions. Article 12 in the UN child convention is in place to secure that the voice of youth are heard in these processes, but is often overlooked by decision makers (Shier, 2001)

Participation and service-design

Looking at participation theory and understanding advocacy, we see that different institutions must, by law or moral imperative, listen to youth. How to do this in practice can be complicated, but youth-oriented service design offers a method to guide such processes.

Youth-oriented service design aims to let youth influence decisions in a structured way, improving the services they use. While youth participation is often done in an ad-hoc or case-to-case approach, this method requires institutions and organisations to constantly evaluate their services together with youth, implement changes and then again evaluate if the changes have had the desired effect.

It is also important that organisations and institutions are aware of how the public regard their services. When stakeholders are advocating for change, this might be a motivating factor to initiate a participative process to improve services, and consider it a process where both sides can develop more knowledge about each other and improve public services.

The challenge for institutions using this method will be to ensure that the input of youth is taken into consideration when decisions are made, and making sure the participation process is not just a symbolic gesture, which Harry Shier would consider a minimum requirement to fulfill the intentions of article 12.

A practical example

A way of creating more focus on youth, could be to define what quality is in terms of youth policy. Different quality standards and labels have been created and mainstreamed across Europe.

These can have the form of national quality standards approved by respective ministries, a set of recommendations from state level to local level or they can be done in a form of quality label created by NGOs, and used to advocate for better youth participation. One example of this we find in Lithuania, with the Youth friendly municipalities.

Youth friendly municipality - quality label, recommendations, quality standards

These recommendations were developed in collaboration between the Department of Youth Affairs under the Ministry of Social Security and Labor, the National Youth Council and the Lithuanian Erasmus+ NA. They aim to support municipal administrations, municipal youth councils, youth coordinators and other stakeholders in the implementation of youth policy. The aim of the recommendations is to inspire and guide them to become more youth-friendly.

Under this programme municipalities could get awarded the title of "Youth-friendly municipality". Today it exists as a set of recommendations and collection of good practices. The recommendations describe measures to help municipalities become more attractive to young people and respond better to their changing needs, and focus on six main areas:

- Entrepreneurship and job creation programs
- Involving young people in municipal decision-making
- Funding of various youth initiatives
- Youth-friendly infrastructure and services
- Incentives for young people (scholarships, housing, etc.)
- The image of a youth-friendly municipality

The Lithuanian model gives municipalities inspiration (in the form of good practices) and tools for self-reflection and self-assessment. For more information and examples you can check see this publication (in Lithuanian) <https://bit.ly/31IPFZ3>

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The process of combining these different approaches, theories and methods are playing to the strengths of each other. Looking at both service design and participation in youth work, they both have their flaws. By merging the ideas, this project found that a model of youth-oriented service design could be a good tool to develop more youth friendly services.

Service design has a very structured method to identify when and where improvements need to be made. The graphic nature of user journeys and schematic flowchart approach of mapping out services, are easy to understand for users of all ages. At the same time it does not give a good answer to how we should involve youth, or how to get them to participate in a meaningful way.

Youth Works' long tradition of involving and engaging with youth on the other side, provides us with good tools for how to create a space for participation and co-creation. By adapting the value system of youth work, we naturally put the youth in the center of the development. By focusing on making sure that the participation of youth has the needed quality, and actually becomes a part of a decision making process, we can ensure that the involvement of youth is not only tokenistic og symbolic, but that it has an impact on the development of services.

The tools of the facilitators are also needed in these spaces. A neutral facilitator will be true to the process, and can make sure that it is the youth that is actually in the center of development, and not only the needs of institutions.

The cross sectorial nature of youth works also brings an added dimension to Service Design. It is a tool that is not only suited to understand individual services, but can also be used to understand how our services interact, in a more holistic approach. It helps us understand that our services are not being delivered in a vacuum, but that it is affected by everything else around us. For youth it is not always easy to see the silos that the different services belong to, and maybe it is also not their responsibility to navigate these murky waters?

On the other side participation and co-creation in the youth field often comes across as random, or with a lack of structure. Youth are often invited into processes on an ad-hoc basis, or when we feel it's needed. This means that the initiative often comes from institutions or organisations with a specific issue or problem they need to solve or deal with. User Oriented Service Design gives us a more structured way of identifying where the need for development is, from the perspective of young people. It can improve the quality of when and where participation is needed.

A model of Youth Oriented Service Design tries to play on the strengths of both fields. By using User Oriented Service Design as a tool to identify where improvements are needed, and the tools and experience of youth work to identify how we can involve youth in a meaningful way, this approach could help us develop better services for youth, and empower them to also be a part of the change.







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