

Youth Spaces and Everyday Participation

What are the challenges young people are facing?

According to the outcomes of Tallinn conference, **young people need access to physical spaces** in their communities to **support their personal, cultural and political development**, where they can meet each other, relax, learn, explore and organize themselves, and become civically active.

Some working group reports spoke of having sufficient amount of such spaces for young people, whilst others identified a need to develop more, particularly in rural areas. How in all responses there was a desire that **the spaces that already exist should be used more wisely** and effectively, and that **public spaces in general could become more youth-friendly**. Participants also emphasised the importance of **virtual spaces**.

At the same time, young people find it important to exert their **influence on decision making**, but seek **more platforms and forums** to do this. Many feel distant from political institutions. They described need **greater access to political communities and forums** where they can develop and **express their views both to their peers and to decision makers**, to influence political decisions.

What is young people's vision for the future?

In the consultation young people described a desire for youth spaces that were **inclusive, safe and accessible to all**. They should be modern, welcoming and conveniently located. Most importantly they should be **youth led spaces**, though the need for welcoming staff, and limited youth work support was recognised. It was identified that some groups of marginalised young people may benefit from dedicated spaces. Settings for youth spaces could mean youth centres, hostel, and youth houses, but also libraries, historic sites, outdoor spaces, heritage sites or **virtual spaces**. Youth spaces should **enable meeting between young people from different backgrounds in a dynamic manner**, to socialise, engage in learning programmes, cultural events, develop your own initiatives and participate in **non-formal education**. Youth spaces also had a key role to play in **providing information** to young people, particularly to enable their participation.

The importance of **meaningful dialogue and debate within youth spaces** was emphasised. Discussion with peers was said to develop your opinions and political motivations. Connected to this some consultation reports stressed the need for **systematic links between politicians or public institutions and youth spaces**. The **regular engagement of decision makers directly within youth spaces** was thought to be a key

part of developing youth participation. In this way political debate occurs not just *between* young people, but also with decision makers. **Virtual spaces** and **local structured dialogue** style process were particularly highlighted as a way of achieving this.

To further develop youth participation there were also strong calls in some consultation reports to **strengthen youth organisations and youth or school council structures**. However, some also raised concerns they did not reach enough young people. Votes at 16 also was an issue that divided respondent, as shown by the data below. The goal in all cases however is to **find ways to make participation accessible to all**, by strengthening existing mechanisms and creating new ones. Linked to this there was a strong a desire from young people that **public authorities and politicians should take greater action in response to the voices of young people**.

What solutions did young people propose in the consultation?

Measures suggested within the consultation were;

- Development of **physical spaces dedicated to young people** - such as youth led youth centres, or dedicated youth spaces within schools. Where young people define the programme, space and curriculum.
- Developing of **public spaces to become more youth friendly spaces** - e.g. libraries, public parks.
- Develop youth friendly, safe **virtual spaces** and **e-participation**, where young people can discuss ideas, access information, and engage in dialogue with decision makers.
- Promotion and development of **meaningful dialogue within youth spaces**. Where political topics are explored in engaging and non-threatening ways and young people can develop and express their views, as well as put them to decision makers. E.g. through localised approaches to structured dialogue.
- Measures to **improve youth and school councils** and other formal youth participation structures. Enabling a more diverse range of young people to participate within them, raising their visibility amongst young people, improving recognition from decision makers. A legal framework was also suggested.
- Measures to **strengthen youth organisations** and youth civil society- and their role in inclusion, participation, and non-formal education.
- Measures to provide **better information to young people** about participation - e.g. local youth information centre (that can be physical or virtual).

A number of suggestions focused on the development of civic and political education - these are further discussed in the Education and Learning paper.

The Survey Data

How important is this issue to young people?

This issue ranks twelfth and sixteenth among the priorities, as rated by the young people. It has been measured by two separate items: item focusing on access to spaces for relaxing, learning, and connecting for youth ranked twelfth among priorities of the young people; and item focusing on active participation ranked sixteenth as rated by young people.

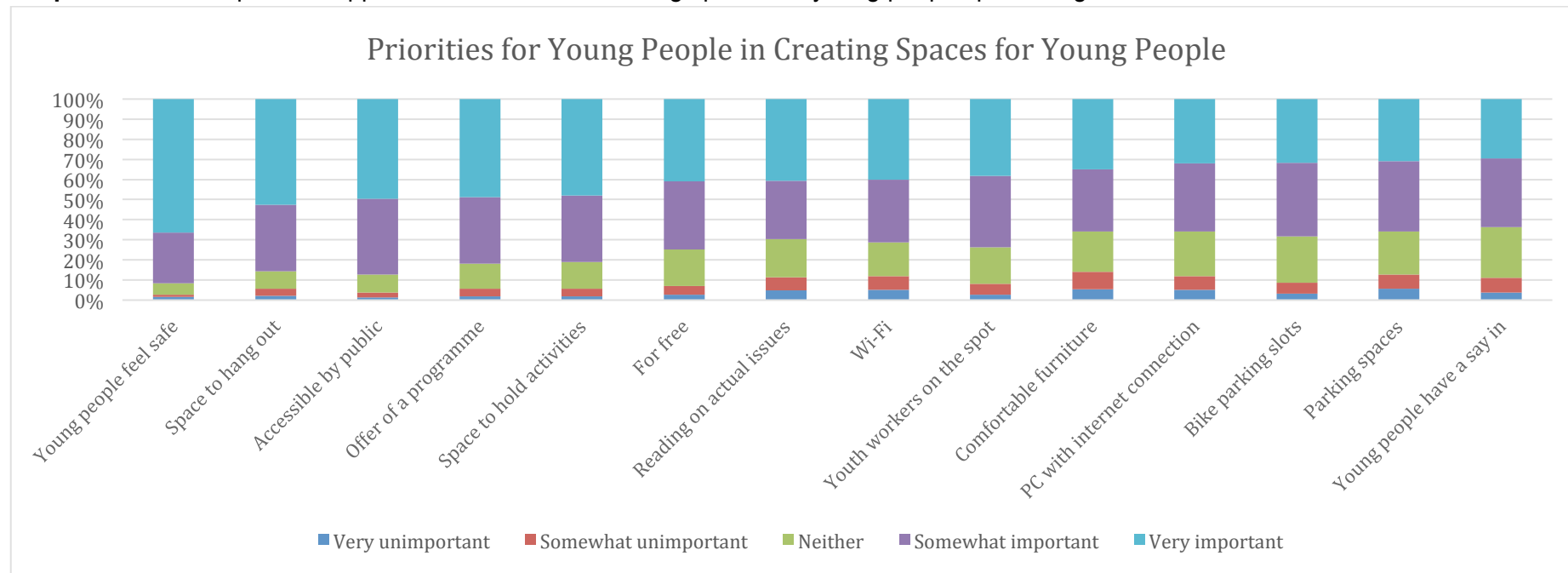
What are the priorities for young people?

Spaces for young people were one of the topics of the consultation process¹. The absolutely most important quality of a place where young people like spending their free time is for the young people to feel safe. This can, and very likely does, hold many meanings, but it is clearly ahead of any other priorities. Such spaces should also provide a chance to hang out with friends and should be accessible by the public transport. ICT related issues, like a presence of a Wi-Fi or a computer are not among the top priorities, and so are not bike or car parking spaces.

The detailed analysis in the graph below even more stresses the importance the young people put on “feeling safe” – almost 70% of the respondents pointed this as “very important” to them. It also shows that there are several other important aspects, such as the place for hanging out with friends, accessibility by the public transport, programme offer, or the chance to organize programme by themselves.

¹ The item read: “How important is the following to you when it comes to finding a place where you feel fine and you are developing yourself at the same time?”

Graph: The most important support mechanisms for creating spaces for young people; percentages.

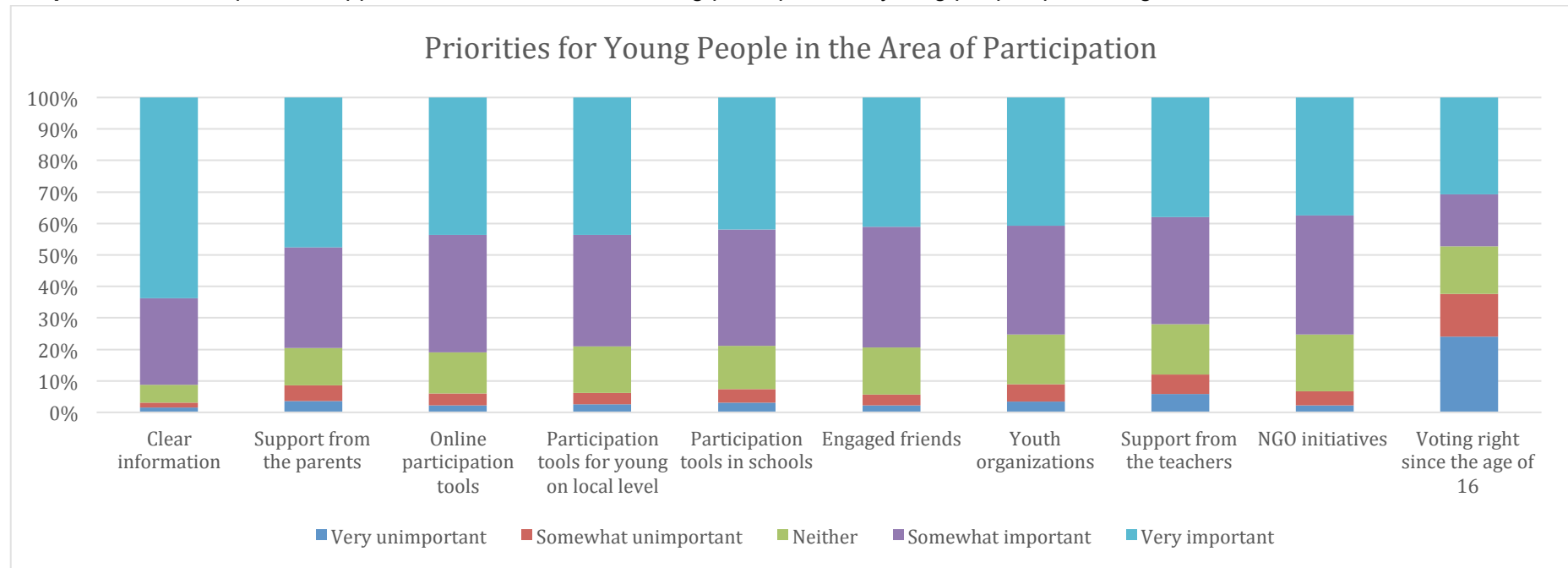


Active participation on social and societal issues has been discussed with young people during the consultations as well². There is an aspect that young people stress as by far the most important to them in this area, and that is the availability to the clear information. This seems to take priority in young people. On the other hand, the issue of having the voting right from the age of 16, as is the case in some European countries, has been rated rather low, coming in last in the list of priorities, and bringing forward a considerably lower average score than the other suggested supporting mechanisms.

The detailed analysis in the graph below supports the conclusions of the first analysis above: more than 60% of the young people surveyed consider it to be “very important” to them. It also shows, as outlined above, that the voting right at the age of 16 is by far the most problematic and polarized issue, with over 20% (sic!) of the respondents stating that this is “very unimportant” to them, in opposition to 30% who consider this to be “very important”.

² The item read: “How important is the following to you when it comes to engaging in the public issues (e.g. local politics, general decision making, etc.)?”

Graph: The most important support mechanisms for enhancing participation of young people; percentages.



Where does this report come from?

This report is based on responses to consultation question 'What sort of spaces do young people need access to, in order to support their personal, cultural and political development?' and 'What opportunities and tools do young people need to influence democratic and societal decision making as part of their everyday lives?'. These questions were developed from harvesting tools submitted at the first conference.