



YOU PART

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INTRODUCTION

The participation of young people in creative processes, the support of their ability to organise themselves and the articulation of their interests in different contexts (personal interests, interests specific to their living environment, social and political interests) form an important principle of action of open youth work. The participatory approach is reflected in the conception, design and implementation of programmes as well as in the evaluation of open youth work. The participation of young people in social processes is not a benevolent concession on the part of responsible adults, but is enshrined in many ways, for example in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), in the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life or in the Federal Constitutional Act on the Rights of Children in Austria (2011).

The contribution of open youth work to a successful municipal/regional culture of participation consists of both practising participation at various levels in its own area and thus practising it, as it were, as well as initiating and accompanying participation processes in the municipal/regional context. This helps children and young people experience their lives as something that can be shaped and thus increasingly take their lives in their own hands as part of their development.

When involving young people in planning and decision-making processes in a local and regional context, particular care must be taken to ensure that their interests, opportunities, abilities and limitations are taken into account. This not only avoids experiences that are too low, too high or unsuccessful, but also creates realistic opportunities for participation.

LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

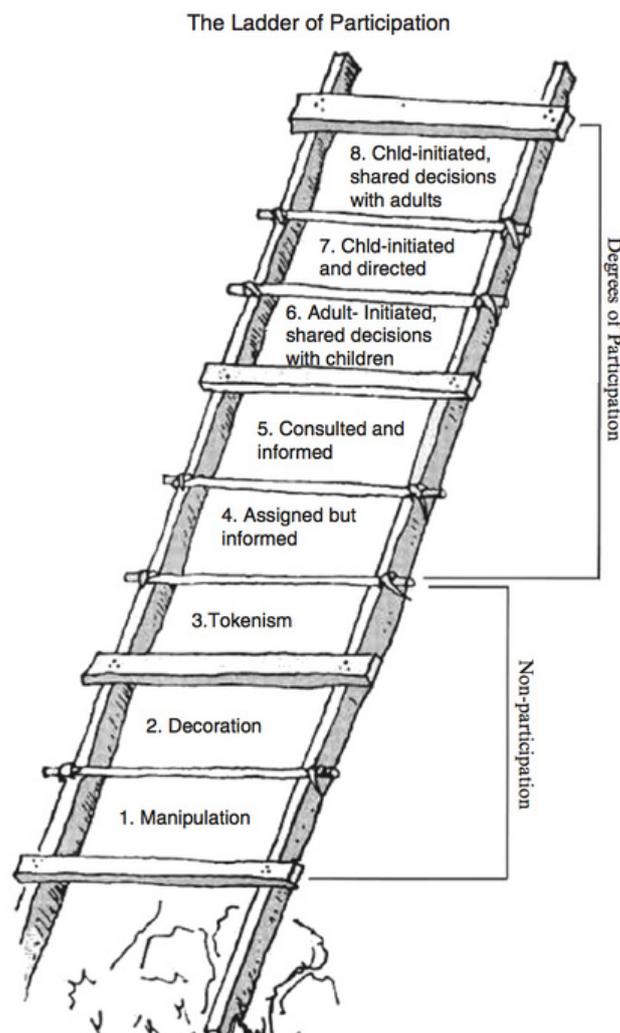
Measuring the quality of the participation we can use the “Ladder of Participation” and the further considerations that follow.

First published in Children’s Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship, a 1992 publication of the International Child Development Centre of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Roger Hart’s Ladder of Children’s Participation applied the conceptual framework of Sherry Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation to the participation of children in adult projects, programmes, and activities, including forms of work, advocacy, and citizenship. Like Arnstein’s earlier framework, Hart’s modified ladder of participation became an influential and widely applied model in the fields of child development, education, civic participation, and democratic decision-making.

LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

“Young people’s participation cannot be discussed without considering power relations and the struggle for equal rights. It is important that all young people have the opportunity to learn to participate in programmes which directly affect their lives. This is especially so for disadvantaged children for through participation with others such children learn that to struggle against discrimination and repression, and to fight for their equal rights in solidarity with others is itself a fundamental democratic right. The highest possible degree of citizenship in my view is when we, children or adults, not only feel that we can initiate some change ourselves but when we also recognise that it is sometimes appropriate to also invite others to join us because of their own rights and because it affects them too, as fellow-citizens.”

Roger A. Hart, Children’s Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship



Roger Hart’s original 1992 illustration of the Ladder of Children’s Participation from *Children’s Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*. The model features eight “rungs” that describe the characteristics associated with different levels of decision-making, agency, control, or power that can be given to children and youth by adults.

LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

Hart's typology of children's participation is presented as a metaphorical "ladder," with each ascending rung representing increasing levels of child agency, control, or power. In addition to the eight "rungs" of the ladder represent a continuum of power that ascends from nonparticipation (no agency) to degrees of participation (increasing levels of agency). It should be noted that Hart's use of the term "children" encompasses all legal minors from preschool-age children to adolescents.

The eight rungs of Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation are:

1. MANIPULATION

Participation as manipulation occurs when children and youth do not understand the issues motivating a participatory process or their role in that process. In Hart's words: "Sometimes adults feel that the end justifies the means.... If children have no understanding of the issues and hence do not understand their actions, then this is manipulation. Such manipulation under the guise of participation is hardly an appropriate way to introduce children into democratic political processes."

Examples include "pre-school children carrying political placards concerning the impact of social policies on children" when those children do not understand the issues or their role in the political process, and asking children "to make drawings of something, such as their ideal playground," after which "adults collect the drawings and in some hidden manner synthesize the ideas to come up with 'the children's design' for a playground. The process of analysis is not shared with the children and is usually not even made transparent to other adults. The children have no idea how their ideas were used."

2. DECORATION

Participation as decoration occurs when children and youth are put on public display during an event, performance, or other activity organized for a specific purpose, but they do not understand the meaning or intent of their involvement.

Examples include "those frequent occasions when children are given T-shirts related to some cause, and may sing or dance at an event in such dress, but have little idea of what it is all about and no say in the organizing of the occasion. The young people are there because of the refreshments, or some interesting performance, rather than the cause. The reason this is described as one rung up from 'manipulation' is that adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by children. They simply use the children to bolster their cause in a relatively indirect way."

LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

3. TOKENISM

Participation as tokenism occurs in “those instances in which children are apparently given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions”.

Examples include “how children are sometimes used on conference panels. Articulate, charming children are selected by adults to sit on a panel with little or no substantive preparation on the subject and no consultation with their peers who, it is implied, they represent. If no explanation is given to the audience or to the children of how they were selected, and which children’s perspectives they represent, this is usually sufficient indication that a project is not truly an example of participation”.

4. ASSIGNED BUT INFORMED

Participation that is assigned but informed occurs when the children and youth (1) “understand the intentions of the project,” (2) “know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why,” (3) “have a meaningful (rather than ‘decorative’) role,” and (4) “volunteer for the project after the project was made clear to them.”

Hart describes, as an example, a World Summit for Children held at the United Nations Headquarters. It was “an extremely large event with great logistical complexity” and “it would have been difficult to involve young people genuinely in the planning of such an event,” according to Hart. However, “a child was assigned to each of the 71 world leaders. As ‘pages,’ these children became experts on the United Nations building and the event, and were able to play the important role of ushering the Presidents and Prime Ministers to the right places at the right times.” In this case, the children’s role was both functional and symbolic, and “the children’s roles as pages were important and were clear to all.”

5. CONSULTED AND INFORMED

Participation that constitutes consulted and informed occurs when children act as “consultants for adults in a manner which has great integrity. The project is designed and run by adults, but children understand the process and their opinions are treated seriously.”

One example Hart describes is of an adult-led survey of youth perceptions in which the youth are informed about the purpose of the survey, consulted about appropriate questions before it’s developed, and given an opportunity to provide feedback on the final survey before it is administered.

LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

6. ADULT-INITIATED, SHARED DECISIONS WITH CHILDREN

Participation that constitutes adult-initiated, shared decisions with children occurs when adults initiate participatory projects, but they share decision-making authority or management with children.

One example Hart describes is a youth newspaper. In this case, the newspaper may be an adult-initiated project, but children can manage every aspect of the operation—from reporting, writing, and editing to advertising, printing, and distribution—with only guidance and technical assistance from adults.

7. CHILD-INITIATED AND DIRECTED

Participation that is child-initiated and directed occurs when children and youth conceptualize and carry out complex projects by working cooperatively in small or large groups. While adults may observe and assist the children, they do not interfere with the process or play a directive or managerial role.

Hart notes that it's difficult “to find examples of child-initiated community projects. A primary reason for this is that adults are usually not good at responding to young people's own initiatives. Even in those instances where adults leave children alone to design and paint a wall mural or their own recreation room, it seems hard for them not to play a directing role.”

8. CHILD-INITIATED, SHARED DECISIONS WITH ADULTS

Participation that constitutes child-initiated, shared decisions with adults occurs when children—though primarily teenage youth in this case—share decision-making authority, management, or power with adult partners and allies.

Examples would include students partnering with adults to raise funding, develop and run a school program, or lead a community campaign. A major advantage of this form of youth participation is that it can empower young people to have a significant impact on policies, decisions, or outcomes that were traditionally under the exclusive control and direction of adults, such as legislative or political processes.

Source:

Hart, R. A., Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship. Florence, Italy: United Nations Children's Fund International Child Development Centre, 1992.

Hart, R. A., Stepping back from 'the ladder': Reflections on a model of participatory work with children. In Participation and Learning: Perspectives on education and the environment, health and sustainability (pp. 19-31). Netherlands: Springer, 2008.

DEGREES OF SEPARATION

In Empowering Children and Young People: Promoting Involvement in Decision-Making (1997), Phil Treseder refashioned Roger Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation into a hub-and-spoke configuration to avoid common criticisms of the ladder metaphor: in real-world settings, participation does not unfold in an ordered sequence from higher to lower, and forms of participation that appear on lower rungs of the ladder are not intrinsically worse than higher levels—in fact, they may be appropriate in certain circumstances, such as when children and youth need adult support and guidance to fully participate in a leadership or decision-making process:

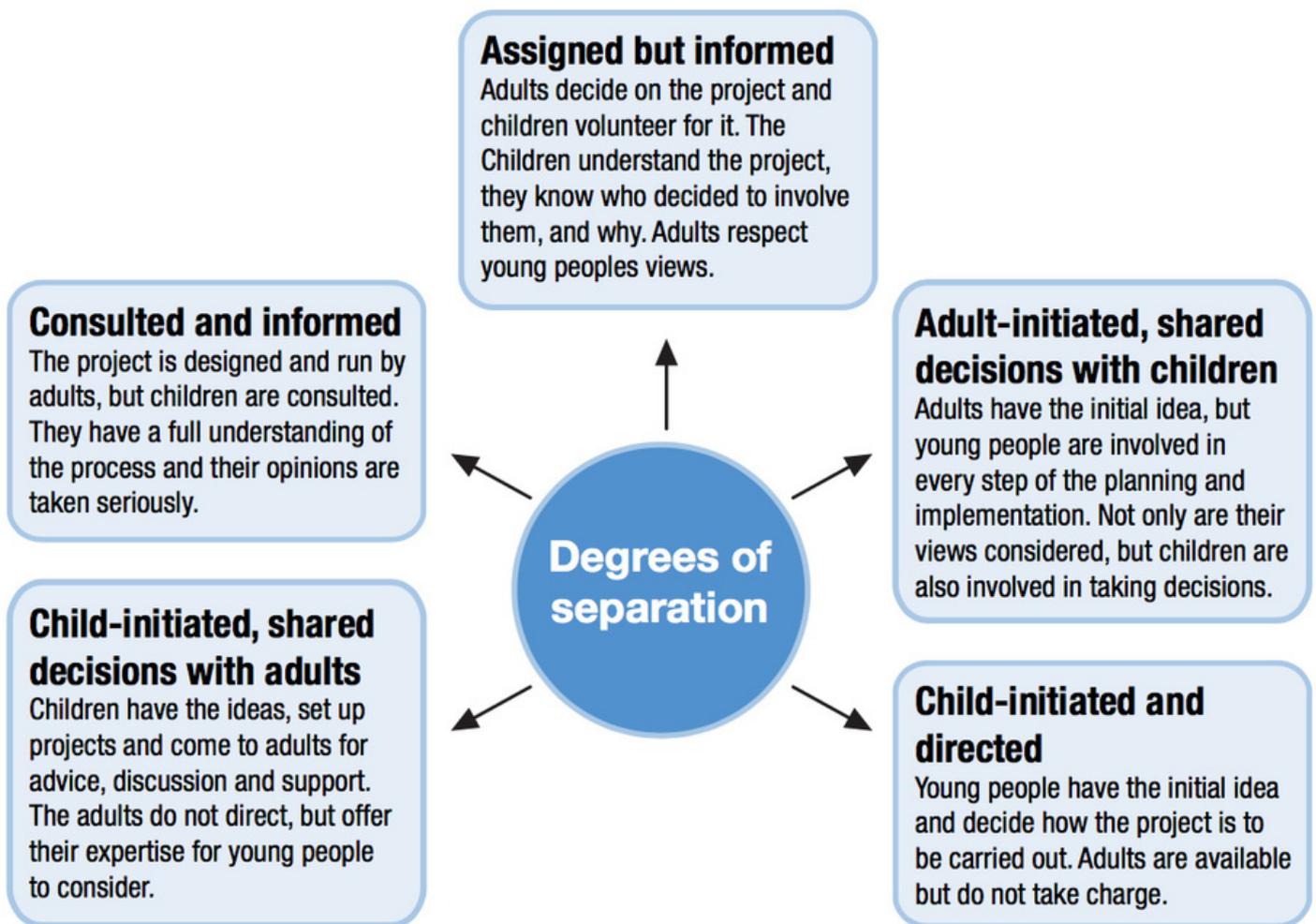


Image source:
Empowering Young People, Carnegie UK Trust, 2008.

DIMENSIONS OF PARTICIPATION

In Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth: A Manual for Participation (2001), David Driskell proposed another reconceptualization of Roger Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation called the dimensions of young people's participation. The reconceived presentation places the eight rungs of Hart's Ladder on an X-Y axis. The vertical dimension illustrates increasing power to make decisions and change, while the horizontal dimension illustrates increasing levels of interaction and collaboration.

The dimensions of young people's participation

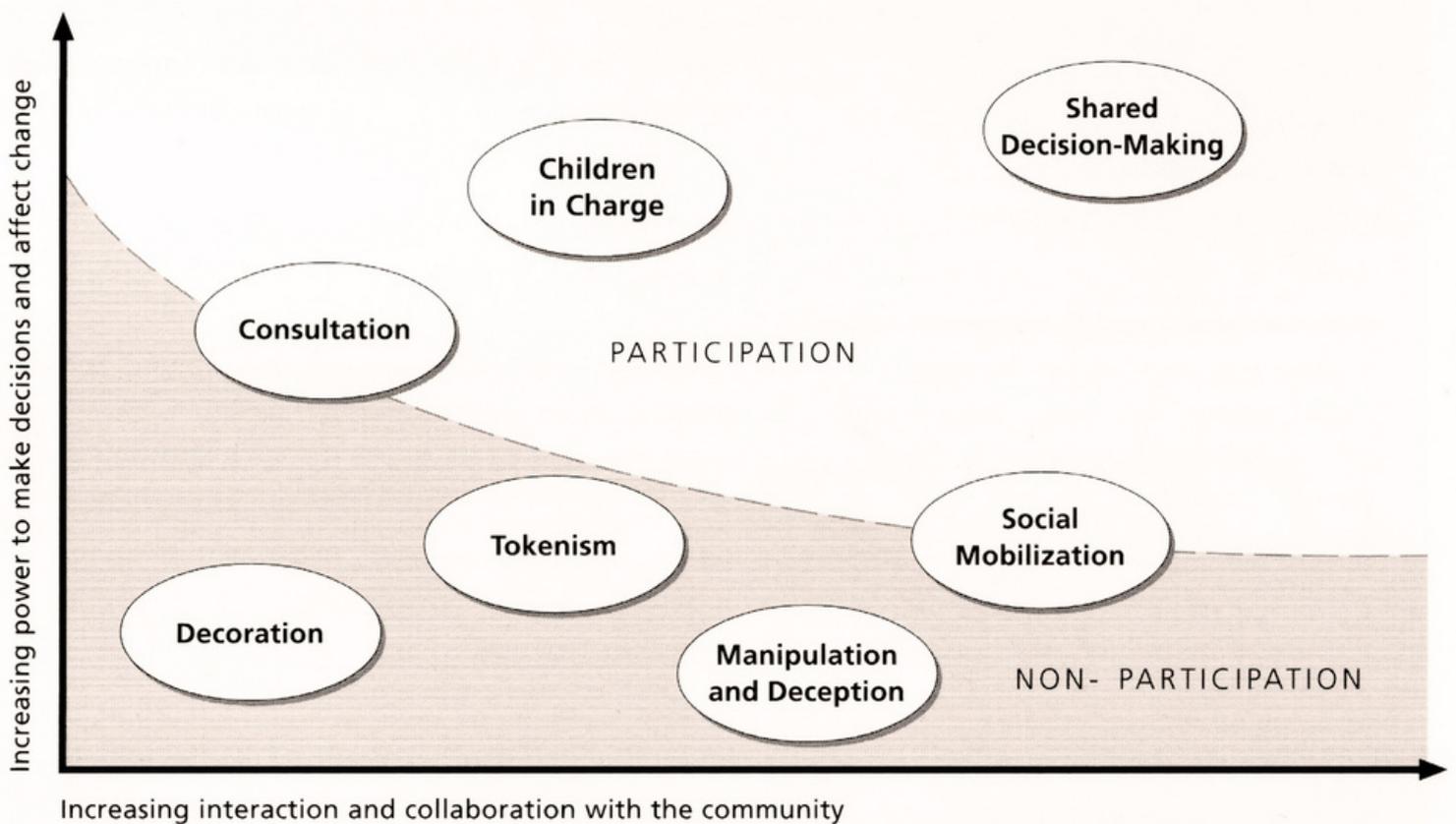


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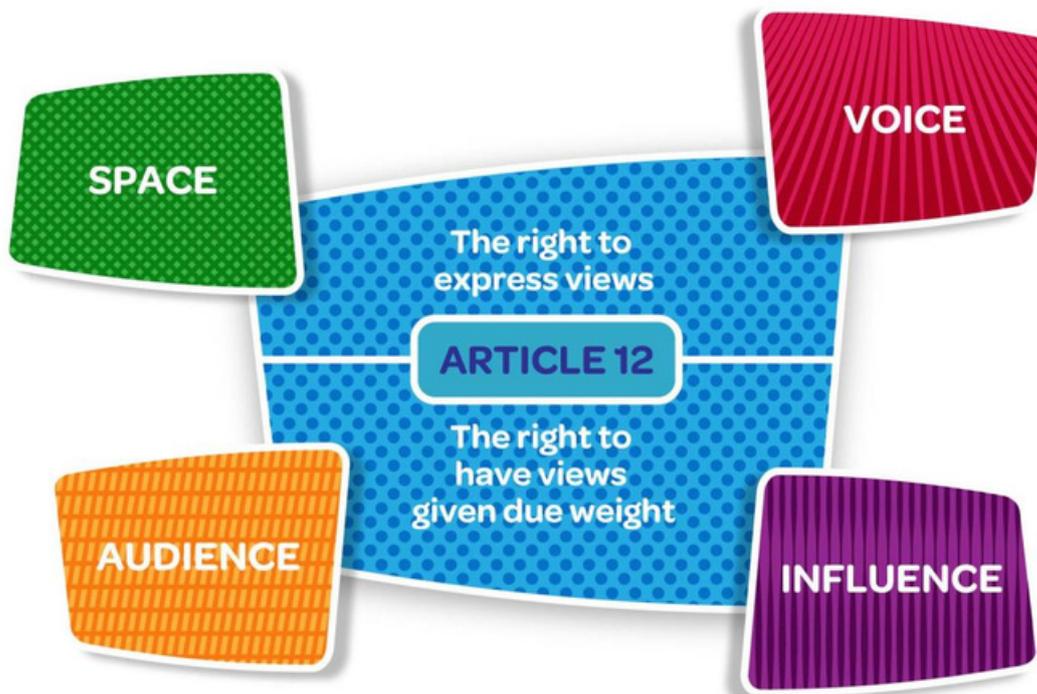
Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth: A Manual for Participation, 2001.

THE LUNDY MODEL

This model was developed by Laura Lundy, Professor of international children's rights at the School of Education at the Queen's University of Belfast. Her model, detailed in a 2007 publication in the British Educational Journal, provides a way of conceptualising a child's right to participation, as laid down in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is intended to focus decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision.

The four elements have a rational chronological order: **space, voice, audience, influence**.

The Lundy Model of Participation was prominently featured and endorsed by the Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs in their recent National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015 – 2020).



SPACE: Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view.

VOICE: Children must be facilitated to express their view.

AUDIENCE: The view must be listened to.

INFLUENCE: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.

Source:

Lundy, L., "Voice" is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, British Educational Research Journal, 2007.

THE LUNDY CHECKLIST FOR PARTICIPATION

Moreover Laura Lundy (in consultation with a subgroup) developed a checklist on participation. The Strategy details that "this checklist aims to help organisations, working with and for children and young people, to comply with Article 12 of the UNCRC and ensure that children have the space to express their views; their voice is enabled; they have an audience for their views; and their views will have influence".



Source:

Lundy, L., "Voice" is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, *British Educational Research Journal*, 2007.



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