

URBACT Good Practice Call 2017

Good Practice Summary

Esplugues (Spain)

Citizen Participation: Children's Council and Public Youth Audience

Abstract

The City Council of Esplugues develops a permanent policy of citizen participation. The municipal activity is open to citizens, following the principles of transparency and shared responsibility. Citizens are invited to participate in the joint project of building the city, as a process of constant improvement and adaptation. There are several spaces for citizen participation. Among them are the Children's Council and the Public Youth Audience. The Children's Council is a forum for children in 5th and 6th grade (Secondary Obligatory Education) in public schools, where they have the possibility to learn, reflect, discuss and agree on proposals related to their environment. The Public Youth Audience is addressed to students of 4th grade. These are spaces for discussion. They generate pedagogical/educational debate and proposals for the transformation of the city. Both forums take into account the work plan that is developed in collaboration with schools and institutes, making them participants to contribute in the formation of children / youth, in values and attitudes of participation.

Facing the problem

In order to build our model of city, it is necessary that the City Council open itself to the initiatives and expectations of citizens, responding to a right that is their own, through mechanisms of citizen participation. It's essential to know their proposals in relation to the issues that affect them and foster relationships with their community, also developing their civic commitment. The case of the Children's Council and Public Youth Audience is a way to guarantee the right of participation of these groups, whose purpose is:

- Educate on participation and democratic values.
- Make children and young people act as active and committed citizens.
- Educate in values and attitudes that increase different competences: active listening, reflection, oral expression, debate, argumentation, dialogue, decision making, commitment, critical spirit.
- Commitment to city policies.
- The proposals that are generated have an impact on the city and, therefore, the results are tangible.

Solutions proposed and some results

Until recently the cities were built from the eyes of adults. With the new mechanisms of participation it is intended that the construction of the city be adapted and enriched, through the participation of young people and children, who live and enjoy it. The results of the interventions of both groups (children and youth) as well as the proposals derived from the participation actions, which are transformed into municipal actions, are considered as solutions whenever possible and feasible. That is why a series of municipal actions have been

carried out after the different participatory processes developed by the Children's Council and the Public Youth Audience, such as:

- Children's Council.
 - Rights of minors.
 - Recovery of traditional games.
 - Party of Park.
 - Design of a park.
 - 50th anniversary's celebration "Esplugues City".
 - Proposals to encourage reading for all citizens.
 - Design of kindergartens "The garden of the senses".
- Public Youth Audience:
 - Study on healthy habits.
 - Times and spaces for leisure.
 - Attitudes and values of entrepreneurship among young people.
 - Development of the Local Youth Plan.
 - Design of a campaign against sexist violence.
 - Actions, proposals to combat harassment/bullying.
 - Encourage values and attitudes towards participation, association and voluntariness.

Innovativeness and improvement

Most of the participatory experiences of young people and children have focused on the civic, pedagogical and educational sphere, perhaps due to the weight of this specific competence in the Municipal Action Plan (through activities such as "Making an Educating City" or "Building Citizenship"). It has also been made progress in the implementation of specific urban and cultural projects. Concrete projects have been promoted, such as the construction of a children's playground.

The result of these participation workshops has identified as weakness:

- The lack of participatory culture among the citizens since there is usually a low interest to attend the meetings. It is proposed to increase the dissemination of participation systems to attract citizens.

As highlights has identified:

- The diversity of channels made available to citizens to participate in the decision-making processes on the issues that concern them and affect them. They are channels open to all citizens and do not discriminate against any person who wants to be part of it.
- Citizens see reflected their proposals in the performance and municipal management.

Interest for other European cities

Every city has child and young people. They could be the foundation for effective development at local level, and if engaged they will improve many of the structural development challenges that the cities face today, including enhancing the cohesiveness of families and communities, reducing health risks and advancing livelihood opportunities. They are the bridge between effective development policy and valuable practical action on the ground.

Across many Europe cities, different organisations are practicing different ways of engaging children and youth through participatory activities, and the experience accumulated from Esplugues would be useful both for those cities that have already begun to work in this direction, as for those that have not yet done so but are determined to bet on it.

Children have value as members of European society and that adults can learn from and with them. In summary, there are three main reasons for this good practice may be of interest to other European cities:

- Based on citizenship, young people have citizen's rights and responsibilities.
- Based on pragmatism, it's acknowledged that participation leads to better decisions.
- And based on vision, European cities have to recognize the mutual, life-enhancing benefits that come with engaging children and young people as equals.