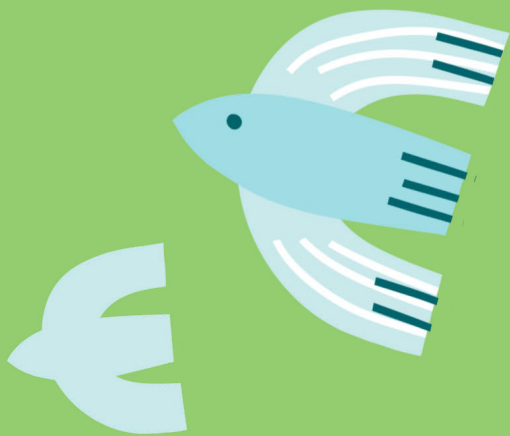# *NBS EduWORLD — Youth Inclusion Toolkit for Local Authorities*

Practical tools and case studies for local governments to engage youth in Nature-based Solutions

What if youth led the way?

ICLEI
Local Governments for Sustainability
EUROPE

NBS EduWORLD

Abstract	This document provides a suite of tools for local governments to engage with the youth in NBS work effectively and meaningfully. The document also summarises the methodology used for the collection and testing of tools as well as the production of case studies. Apart from tools and case studies, the document also includes a chapter on to-dos or recommendations for local governments to consider when engaging with youth for local decision-making activities. The overarching objective of this document is to support local governments to reach out to the youth for engaging them in a respectful and equal manner for collective decision making and envisioning a resilient future with NBS.

Keywords	Youth Inclusion, Nature-Based Solutions, Tools, Case Studies

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Introduction

This online version of the Youth Inclusion Toolkit provides a concise overview of why and how to include young people in Nature-based Solutions (NbS). Designed for local governments, educators, and NGOs, it focuses on practical tools and methods that support meaningful youth participation. Please, for a more detailed version of the background and methodologies, please have a look here.

Young people, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, must be involved as active contributors—not just recipients—in shaping NbS. This Toolkit offers adaptable tools and strategies to support youth engagement, promote social-ecological resilience, and empower young people as co-creators of a sustainable future.

The Toolkit helps to:

- Provide tools and resources for inclusive NbS education
- Overcome barriers to youth involvement
- Encourage youth-led action and decision-making
- Support municipalities in co-creating solutions with young people

Youth Defined

"Youth" does not have a universally fixed definition—it is a socially defined stage of life representing the transition from childhood to adulthood, often associated with growing independence and civic involvement. Definitions vary across institutions: the European Union typically uses ages between 15 to 29[1] for statistical purposes, Erasmus+ defines youth as individuals between the ages of 13 and 30, and the Council of Europe refers to those aged 18 to 30[2]. The United Nations considers youth to be individuals between 15 and 24 years old, while also recognizing that cultural and contextual factors strongly influence how youth is understood in different regions .

In the context of this Toolkit, we define youth as individuals aged 16 to 30. This age range was selected based on the co-creative process and the lived experiences shared by local demonstrators, referred to as: "Tier-1" (Paris, Offaly County, and Almada) "Tier-2" (Genova, Belgrade and Moldova) and "Tier-3" (Ege University Türkiye, Hungarian NBS Hub, Patras, Lykovrisi-Pefki, Zaragoza and Bucharest University, Romania) during the development of this toolkit.

Understanding Youth Perspectives

Numerous youth declarations and manifestos have been published globally and across Europe. Some examples include the Global Youth Statement on NBS, the Manifesto for Young People by Young People!, the Youth4Climate Manifesto and Wildlife, Wales, and the World: A youth manifesto, to name just a few. With due consideration for local contexts, a common thread can be identified in the recurring demand for meaningful inclusion in decision-making processes. Young people emphasize the need for accessible platforms that amplify their voices and integrate their contributions into policy development, enabling them to co-design solutions. This sentiment was echoed by Marina Melanidis, Founder & Global Ambassador of Youth4Nature, who, in an interview for this project, stressed the importance of agency, decision-making power, and respect. She also warned against superficial approaches, as "poorly done participation can actually be worse than no participation at all. It can feel tokenizing, extractive, and disrespectful. So, it's not just about being included — it's about how we're included". Youth are the only ones who can fully explain their own needs and desires, making it critical to engage them in open, equal conversations with a focus on long-term involvement. There are many reasons why meaningful youth participation in NBS education and governance are essential for driving effective, just, and regenerative change[3]:

- Right to Participate[4]: Youth have the recognized right to shape decisions that impact their future—especially in the face of climate and biodiversity crises. Their voices must be heard and meaningfully included in NBS strategies and education.
- Valuable Ideas and Skills: Young people know their communities best. Their experiences, creativity, and digital fluency make them essential co-creators of relevant and innovative NBS.
- Intergenerational Dialogue: Young people can act as powerful connectors across generations. Youth can bridge generational divides and foster collaboration and understanding—especially in communities facing ecological or social change.
- Towards a Resilient Future: Lasting transition requires more than technical fixes. Empowering youth with education, green jobs, and agency builds stronger, more resilient communities for the future and to help to move towards a nature-positive economy.

The envisioning exercise (see Chapter 4) conducted with youth during the third NBS EduCommunity Workshop (see chapter 2) not only underscored the importance of embedding youth participation in NBS education but also explored future scenarios where young people play a central role in driving social-ecological transformation. Below is an example of a vision co-created by youth, alongside educators and NBS experts, during the workshop.

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1   Council of Europe, Williamson, and Lavchyan, 'Youth Policy Essentials

2   Council of Europe, Williamson, and Lavchyan

3   Council of Europe, 'Council Conclusions on Strengthening the Multi-Level Governance: Promoting the Participation of Young People in Political and Other Decision-Making Processes at Local, Regional, National, and European Levels.

4   European Commission. Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy., Youth for a Just Transition.

> "Nature would become at the forefront of social concerns and biodiversity conservation would be fully supported by the population at large, and not a marginal issue. A closer connection and fuller understanding of the importance of nature and of our role as humans belonging also in nature would be better achieved. The present is better than past. There is more hope. Youth are recognized as change-makers and have the full empowerment to do so."

Local governments further explored the potential for youth involvement in NbS during an online workshop (see Section 2). Local governments discussed their experience with regards to including youth in NBS education. Results of these discussions can be seen in Annexes 5-7. At the end of the session, representatives came together to reflect and agreed on a set of key messages (see image below).

Youth needs to learn imagine real alternative and positive pathways	To provide young people with the oportunity to learn and lead innovative practices that address environmental challenges	Young people experience constrains (money, time, etc) and lack of power (to be heard) and need the support of local governments
Youth can create Pathway to reconnect with nature towards a more sustainable future	Lets find a common language between the generations (young and older)!	Youth can have "fresh" insights on topics that sometimes are given for granted

Removing Barriers

Many young people face obstacles to participation—such as limited resources, discrimination, or lack of access. This Toolkit promotes inclusive communication, flexible engagement formats, and long-term trust-building.

Insights from the Youth Inclusion Survey I

As part of this toolkit, a short online survey was conducted (see methodology), gathering responses from 32 young people aged 16–35 on youth inclusion and Nature-Based Solutions (NBS). Results show a relatively high level of engagement in municipal initiatives (see Annex 1). However, many of those not participating cited a lack of accessible opportunities—possibly linked to how municipalities communicate (see Annex 2). Despite some engagement, most youth still do not feel truly included (see Annex 3).

Insights from the Youth Inclusion Survey II

When asked how local actors could better reach them, participants pointed to social media, schools, community centers, and youth organizations. Responders proposed 20 concrete ideas for youth engagement in NBS (see Annex 4).

Applying the tools to engage vulnerable youth groups

Engaging youth voices in decision making processes at the local level is so much more than nice to have; it should be considered a must have. Since the youth today will be the ones dealing with the consequences of climate change and biodiversity loss, it is pertinent to get their buy-in on major decisions. This goes especially for vulnerable youth groups (e.g. young people with disabilities, low socio-economic status, trans and queer people, migrant background) who are more likely to suffer while being rather disadvantaged in representation at the local levels. Therefore, the tools provided in this toolkit should be utilised in such a way by the local authorities that embodies inclusiveness and promotes diversity of youth voices according to their specific context.

To make the tools more inclusive, it is essential to actively involve young people—especially those from vulnerable or underrepresented groups—and consider their specific needs and barriers. Opportunities should be accessible, welcoming, and flexible, with space for reflection and feedback. An agile approach allows young participants to share input during and after activities, helping shape more meaningful experiences.

Safeguarding and the creation of "safe spaces" are also crucial to protect the wellbeing of all youth, particularly those who are underage or at risk. In addition to understanding their needs, it is important to identify and address barriers that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds may face. These can include practical challenges in both on-site and online engagement, as well as "soft" barriers such as language, digital skills, learning differences, and perceived exclusion. Flexibility and adaptability are key to ensuring all young people feel able to take part.

It also helps to ensure diversity among the professionals and local authorities working with youth. Representation can foster trust, reduce feelings of tokenism, and inspire meaningful participation.

Tools should be used not just to include vulnerable youth as a formality, but to actively enrich the process by bringing diverse voices to the table. Their inclusion should be embedded in all aspects of NbS planning and implementation—not just framed as a diversity issue, but as a vital part of achieving better outcomes for people and nature.

Methodology

This Toolkit was developed through a multi-method approach, combining real-world insights and research to ensure it reflects the voices of young people and supports local government action. The methods used aimed to balance practical knowledge with evidence-based strategies, focusing on meaningful youth inclusion in Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) education.

Key insights were drawn from the NBS EduWORLD project's activities, including collaboration with youth centers, schools, educators, local authorities, and youth themselves. Particular attention was given to experiences in Türkiye, where work with young refugee migrants offered valuable lessons for engaging marginalized youth. Schools were also used as Living Labs—experimental spaces to test youth-led NBS initiatives.

The Toolkit was co-created with contributions from young people, municipal representatives, and youth organizations. Two major workshops helped shape its content: one online session (NBS EduCommunity workshop took place on 18 February 2025) with over 50 participants from Tier-1, Tier-2, and Tier-3 partners, and an in-person workshop at Robert Bosch College in Freiburg, a two-year international boarding school, where 20 students aged 16-20 years old gathered to explore creative ways to involve youth in decision-making. In both settings, youth evaluated and improved early drafts of the tools, experimenting with methods such as hackathons, games, and councils.

An online survey (Oct 2024) (see Annexes 1, 2 and 3) collected further input, gathering 32 responses across 9 European countries. This helped identify needs, preferences, and barriers related to youth inclusion in NBS education. Additional insights came from an interview with a representative of Youth4Nature, highlighting the importance of agency and respect in participatory processes.

The Toolkit also benefited from cooperation with other NBS projects like Desirmed and NBRACER. Expert feedback and case studies from these initiatives helped refine practical tools and ensure relevance for municipalities. Throughout, desk research and comparative analysis of other frameworks guided the structure of this Toolkit, with emphasis on usability, clarity, and adaptation for local use.

By grounding its content in diverse perspectives and lived experiences, this Toolkit aims to offer inclusive, youth-centered guidance that supports long-term, meaningful engagement in shaping nature-based futures.

From ideas to action with practical tools

01 Tool / Hackathons

Purpose
What if... digital tools such as hackathons are widely used to simulate real world issues and get youth to problem solve?

Hackathons provide a fun and interactive online format to bring together youth and Nature-based Solutions (NBS) experts, in a gamification approach of local NBS cases. Hackathons also foster debates of ideas and key competences such as teamwork, online skills and creativity. Format and duration are also flexible. Indeed, hackathons can be run on a diversity of platforms (eg: Gathertown) depending on the age and computer skills of the youth. Depending on the aim and exercises of your hackathon, duration can fluctuate from some hours to several days. This tool develops both online skills as well as scientific and social sciences knowledge when applied to NBS. When used by local and regional governments, it can also be a strategic method to engage young people in the reflection and designing of NBS in their local territory, neighborhood and city, connecting them with NBS practitioners and the local community to shape more resilient and sustainable places to live.

Expected Impact and Benefits

Youth Benefits: Boosting Digital Skills: The platform enhances computer and technical abilities through interactive, gamified experiences. Understanding Ecological Issues: Youth engage with peers and experts on Nature-based Solutions (NBS), gaining insight into climate change, adaptation, and mitigation at the local level. Fostering Interdisciplinary Thinking: Participants explore how cross-sector collaboration is key to tackling climate challenges.

Community Impact: Youth Inclusion in Decision-Making: Hackathons connect youth with local authorities, encouraging their involvement in shaping NBS for their communities. Raising NBS Awareness: Youth participation spreads knowledge and acceptance of NBS within their circles and the wider community.

Challenges and Solutions

Potential Barrier: Poor Internet access or unsuitable technical materials could prevent effective participation.

Solution Insight: Secure a place of work where participants can benefit from all physical materials needed and avoid them doing it at home, where equal working conditions among them are not provided.

Examples

In a display of creativity and teamwork, the NBS EduWORLD Hackathon concluded, leaving behind a trail of excitement and inspiration. As a key part of the NBS EduWORLD project, this event brought together a diverse group of international students from 18 different countries at different stages in their studies (from Bachelor to PhD). Far from an average academic gathering, the Hackathon was a celebration of ideas, where students from different disciplines joined forces to tackle real-world challenges using Nature-based Solutions (NBS) – scientists, architects, economists and political scientists, all working together in a virtual environment.

How to use the tool

1. Organise a preliminary meeting with the education institutions (high schools, colleges) staff to suggest and include the hackathon exercise as part of the youth curriculum, targeting key responsible persons (teachers in the relevant disciplines, administrators, etc).

2. After having agreed on the framework of the hackathon (duration, targeted classes, format, platform, available materials), prepare resources and documentations to be shared with young people to serve as the basis for their personal and group reflections.

3. As an online tool, hackathon requires some specific materials and facilities, such as computers, Internet connection, etc. To ensure that every young person is included and can effectively take part in the hackathon, it is therefore important to organise the exercise in a place where all facilities are available (classrooms, municipal buildings, public and media libraries etc).

Pros

- A great way to engage youth in problem solving in a team.
- Broader and efficient ideas and perspectives.
- Understanding the structure of problem solving
- Big opportunity to learn time management and task diversification in a short period of time.

Cons

- Need for equally experienced teams
- Need for a reward as some participants may not be motivated to do the activity otherwise.
- Prepare participants with stress management workshop beforehand
- Need for clear organisation
- Make topic interesting for all, using votes perhaps
- Introduced in the school setting and not on a weekend

„My biggest takeaway was grasping the way people around the world think in the matter of Sustainable solutions, in my group we talked a lot, and I was able to learn lots of things from my colleagues." Participants in NBS EduWORLD Hackathon 2024

→ NBS EduWORLD Hackathon

02 Tool / Citizen Science

Purpose
What if...data collection and biodiversity monitoring is not only done by experts but also non-experts specifically the youth in a structured manner?

Citizen science—public participation in data collection—is a powerful tool for engaging the youth in a more active state than passively learning about NBS. Young people can gain a solid understanding of the different species, restoration work and what data needs to be collected for biodiversity monitoring in a hands-on involvement in real world projects on NBS. Citizen Science proves beneficial for not only building critical skills and expertise on the topic of NBS but also fostering a sense of environmental responsibility, meaning stewardship of NBS over a long term, demonstrating that the actions taken by the youth can contribute to meaningful transformation of urban areas with more green spaces. By involving people in observing local species and ecosystems, it provides detailed, real-time data that can guide green planning and restoration efforts. This local knowledge helps identify where NBS, like green corridors or wetland restoration, are most needed and how effective they are over time.

Citizen science takes many forms—from online platforms and long-term monitoring to in-person events like Bioblitz and activities such as participatory mapping. The tool presented here focuses on long-term engagement through digital platforms and networks (e.g., iNaturalist), enabling individuals—especially young people—to regularly observe and record biodiversity in their surroundings. Other citizen science formats, like Bioblitz (see next tool) and participatory mapping, are introduced below as complementary tools that offer time-bound, place-based opportunities for community involvement.

Expected Impact and Benefits

Youth Benefits: Skill-building and empowerment: Participants gain leadership, scientific literacy, observation skills, and confidence in engaging with real-world environmental issues. Sense of belonging and agency: Youth feel they are contributing meaningfully to their community and the global climate movement, fostering deeper civic engagement. Analytical thinking enhancement – Increasing the Possibility of developing skills for future green jobs.

Community Impact: Increased environmental awareness and education: Residents gain a better understanding of the biodiversity around them, building a culture of care and curiosity about the local environment.

Challenges and Solutions

Potential Barrier: Sustaining youth engagement and ensuring access to expert support. While citizen science platforms often attract highly motivated individuals, participation can become uneven—some users contribute regularly, while many drop off after one or two entries. Younger participants may struggle to stay engaged without ongoing guidance or community connection. Additionally, it can be difficult to find biodiversity experts available to support new users, especially remotely.

Solution Insight: Build networks and empower peer leaders. To address these challenges, partner with local NGOs, universities, or citizen science platforms (like iNaturalist) to connect with experts who can offer virtual guidance, host Q&A sessions,

or provide feedback on observations. Encourage the creation of youth-led online groups or clubs, where experienced young users help onboard and support their peers. Training older students or dedicated youth participants as "community mentors" not only builds their skills but also helps sustain engagement across the platform. Sharing regular updates, challenges, and spotlights on user contributions can also keep the momentum going.

Examples

⊕ A citizen science programme for discovering biodiversity

Resources

⊕ INaturalist Org
⊕ BioBlitz Guide
⊕ Vigie Nature-Ecole
⊕ A citizen science programme for discovering biodiversity

How to use the tool

1. **Set Up a Long-Term Biodiversity Monitoring Initiative.** Instead of focusing on short-term events, create an ongoing digital project on platforms like iNaturalist, where youth can contribute observations at any time. Choose a local area with existing or potential nature-based solutions (NBS) and define a clear monitoring goal—such as tracking pollinators, tree health, or urban wildlife. This fosters continuous engagement and allows biodiversity data to grow over time.

2. **Collaborate with Experts and Data Partners.** Partner with universities, biodiversity experts, environmental NGOs, or municipal departments. They can help design the monitoring framework, provide feedback on observations, and ensure data quality. They may also host virtual trainings or support forums where youth can ask questions and deepen their knowledge of species identification and ecological processes.

3. **Provide Accessible Tools and Guidance.** Create or link to easy-to-follow guides on how to use the citizen science platform (like uploading photos, tagging species, or using geolocation features). Encourage participants to explore biodiversity using tools they already have—like smartphones—and promote the use of accessible features, including audio uploads (e.g., bird calls) to engage users with different abilities.

4. **Promote the Initiative and Build a Digital Community.** Publicize the initiative through schools, youth centers, libraries, social media, and the city's website. Share project goals and updates regularly to keep momentum. Encourage participants to follow and comment on each other's posts, creating a sense of community and peer learning. Consider highlighting "observation of the month" or creating challenges to keep engagement high.

5. **Encourage Reflection and Ownership.** Support youth in understanding how their contributions help monitor and improve urban NBS. Facilitate online discussion spaces or workshops where they can analyze trends in the data and propose ideas for enhancing green spaces. This reflection helps build environmental literacy, long-term stewardship, and a deeper personal connection to their local ecosystems.

NBS Youth Inclusion Toolkit

03 Tool / BioBlitz

Purpose
What if... collaborative events are facilitated for youth to support scientists and experts in place-based biodiversity monitoring?

Collaborative biodiversity inventories, often referred to as bioblitzes, are events held in specific areas that bring together local community members and biodiversity experts. The primary aim is to rapidly collect data on local biodiversity, while also raising public awareness of the importance of biodiversity. Experts provide training in data collection techniques and the use of identification tools. These events typically last from one day to a month, depending on the location, and are often organised in areas where there is a noted gap in biodiversity knowledge. Bioblitzes also contribute to long-term biodiversity monitoring and can inform local conservation efforts.

BioBlitzes are popular citizen science events with the aim to engage participants in biodiversity monitoring. They are "a collaborative race against the clock to discover as many species of plants, animals and fungi as possible, within a set location, over a defined time—usually 24 h" however with time it has now been evolved to be run for shorter durations. Bioblitzes are generally a 'contributory' citizen science activity as they are predominantly run by scientists with the scientific aim of collecting biodiversity data with the help of non-experts[1].

> **"This event showed how we can all contribute, even if we're not scientists. It's about learning together and caring for our home."**
> Participants in NBS EduWORLD Hackathon 2024

How to use the tool

1. **Plan with Purpose and Collaborate with Experts.** Since a Bioblitz is a short, intensive event, planning ahead is key. Start by identifying and involving biodiversity experts to help co-design engaging, hands-on activities—such as species walks, ecosystem introductions, or guided identification sessions—tailored to their areas of expertise. Align the activities with broader goals like raising biodiversity awareness and filling data gaps.

2. **Promote and Communicate Effectively.** To maximize participation, publicize the event widely through schools, libraries, community centers, local websites, and social media. Use clear, engaging messaging that highlights both the purpose of the Bioblitz and its role in larger citizen science and conservation efforts. Emphasize the opportunity for participants—especially youth—to contribute meaningfully to biodiversity knowledge and stewardship.

3. **Set Up an Accessible and Equipped Base Camp.** Create a central "base camp" that serves as the hub for coordination, support, and communication during the event. Equip it with tools like field guides, binocular loupes, magnifiers, and mobile device chargers. Have a friendly and knowledgeable team on hand to help participants with species identification and data submission, ensuring a smooth and engaging experience.

4. **Engage Participants Beyond the Event.** Although a Bioblitz is time-limited, the learning and impact can go further. Encourage participants to continue observing and contributing through digital platforms like iNaturalist. Share event results and stories with attendees and the wider community to maintain momentum and build a sense of shared achievement in protecting local biodiversity.

Expected Impact and Benefits

Youth Benefits: Skill-building and empowerment: Participants gain leadership, scientific literacy, observation skills, and confidence in engaging with real-world environmental issues. Sense of belonging and agency: Youth feel they are contributing meaningfully to their community and the global climate movement, fostering deeper civic engagement.

Community Impact: Increased environmental awareness and education: Residents gain a better understanding of the biodiversity around them, building a culture of care and curiosity about the local environment. Stronger community ties: Bioblitzes foster collaboration between citizens, youth, experts, and institutions—creating a stronger, more informed, and united local network.

Challenges and Solutions

Potential Barrier: Key challenges in organizing a Bioblitz include the limited availability of biodiversity experts, especially in smaller communities. Coordinating large groups and maintaining youth engagement throughout the event can also be difficult, as participants may lose interest during longer activities or if tasks feel repetitive.

Solution Insight: Partnering with NGOs, universities, or citizen science platforms like iNaturalist can provide remote expert support. Training older students to lead peer-to-peer sessions can help fill the expert gap. To keep youth engaged, divide participants into smaller teams with specific roles and incorporate interactive activities such as species identification challenges or tech-based documentation. Offering recognition or rewards for contributions can also maintain motivation.

Examples

→ BioBlitzes – Natural History Museum UK
→ More than a Bit of Fun: The Multiple Outcomes of a Bioblitz
→ Insights from the Third NBS EduCommunity Workshop on the BioBlitz tool (See Annex 9.)

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1   Lorke, Ballard, and Robinson, 'More Complex than Expected—Mapping Activities and Youths' Experiences at BioBlitz Events to the Rosette Model of Science Communication'.

04 Tool /
Youth Engagement Surveys

Purpose
What if... decision making is informed by the opinions of local youth groups who are encouraged to express themselves?

Surveys are a classic tool to collect data, but their flexibility makes them adaptable to new ways of communication (online, via social media) and fit for different target audiences, including youth. They have the potential to gather a high quantity of information and illustrate a bigger picture of the opinions of a target group on a specific matter. Surveys do not necessarily require physical presence, and this provides an opportunity for difficult-to-reach youth to participate.

Their effectiveness and inclusiveness, though, are greatly dependent on design, and it is fundamental to tailor surveys to the target audience. Particular attention must be paid to survey length and how questions are formulated to ensure accessibility and guarantee encourage free and non-biased expression. A great way to make sure the survey is received in the right manner is to test the final version with a small group of the same target audience the survey is addressed to.

Moreover, selecting the right dissemination channels is essential to effectively reach the intended audience. Surveys promoted through familiar platforms increase the likelihood of participation. While creativity and innovation in format can help make surveys more engaging, the core objective is to create a trusted and respectful spaces for youth feel represented.

Ultimately, providing clear context and information about data protection is not just a legal necessity — it also reinforces trust and transparency. Clearly communicating how data will be handled, how results may be shared, and how they will contribute to ongoing processes helps ensure that participants feel respected and genuinely included in shaping outcomes.

Challenges and Solutions

Potential Challenge: It is easy to underestimate the effort required to design a survey and collect data. The whole process can take a long time and often there is the temptation to shorten it by cutting some steps (e.g. the testing phase). Especially in the case of new surveys, this leads to the risk of unreliable data or very low respondent rate due to unclear questions.

Solution Insight: Surveys are not a new tool—there's a rich history of them being used effectively. Drawing inspiration from past examples can help you shape your initial draft questionnaire more easily. Reviewing existing surveys can also help avoid common pitfalls and build on what's already worked.

To boost response rates, consider partnering with local groups—such as sports clubs, cultural organizations, or youth associations—that can help promote the survey within their networks. Offering small incentives may also encourage participation.

Most importantly, respondents are more likely to engage if they know their input will be taken seriously. Clearly communicate how their feedback will be used and establish a timeline that allows the collected input to meaningfully inform the ongoing process. Be sure to include buffers for possible delays.

How to use the tool

1. Define the objective of your survey: what do you want to learn from it? Make sure to identify the added value for youth to participate by outlining why they should invest t[ime] to answer your questions. This aspect should be made clear in the introduction to the survey, together with the information on how data will be treated and next steps.

2. Draft questions and options for answers. Formulate questions to be as clear and conc[ise] as possible.

3. Test your final survey with a small group of young people. This helps to validate formulations and collect feedback on format and channels for dissemination.

Examples

→ Tips on writing surveys for youth - University of Minnesota
→ Young Londoners' Health survey- City of London
As part of their broader "Green Infrastructure Strategy," the city included youth perspectives on parks, street trees, and how these could be enhanced through sustainable, nature-based methods like green roofs and rain gardens. This survey aimed to inform future development and ensure that youth voices were central to shaping London's green future.

05 Tool /
Role Play Game

Purpose **What if... a role play game could encourage the consideration of different perspectives?**

From the outside, decision-making roles may seem simple—but role-play simulations offer an engaging way to explore their complexity. This interactive method brings together different actors to reflect on a hypothetical situation from alternative perspectives. At its core, the activity invites participants to "step into someone else's shoes," taking on roles different from their usual ones. Because of this, role-play simulations are highly flexible and can be adapted to various contexts.

Scenarios can serve different purposes: they may aim to generate concrete outputs that inform a process, or simply create a safe space for dialogue, mutual learning, and empathy-building. The result is often a deeper understanding across stakeholder groups—of how others operate internally, how they perceive specific challenges, what constraints they face, and the dynamics of power relations. This kind of awareness can foster better cooperation and lead to more inclusive, effective approaches.

However, successful role-play simulations require thorough preparation. This includes defining the scenario, assigning roles, setting rules, and ensuring skilled facilitation. Sessions can range from a few hours to several days, depending on the goals.

In the context of youth engagement, role-play simulations can be a powerful, unconventional learning tool. They offer young people a platform to express their views, better understand institutional processes and limitations, and challenge misconceptions—ultimately building capacity and mutual respect between generations.

Expected Impact and Benefits

Youth Benefits: Role-play simulations can strengthen the relationship between young people and local institutions by creating space for dialogue, recognizing diverse perspectives, and promoting more inclusive decision-making processes. When used to shape policies or services, this tool helps ensure that the needs and challenges of different groups—especially youth—are taken into account. It also fosters empathy, open-mindedness, and a reduction in polarization by encouraging participants to step into others' roles and viewpoints.

Benefits for Municipalities: For municipalities, role-play offers a creative and interactive way to engage with youth in a constructive, non-traditional format. It allows institutions to gain fresh insights,

uncover potential sources of conflict, and explore collaborative solutions. Importantly, the benefits of the simulation are mutual—both youth and local authorities can learn from each other, paving the way for more responsive, inclusive, and effective local governance.

Challenges and Solutions

Potential Barrier: Role-play games require a considerable amount of time to ideate.

Solution Insight: Despite being a novel tool, there is a tradition of role play and it can be very useful to start with desk research to learn from other experiences and get inspired. If a role play is created from scratch, it is worth envisaging its re-use in a

How to use the tool

1. **Identify the Purpose of the Role-Play Simulation.** Begin by clearly identifying the specific gap the role-play simulation is intended to address. Is the goal to help young people understand how the local environmental office makes decisions about green space management? To co-develop or refine municipal initiatives for engaging students in nature conservation? Or to collectively decide how to redesign a neighbourhood space? The strength of role-play lies in its flexibility—it can be adapted to serve many different purposes.

2. **Design a Credible Yet Hypothetical Scenario.** Craft a scenario that participants will explore during the simulation. This scenario should be easy to grasp but still contain a level of complexity that reflects real-world challenges. Aim to recreate some of the tensions or dilemmas that typically arise in actual decision-making processes. While the scenario should not mirror real events too closely—so participants can think more freely—it must remain believable and grounded in reality. Striking this balance encourages deeper engagement and thoughtful role exploration.

3. **Assign Roles with Clear Guidance.** Distribute roles to participants with detailed instructions. Each participant should understand who they are representing, what their objectives are, what constraints they face, and how they relate to others in the simulation. Facilitators are essential for setting the scene, explaining the objectives, and ensuring that everyone is comfortable with the process. A well-guided simulation creates the conditions for productive interaction and shared learning.

similar context (e.g., in different neighborhoods or schools).

Examples

as part of the 10th European Cities and Town Conference that took place in Aalborg, ICLEI Europe created a role-play game to facilitate an interactive discussion on youth engagement. The role play exercise invited participants to imagine being around a table of discussion to decide new measures to make the local high school more sustainable after a recent report highlighted its low performance, especially on NBS, Energy consumption, and food waste. Participants picked random roles (municipal representatives, principal of the school, head of technical team of the school,

representatives of students and teachers), each one including a general indication of the position of this role toward the topics discussed, made of positive and negative elements. Divided into three thematic groups, participants discussed possible proposals to improve the school sustainability, prioritized them and identified concrete action points and attribute responsibilities to the top three ones.

→ Other examples can be seen, by Organizations like CRISP e.g.
→ Climate Negotiations with Kalabia Simulation Game!
→ Online Simulation on Climate Change

06 Tool /
Youth Council

Purpose

What if... youth councils were organised in every neighbourhood, allowing young people to co-create solutions for local, sustainable systems?

Youth councils provide structured platforms for young people to actively engage in co-designing solutions with community stakeholders, amplifying their voices in NBS. Inviting youth representatives to organise debates on the social and ecological issues within their networks can foster wider youth involvement, gather valuable input, and increase visibility for their efforts. This approach empowers young leaders to connect with broader audiences, ensuring that youth perspectives are integral to shaping an equitable and sustainable transition. They can help municipality officials know what the needs of the youth are and how to integrate them into the planning processes, for instance, when implementing NBS.

> Youth councils allow young people to have the space to engage in local decisions and impact the direction of the changes in their local communities.

Expected Impact and Benefits

- Encouraging Civic Participation: Youth councils and similar engagement platforms allow young people to directly participate in community and policy discussions. This active involvement fosters a sense of civic responsibility and encourages youth to play a role in shaping their community's future, particularly around issues they care about.

- Deepening Understanding of Ecological Challenges: Through collaborative discussions on NBS, sustainable transitions, and the Just Transition Fund, youth participants gain a nuanced understanding of ecological and economic challenges. They learn about the impacts of climate change, sustainable development strategies, and the complexities of implementing just and equitable transitions, enabling them to make informed contributions and advocate for meaningful action.

Pros

- Makes young people feel more engaged in their governments
- Lead to a future participation of youth in politics
- Adults would make decisions that positively affect youth if there is a youth council
- Can help youth prepare for a career in diplomacy and activism
- Great for networking – direct access to politicians and local decision makers

How to use the tool

1. It is important to set up a transparent procedure for selecting the members of the youth council, through open calls or nominations. The selection and the number of selected councillors depend on the needs of the municipality; it should not add a burden to either side but rather be for the mutual benefit. Once a youth council is formed, it would be essential to set up a vision and mission with a timeline for activities to provide clear expectations and desirable results from the engagement of youth in local municipal decision-making processes.

2. Provide a safe space for the youth to voice their opinions and needs. A trained facilitator could be a good addition to ensure a collaborative environment with the possibilities for gathering ideas in a constructive manner.

3. Additionally, the aspect of diversity should be kept in mind to give voice to the vulnerable groups of youth too, as well as a plan to sustain their interest in continuing their participation in the youth council could prove very valuable.

Recommendations

- Encourage youth to reflect broader community values.
- Create mechanisms to ensure youth input is taken seriously.
- Broaden participation to include diverse youth voices.
- Promote independent thinking and critical engagement.
- Design inclusive processes beyond symbolic involvement.
- Provide clear pathways for youth input to influence outcomes.
- Challenge age-based biases with trust and responsibility.

Examples

→ Youth Councils – Youth Councils
→ Youth Climate Council (DK)
→ Comhaire na nÓg (IE)
→ Barents Regional Youth Council (SE, FI, RU, NO)

07 Tool /
Participatory Budget

Purpose
What if... ... youth would have a dedicated budget to realize their own ideas on how to improve the community in which they live?

Every year, municipalities assess, discuss, and agree on how to allocate their budget to ensure the city's smooth functioning, provide basic services to the population, and move toward achieving its priorities. A participatory budget is a way to directly involve citizens in decisions about how to spend part of this budget, a task which is normally of competence of the local council. This can go further and become a powerful tool for youth engagement by dedicating funds specifically for youth initiatives.

The basic principles involve youth (age range to be defined) proposing projects to be implemented in their municipality. They should have a clear understanding of the budget available to them and the general municipal objectives their projects should support e.g., to enhance biodiversity, to regenerate a specific area of the city, or simply to make it greener. Effective communication is crucial to ensure the opportunity is inclusive, the project submission process is clear, and youth are properly equipped to develop their projects. To enhance this process, events and presentations should be organised, and municipalities might consider partnering with schools, where students and teens can collaborate on project ideas, or with other community spaces such as libraries, sports clubs, or neighborhood centers.

Once proposals are collected—likely more than what can be funded—the next step is to determine which projects will be implemented. There are various ways to do this: the same youth group could vote, or they could work together to set priorities and select the most relevant projects. In the first case, time would be needed for presenting proposals and potentially campaigning in support of them. Then, it is time for implementation: it is very important to be clear about the timeline and the intended way to realize the selected proposals. Youth are often involved in the realizations and events are organised to celebrate the successful completion of the project.

Expected Impact and Benefits

Youth Benefits: The participatory budget fosters a sense of empowerment within the community overall, including the engaged youth. When youth see the tangible changes that result from their input, it reinforces their belief in their ability to influence local development.

Benefits for Municipalities: Municipalities stand to gain in terms of trust from the local community due to the open, inclusive, and highly transparent process created. This transparency not only reassures residents about the responsible use of public funds but also helps build a stronger bond between the local government and the citizens it serves. Additionally, the municipality's efforts to actively empower the community, particularly youth, are likely to generate increased support.

Challenges and Solutions

Potential Challenge: A common barrier, especially when starting with a youth participatory budget, may be to anticipate the needs of support from the targeted youth and be prepared with different means to respond to them. Also, a lack of knowledge on budgeting, especially from a local authority perspective.

How to use the tool

1. Define within the municipality the budget envelope that could be saved for this purpose, ideally funding more than one project, and link it with the city's objectives. These fundamental boundaries should be sufficiently broad to allow the open call to cater for different perspectives.

2. Municipalities need allies to make this work in the best possible way and increase the participation of youth from different backgrounds. Schools can be a precious ally with their outreach and transversality, but other types of formal group that gather youth.

3. As communication is so central, it is important to define the process in its details and make sure every step is defined with youth in mind. Creative solutions are welcomed to encourage and support participation, e.g., not limiting written text as the only format for the project submission, and welcoming other types of means of communication, which can be more youth friendly.

Solution Insight: Looking at how youth participatory budgets have been implemented in other cities or institutions can be incredibly helpful. Often, other municipalities or organizations (including schools, where participatory budgets are sometimes also organised) provide valuable resources, showcasing various methods used, initiatives carried out, stakeholders involved, and communication techniques adopted.
It is then very important to adapt these materials to the local context, and local stakeholders are best placed to do so. Therefore, it is advisable to hold a consultation with schools, youth organizations, and other relevant groups early in the process to ensure that the approach is tailored to the community's specific needs.

Additional Resources

→ https://youthpb.eu a website that gathers participatory budget experiences to give them more visibility but also creates some resources to guide the set-up of participatory budgets in schools and communities
→ https://urbact.eu/good-practices/participatory-youth-budget the example of Valongo, Portugal
→ https://hal.science/hal-03807166/document for a scientific perspective on it

08 Tool / Board Games

Purpose

What if... board games were played by youth not only in their free time but also as a means to engage with local municipalities and provide potential Nature-based Solutions for societal and environmental issues?

Game-based approaches can be both fun and educational, offering an engaging way to involve young people. Board games in particular provide a structured yet flexible environment where youth can experiment with different strategies, explore various options, and learn to manage limited resources—all within a defined set of rules. This structure helps support decision-making and reinforces key learning outcomes in a playful context.

However, one limitation is the gap between the game environment and real-life application. While games are easy to play and simulate scenarios effectively, it can be challenging for participants to translate what they've learned into real-world action, especially given the complexity of socio-environmental issues.

Game-based approaches can be both fun and educational, offering an engaging way to involve young people.

How to use the tool

1. Ensure there is sufficient furniture (tables and chairs) in a room with a conducive environment to engage in the game for the young participants.

2. Prepare the ground rules for how to play the board game and explain them to the youth participants in a manner that they can grasp.

3. Ensure the board game responds to local challenges faced and related NBS that can solve the issue, to support easy imagination of the scenario in question, such that the youth participants can think of easy but complete solutions to those issues.

Expected Impact and Benefits

- Systems thinking and problem solving can be enhanced in the participants.

- Improved environmental literacy can be expected from the game play especially if the game is designed in a way that induces critical thinking and problem-solving skills while learning about the NBS as solutions to the multiple societal and environmental challenges.

- Teamwork and collaborative efforts can make the youth aware of the power, but also the challenges of collective decision making.

Challenges and Solutions

Potential Barrier: Complex design can cause difficulties for the young participants to grasp the concept of NBS well while trying to solve the presented challenge. The simpler the game is to understand and most appropriate for the age of the youth, the better the outcomes might be.
Long term and real-life impact are limited as once the board game is over, even with deep reflection there might be a disconnect to the real-life challenges.

Solution Insight: Relevance based on culture and context is important to keep in mind right from the inception of the game, or else the results might not be as desired.

Insights

Pros
- Good possibility for young people to learn about relevant topics such as NBS in a fun way with other people without sacrificing a lot of their time.
- High level of engagement and participation from the involved parties.
- Young people can get awareness about real problems and have ideas for creating solutions.
- Improves critical thinking regarding those issues.

Recommencations
- Secure dedicated funding for materials and facilitation.
- Adapt formats to allow broader community access and scalability.

Examples

→ Serious game for nature-based solutions: Engineering Royal HaskoningDHV created an NBS-based game on how to make better decisions for the benefit of citizens, budgets, and ecosystems in the fictional "Valley Town" named Engineering game
→ Gamification as a tool for sustainability - azote

09 Tool /
Scenario Planning

Purpose
What if... the worries about future crises and uncertainties caused by climate change were openly discussed—and the enablers, barriers, and drivers were mapped out—to help young people imagine different futures, especially the one they prefer?

Participatory scenario planning for crisis is a strategic approach used by governments, businesses, organizations, and communities to forecast future conditions, evaluate potential risks, and devise adaptive strategies. Rather than reacting to crises after they occur, this tool supports the development of multiple plausible scenarios shaped by critical uncertainties—such as climate change, socio-political shifts, or economic disruptions.

By engaging a broad and diverse group of stakeholders—including those most affected, such as young people and vulnerable communities—the process fosters social learning, builds collective intelligence, and strengthens collaborative decision-making. It not only enhances resilience through better preparedness but also supports long-term transformation by integrating different types of knowledge, values, and aspirations into shared, actionable futures.

This tool can be effectively combined with visioning exercises by first using scenario planning to explore plausible crises and uncertainties, then following with visioning to imagine transformative responses and desired futures beyond those challenges.

Expected Impact and Benefits

Youth Benefits:
- Enhanced Strategic Thinking: Youth organizations are empowered to anticipate future climate trends, risks, and opportunities. This approach strengthens long-term planning and supports informed decision-making for local climate initiatives.
- Improved Policy Advocacy: Young leaders gain the ability to develop well-informed, forward-thinking policy papers that align with evolving climate scenarios, thereby enhancing their influence in policy discussions.
- Increased Youth Engagement & Empowerment: Providing practical tools builds confidence among young activists, while encouraging intergenerational collaboration and knowledge sharing enhances community-driven climate action.
- Less Anxiety and Fear: young people would feel less worried about future impacts and events, and be more prepared and secure to confront challenges.

Challenges and Solutions

Potential Challenge: Youth and marginalized participants may feel intimidated or uncertain about contributing to abstract or complex scenario discussions, especially if the process is dominated by technical language or more vocal participants.

Solution Insight: Use inclusive, youth-friendly facilitation techniques such as storytelling, drawing, or role-play to explore scenarios. Break into smaller, mixed-experience groups and provide guiding prompts or visual aids to spark ideas. Ensure facilitators actively encourage quieter voices and frame all contributions as valuable to co-creating diverse, grounded future pathways.

How to use the tool

1. **Adapt to Context:** Tailor the process to your specific audience, region, or thematic focus (e.g., climate, food systems, water). Ensure participation from those most affected, especially youth and vulnerable groups, to ground scenarios in real-world experiences.

2. **Use the Scenario Planning Quadrant method:** (inspired by Shell's approach)[1]
   · Draw two intersecting axes to form four quadrants.
   · Identify critical drivers of change (e.g., policy support, climate severity) and select two with high uncertainty and high impact.
   · Label one axis with one driver (increase/decrease), and the other with the second driver.
   · Co-create the four distinct future scenarios—one for each quadrant—by imagining possible developments, challenges, and opportunities.
   · Enrich each scenario with narratives, visuals, or keywords describing risks, benefits, and system shifts.
   · Give each scenario a name and discuss which ones are desirable, avoidable, or probable—and what actions are needed now to navigate toward preferred outcomes.

3. **Debriefing:** Facilitate a group reflection to compare scenarios with the current reality. Discuss what insights emerged, what risks or opportunities are most pressing, and what can be done now to shape a more resilient and just future. Encourage participants to identify early warning signs, leverage points, and concrete actions they can take individually or collectively. The results can inform educational programs, community strategies, or youth-led initiatives in Nature-Based Solutions and beyond.

Examples

CRISP e.V., a German organization specializing in civic education and conflict transformation, applied the scenario planning tool within the IKI ARCH project in Egypt and Sudan. In this instance, the tool was used to support youth-led organizations in anticipating and preparing for future climate-related challenges. Through exploring possible future scenarios, these organizations were able to develop informed strategies for policy advocacy and local climate action.

Related Resources:

→ Implementing the tool in Egypt under the IKI ARCH Project
→ Implementing the tool in Sudan under the IKI ARCH Project
→ Scenario Planning Quadrant toolbox

"The workshop provided me with a methodology that creates an overview of how-to bring climate action fundamentals to bear on scenarios"

Participant of the ARCH IKI project lead by CRISP e.V using the scenario planning tool in Egypt.

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1   Shell Global Solutions International B.V., 'Scenario Planning Quadrant'.

10 Tool / Visioning Exercise

Purpose

What if... young people were empowered to dream up real utopias—and, by combining bold imagination with grounded understanding of their context, shaped concrete pathways for transformative change?

While scenario planning explores what could plausibly happen, visioning focuses on what we want to happen—what's worth striving for. This tool invites learners to collaboratively imagine desirable futures where ecological regeneration, social equity, and well-being are central. It opens space to reimagine societies where the economy serves life, governance is participatory, and humans live in harmony with nature.

By crafting aspirational narratives of radically different, just, and sustainable worlds, visioning helps overcome the challenge of imagining beyond the status quo. It supports the development of transformative pathways for social change, sparking innovation and motivating action. Like participatory scenario planning, it empowers stakeholders by stimulating creativity, easing tensions, enhancing social learning, and integrating diverse knowledges and worldviews (Rana u. a. 2020).

Expected Impact and Benefits

- Futures literacy and systems thinking capacity
- Personal and collective empowerment through co-creation
- Enhanced agency, creativity, and hope-based resilience
- Deepened sense of place, ecological empathy, and intergenerational responsibility
- Opening space for integrating scientific, local, and indigenous knowledges

Challenges and Solutions

Potential Challenge: Youth from marginalized backgrounds may feel hesitant or unsafe to share their ideas openly, especially in mixed or formal settings where they have historically felt excluded or undervalued.

Solution Insight: Use trust-building and trauma-informed facilitation techniques to create a safe, non-judgmental space. Begin with small-group or creative, non-verbal activities to ease participants into the process. Position lived experience as valuable knowledge, and explicitly name that all contributions—whether spoken, drawn, or felt—are welcome and respected.

Examples

- → World Game by IFF
- → Real Utopian Workshops
- → From Whas is to What if
- → HubMobile Toolkit

How to use the tool

1. **Tailor the language and focus to your specific setting**—whether school-based, community-based, or thematic (e.g., food systems, water, energy, or urban nature).

2. Begin by exploring current dominant narratives (e.g., climate anxiety, economic growth, technology dependence), then introduce alternative frames letting of the "business as usual" and supporting radical imagination towards a more positive future.

   Imagining the Year 2045: Invite participants to time-travel 20 years into a regenerative, thriving, and just future. Ask them to co-create a story world or landscape where humans live in partnership with nature, and where systemic change has occurred.

   Guiding prompt: "Imagine you are waking up in your community in the year 2045. The climate change has challenged the world vastly, and many ecosystems have changed. However, society was able to adapt and build a just climate resilience through bold, collective action. Nature is adapting too, and returning to our cities, towns, and ecosystems. Social and ecological well-being are central to how society is now, and an indicator of wealth and wellbeing. What does life look like?"

   Encourage creative outputs: storytelling, collage, drawing, map-making, zines, or mini theatre. Use structured prompts to unpack the features of the envisioned future and surface underlying values, systems, and dynamics.

   - What do people look like?
   - How do people consume things?
   - What does 'nature´ look like? How is it perceived?
   - Who will have a voice in the future?
   - How do people spend their time?
   - What do we do with waste?
   - How does this vision compare to current ´desired 'economic growth and development projections?
   - What is the key feedback in this future?
   - Are there important drivers in this future?
   - What critical responses are needed to get to this future?
   - What key innovations are important for this future?

3. Facilitate reflection on how to move from current realities to the desired future. Support learners in identifying leverage points, windows of opportunity, and small but significant actions they can take today. Key questions for the debrief:

   - What did you feel or discover during this visioning?
   - Which parts of the future felt possible or already emerging?
   - What needs to change—at personal, community, and system levels—to get there?
   - Where are there seeds of this future in the present moment?
   - Use a back casting method to map the steps and shifts needed to realize the vision. Highlight that transformation is not linear, and the journey includes uncertainty, resistance, and creativity.

11 Tool /
Participatory Mapping

Purpose
What if... urban, coastal, and rural planners used the collective knowledge of young people to prioritise their needs and create thriving green spaces?

Participatory mapping is a collaborative process that uses cartography to make visible the relationships between land, community, and identity—centring local knowledge, lived experiences, and cultural values. It challenges top-down planning by allowing communities, especially youth and marginalized groups, to spatially express what matters to them.

A key approach within this is Public Participation Geographic Information Systems (PPGIS), which enhances participatory mapping through digital tools like Maptionnaire, enabling participants to geo-tag insights, needs, and visions in real-time.[1] While participatory mapping often uses physical maps and workshops—ideal for hands-on, intergenerational engagement—PPGIS extends this process digitally, offering scalability, interactivity, and integration with formal planning systems. Together, they democratize spatial decision-making, amplify underrepresented voices, and inform place-based Nature-Based Solutions with greater equity and precision.

Expected Impact and Benefits

Youth Benefits: Civic Participation & Spatial Agency: By contributing to maps that inform real decisions, youth gain a sense of ownership over their environment and experience meaningful participation in community and policy processes. Systems Thinking & Ecological Awareness: Mapping local challenges and assets helps youth understand the interconnections between social and ecological systems, deepening their place-based knowledge and capacity for regenerative thinking.

Challenges and Solutions

Potential Challenge: Low participation from marginalized youth or community members due to digital knowledge or access barriers, lack of trust in planning processes, or past experiences of exclusion.

Solution Insight: Build relationships through trusted local partners (e.g., youth groups, schools, cultural associations), and combine digital (PPGIS) with in-person methods to ensure access. Use creative, low-tech entry points—like community walks, art-based mapping, or storytelling sessions—to build comfort and ownership before introducing digital tools. Co-design the mapping process with participants to increase relevance and engagement.

Examples

→ Travel behaviour in Turku In 2020, PPGIS method was used to collect data on citizens' travel behaviour in Turku, and about 800 residents participated in the online survey. After analysing the 474 full responds, four types of travel behaviours were classified. The result of this project can be used both in transportation and land use planning.

→ Maptionnaire has been used both in academic research projects and in public participation processes (see: examples here). Kahila-Tani et al (2019) studied a sample (n= 203) of Maptionnaire projects that were realized as part of real-life public participation projects

→ Advancing Youth Engagement with Digital Tools: A Blueprint from Cardiff

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1   Kyttä, M et al., 'Maptionnaire. In Evaluating Participatory Mapping Software (Eds. Burnett, C. M.). Springer, Pp 71–91.

How to use the tool

#	Participatory Mapping (in-person)	PPGIS (online)
1	**Engage the Community** Invite a diverse group of participants to an accessible, welcoming location. Ensure multiple perspectives—especially youth and vulnerable groups—are included.	**Survey Design** Design a balanced digital survey that includes both spatial and non-spatial questions. Keep it concise and user-friendly.
2	**Gather Materials** Use printed base maps, transparent overlays, or natural elements like sand, sticks, or stones. Project digital maps, if possible, and archive hand-drawn outputs.	**Select Participants** Choose a recruitment strategy—random sampling for representation or crowdsourcing for open participation. Consider digital access barriers.
3	**Outline Key Features** Have participants mark known landmarks (roads, rivers, sites) and sketch their daily geographies or spatial memories. Use pre-existing maps for reference if available	**Data Collection** Distribute the survey through emails, social media, or targeted platforms. Encourage participants to pin their input on interactive maps.
4	**Add Local Insights** Invite participants to highlight places of concern or importance (e.g., safe spaces, areas at risk). Use sticky notes, drawings, and discussion to capture meaning.	**Data Analysis** Use built-in analysis tools (e.g., Maptionnaire dashboards) or export for GIS-based spatial analysis to identify patterns, hotspots, or planning needs.
5	**Guiding Questions** • What problems does the community face? • Where are these problems located? • Where are the hotspots? • Who is responsible? (optional) • How are the issues connected? • Are there positive examples or solutions? How are these problems connected to each other?	**Data Storage & Use** Store spatial data securely in GIS databases. Integrate findings with planning systems and share insights with relevant stakeholders.
6	**Refine & Use the Map** Make adjustments until the group is satisfied with the final version. This map serves as a valuable tool for planning, decision-making, and future comparisons.	**Data Sharing & Use** Publish findings for public or institutional use, ensuring privacy considerations while enabling informed urban and environmental planning.

Resources

→ Maptionnaire

→ Esri: ArcGIS Survey123
→ Mapping for Change
→ Commonplace

→ Map-me
→ NordGreen handbook
→ HubMobile Toolkit

12 Tool / Third Spaces

Purpose
What if... third spaces became hubs for hands-on nature-based learning and restoration projects led by youth?

Third spaces—informal, non-institutional public environments such as parks, cultural centres, or community art spaces—offer fantastic opportunities for youth inclusion. These spaces exist outside of the home (first space) and school or work (second spaces) and are uniquely positioned to support youth-led engagement, creativity, and connection to place[1].

For municipalities, third spaces provide a flexible and low-barrier setting to involve young people—especially those from underrepresented groups—in the co-creation of NBS and public life. When activated through participatory design, arts, and cultural programming, third spaces can foster belonging, voice, and agency. They serve not only as sites of recreation but also as platforms for youth to shape their environment, build social cohesion, and contribute meaningfully to regenerative urban futures.

- Third spaces offer flexible, informal environments where youth can engage with nature through creativity, storytelling, and hands-on experimentation beyond traditional education.
- Arts-based third spaces build trust and belonging, particularly for marginalized youth, by centring personal expression and community connection in environmental learning.
- When co-designed with young people, third spaces can transform public areas into inclusive, safe, and engaging environments that support equitable participation in Nature-Based Solutions.

Expected Impact and Benefits

Youth Benefits: Third spaces empower youth by offering opportunities to lead, collaborate, and shape their environments—building critical leadership, co-creation, and civic participation skills. These spaces also foster environmental awareness through hands-on, place-based learning, helping young people understand local ecological challenges and their role in regenerative solutions.

Community Impact: When activated intentionally, third spaces become hubs for community resilience—bringing together diverse groups, surfacing local knowledge, and strengthening collective ties to place. They create accessible entry points for learning and dialogue around Nature-Based Solutions, helping build public support and shared stewardship of local green infrastructure.

Challenges and Solutions

Potential Challenge: Youth from marginalized communities may not feel welcome or safe in existing public spaces due to previous exclusion, lack of representation, or poorly designed infrastructure that doesn't meet their needs.

Solution Insight: Work in partnership with youth from the start to co-design third spaces that reflect their realities, identities, and aspirations. Cities like Umeå, Sweden, have successfully increased youth participation—especially among girls—by involving them directly in the design of inclusive public spaces, resulting in higher usage, safety, and a stronger sense of ownership.

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1   Srivastava, 'Arts-Based Third Spaces for Youth'

How to use the tool

1. **Identify and Activate Underused Third Spaces -** Start by mapping informal public or semi-public spaces—such as parks, libraries, community centres, or open urban areas—that could host youth-centred NBS activities. Prioritize spaces that are accessible, safe, and familiar to young people, especially those from marginalized groups.

2. **Encourage Creative and Cultural Expression -** Integrate arts, storytelling, music, or digital media as part of NBS education in these spaces. This allows young people to engage with ecological challenges in ways that are meaningful, expressive, and inclusive of diverse identities and perspectives.

3. **Co-Design with Youth, Not Just for Them -** Involve young people from the beginning—through workshops, youth councils, or school partnerships—to co-design how the space is used and what learning or engagement looks like. This builds ownership, relevance, and long-term impact. To do this, you can use of existing tools featured in this toolkit, like Participatory Mapping, Visioning Exercises, and Scenario Planning, to co-create third spaces.

4. **Connect Learning with Action -** Link third-space activities with real municipal plans and projects. For example, use youth-generated insights to inform green infrastructure upgrades, park redesigns, or biodiversity initiatives—making their contributions visible and actionable

5. **Build Long-Term Partnerships -** Collaborate with schools, youth organizations, artists, and local NGOs to sustain programming in third spaces. Long-term engagement increases trust, deepens learning, and strengthens the role of youth in shaping regenerative cities.

Examples

→ **Third Spaces Foster Creative and Critical Thinking Beyond Traditional Systems:** As highlighted in "The Third Space, Reimagined" by Andy Fidel, third spaces offer hybrid, flexible environments that go beyond institutional settings.
→ **Arts-Based Third Spaces Build Trust and Belonging for Marginalized Youth:** The University of Pennsylvania report on arts-based third spaces shows that these environments are particularly effective in reaching youth who face social, economic, or cultural exclusion.
→ **Inclusive Design of Third Spaces Translates to Real Public Impact:** The case of Umeå, Sweden, from Make Space for Girls, illustrates how thoughtfully designed third spaces can address gendered and age-based inequalities.

Resources

→ Offline Oasis: Why Teens Need non-digital Third Spaces — EDIT change management — Editcm BLOG—
→ "Third places and learning!" | EPALE
→ Ray Oldenburg & Karen Christensen: third places, true citizen spaces | The UNESCO Courier
→ Dynamics of third places in Europe
→ Why you need a third place | Sophie Spier | TEDxSioux Falls Youth - YouTube
→ What are Third Places and Why Do They Matter? | Shanker Institute
→ Arts-Based Third Spaces for Youth
→ Placemaking: What if We Built Our Cities Around Places | Publications — Project for Public Spaces

Case studies

01 Case studies /
Almada

Background and Goals

Almada, a predominantly urban municipality, has been implementing youth inclusion initiatives to address the community's disconnection from nature. By engaging youth in environmental education and awareness programs centred on nature-based solutions (NBS), the city aims to foster a deeper connection with natural processes and cultivate future leaders in conservation. Special attention has been directed toward young adults (18-25 years old) from universities and polytechnical schools, as well as younger participants (14-18 years old) involved in summer programs and eco-school initiatives.

Planning and Development

Youth inclusion in Almada is driven by participatory programs such as the municipal participatory budget and Agenda 21 student assemblies. Through these platforms, young people have directly contributed to initiatives, including the ecological restoration of riverine habitats using natural engineering solutions. Youth have played active roles in planning and decision-making, presenting proposals and collaborating with city officials and local organizations to bring ideas to fruition.

Implementation and Participation

The city maintains consistent youth participation through partnerships with NGOs, schools, and youth associations. Regular communication channels, including social media, email newsletters, and WhatsApp groups, ensure visibility and engagement. While the general volunteering program is not youth-specific, it has attracted significant participation from young people. Events tailored to organised youth groups have also been successful in maintaining engagement.

Challenges and Barriers

Key challenges include limited human resources to establish a dedicated youth volunteer program and barriers to independent youth participation. To address this, the city has emphasized group-based involvement through schools and associations. Despite these constraints, no resistance or skepticism toward youth inclusion has been encountered.

Impact and Outcomes

Youth involvement has had tangible impacts on city programs. For example, student-proposed projects for riverine habitat restoration were implemented as municipal policy, showcasing the value of youth-led ideas. Furthermore, youth participation in the ReDuna project brought fresh perspectives on event management, youth-oriented communication, and awareness signage. While no formal evaluations have been conducted, feedback mechanisms such as surveys and emails have guided the improvement of initiatives, leading to more engaging and diverse activities.

> **Hands-on, dynamic activities that integrate art and science have proven effective in capturing youth interest.**

Sustainability and Future Plans

Almada plans to sustain youth inclusion through ongoing initiatives and the development of a general volunteer program. The city envisions youth playing an increasingly active role in environmental planning, fostering a generation of participatory citizens committed to collaboration and conservation. Partnerships with NGOs and departments focused on youth and sports will further enhance these efforts.

Key Lessons and Advice

Almada's experience highlights the importance of connecting with youth through trusted intermediaries, such as schools and NGOs. Hands-on, dynamic activities that integrate art and science have proven effective in capturing youth interest. Cities looking to replicate this model should prioritize engaging communication and foster opportunities for youth to solve open-ended, real-world problems.

Conclusion

Almada's youth inclusion initiatives demonstrate the potential of engaging young people in nature-based solutions to bridge the gap between urban communities and nature. Through participatory programs, innovative communication strategies, and a commitment to fostering leadership, the city is paving the way for a sustainable and inclusive future.

02 *Case studies /*
Türkiye

Background and Goals

The Ministry of Youth and Sports in Türkiye, in collaboration with UNICEF, launched a Social Inclusion and Youth Participation Project to foster social cohesion between Turkish youth and migrant/ refugee youth under Temporary Protection Status. This initiative aims to address social adaptation challenges and promote equitable opportunities in education, culture, and personal development. Key objectives include overcoming language barriers, creating equal access to resources, and addressing social cohesion issues through preventive and remedial projects.

Target Demographics

The program focuses on disadvantaged youth, including adolescents and young adults under Temporary Protection Status, those not attending school, and others at risk of exclusion due to social or economic barriers.

Planning and Development

Youth engagement during planning relied on surveys and pilot studies to assess their needs and challenges, such as language learning and social integration. Although youth were not directly involved in decision-making, their feedback significantly shaped program design. Collaborations with schools, NGOs, international organizations, and local community groups provided a solid foundation for implementation.

Implementation and Participation

The Ministry facilitated youth participation through diverse programs like Turkish language courses, skill-building workshops, and cultural events. Youth Centres served as hubs for consistent engagement, complemented by innovative initiatives such as Genç Alan and Genç UPSHIFT. Social media, digital portals, and localized outreach emerged as effective communication methods.

Challenges and Barriers

The program faced logistical challenges, such as incentivizing participation and addressing access issues in remote areas. Youth encountered barriers like language difficulties and limited digital resources. These obstacles were partially addressed through financial incentives, mobile education units, and community trust-building efforts.

Impact and Outcomes

The initiatives have made a significant impact by facilitating integration and mutual understanding between refugee and local youth. Programs like Turkish language courses have successfully improved social adaptation, while Genç UPSHIFT fostered entrepreneurial and innovative thinking. Evaluations highlight the programs' positive outcomes, though unexpected successes, such as enhanced youth engagement in creative problem-solving, also emerged.

Sustainability and Future Plans

The Ministry plans to maintain its initiatives through continuous funding, expanded workshops, and enhanced digital tools like the Gençlik Bilgilendirme Sistemi (Youth Information System). Ongoing field surveys ensure programs are tailored to participants' evolving needs and measure their effectiveness.

Key Lessons and Advice

Türkiye's experience underscores the importance of early stakeholder engagement, leveraging digital platforms, and integrating feedback mechanisms. Hands-on, dynamic activities that combine education, art, and social interaction effectively engage youth. Other cities and ministries could draw inspiration from this model by emphasizing community collaboration and robust evaluation frameworks.

Conclusion

The Social Inclusion and Youth Participation Project exemplifies how targeted, well-designed programs can empower disadvantaged youth. By addressing barriers and fostering mutual understanding, the initiative has laid the groundwork for a more inclusive society while providing a roadmap for other cities and ministries to follow.

03 Case studies /
Genova

Background and Goals

In Genova there is a social promotion association called Alle Ortiche which carries out urban regeneration and civic innovation projects focussing on cultural and environmental dimensions. The association itself was founded by a group of young people below 30 years of age. Through the Urban Linneo project, the association engaged with various age groups including middle and high school as well as university students. They have also promoted youth volunteering and have activated civil services opportunities.

Planning and Development

The volunteer group welcomes anyone interested in participating in the creation of specific activities, workshops, or spaces. There is a wide range of opportunities for involvement, and they seek the engagement of the Alle Ortiche Assembly, which consists of volunteers rather than members of the Association, for every project. Additionally, they have the participation of civil service volunteers—currently, with two volunteers, and using a call they expect to have 2 more. The volunteer base expands significantly during the spring and summer when open-air activities are organised. For schools, it is a little bit different, since they primarily connect with them through teachers, while for university students and similar, usually they organise open calls.

Implementation and Participation

In terms of communication and tools, their Instagram page is performing very well with young people; however, young adults are difficult to reach. Cultural events also serve as valuable engagement opportunities. The civil service network, being broader and involving other partners, effectively aids in dissemination.
In terms of engagement, in the Urban Linneo project the association experimented with a public call to involve young people (18-27) to plan and develop a cultural initiative through a mentoring process supported with a dedicated budget. Selected participants are quite different from volunteers: most of them have heard about the project through social media or by being a "passive" participant to an event. This helps identify what works and what doesn't and what adjustments are needed. The association does not engage them only to collect ideas but by providing a dedicated budget to use, they support in implementing some of the ideas.

Challenges and Barriers

The main challenges that young people face when it comes to develop their ideas are paternalistic and patriarchal dynamics. The association often encounter dynamics rooted in prejudice against young people. It's crucial to create a space for freedom, though the engaged youth may not always know how to manage it effectively. Coming back to the example of Urban Linneo's call, the groups of

selected young people have received training on specific topics, and then they were also given quite a free space to develop ideas. Sometimes, they desire more guidance, more meetings, and closer follow-up. It has also been noticed that they often try to spend less than they have, in terms of budget management.

Impact and Outcomes

With Urban Linneo project Alle Ortiche is still in the experimentation phase as it is still going on so an evaluation cannot be provided right away. However, they notice some "unexpected" outcomes such as involving young people keeps the organization vibrant and ensures a continuous influx of new ideas. If this is true in an organisation like Alle Ortiche, which is still quite young with members in their 30s, it is worth imagining how crucial this would be in other contexts.

Sustainability and Future Plans

For Alle Ortiche, the main source to expand and maintain these initiatives is through the development of project (and participation to tenders to get funded). Recently, they have submitted applications for two projects to propose a new, expanded, and updated edition of the artistic residencies (for artists under 35) that was tried and tests in last year's annual Festival.

They also aim to structure more complex proposals with a broader scope, for instance, they plan to reintroduce the Summer school on the topic of urban regeneration, which was also an action of the Urban Linneo project directed towards university students and was very successful.

Key Lessons and Advice

Alle Ortiche proposed "Real Impact and Clear Parameters" as a basis for such activities of youth engagement. They believe that initiatives that are not just theoretical but also involve real interventions, even if small ones are more successful and beneficial. They suggest it is important to listen to young people not just "out of obligation" but with clear parameters: "it should be clear what we want to achieve, what we ask for, and what we offer."
A small stipend, scholarship etc. could make a difference to keep the youth involved in longer projects with sustained interest as well.

Conclusion

Alle Ortiche's commitment to actively engage with the youth, going beyond mere consultation and integrating a dedicated budget for real application of youth ideas, is commendable. They are keen on expanding their activities over time and supporting the youth in whichever way possible through projects, to give them the opportunity to voice their opinions and ideas while also experimenting with implementation work.

04 Case studies /
Parma

Background and Goals

In Parma, as in many municipalities, youth policy has traditionally been paired with other streams of work such as culture and sports, resulting in youth being a small component within the broader political agenda. When the current mayor—formerly councillor for culture and youth—was elected 2.5 years ago, he chose to establish a dedicated councillorship for youth to give the issue greater visibility, autonomy, and impact. Beatrice Aimi, a pragmatic and technically skilled figure, was appointed to the role, with the intention of moving beyond one-off events toward more meaningful initiatives. Now Parma's youth department addresses the 16–35 age range, with current activities primarily focussing on those up to age 26, and the aim of expanding the reach of the department to the full target group by the end of 2025.

The city's youth policy is structured around four main areas: welfare, youth leadership, employment, and creativity. As part of youth leadership, a flagship initiative has been Parma's candidacy for the title of European Youth Capital, a goal that has guided much of the recent programming, without disregarding the others.

At the heart of Parma's candidacy is the ambition to reduce Italy's growing generational gap. Italy presents significant challenges for young people in achieving autonomy, with forecasts suggesting that by 2030, full independence may not be reached until the age of 50. Sustainability is directly referred in 2 of the 8 key priorities identified in the application. Parma's youth demonstrate a strong awareness of environmental issues, including circular economy principles, waste reduction, and sustainable consumption patterns but they also see it in a very holistic manner, strictly connected with social aspects.

Planning and Development

Young people played a central role in the development of Parma's application for the title of European Youth Capital, a two-year process that began in 2023 with an open call and outreach campaign to engage local youth. Youth people who raised their interest were invited to a participatory weekend event aimed at inspiring them to become changemakers, but also to lay the foundation for setting priorities and next steps.

A large open-space meeting was then held, bringing together 150 young people to identify key topics of interest to include in the application. From there, thematic working groups—referred to as "commissions"—were formed around the issues raised. Sustainability quickly emerged as a top priority, though young participants emphasized a broader, intersectional view that included social equity and inclusion. An open call was launched to form a Climate Assembly, an advisory body composed of young people, experts, associations, and local representatives, to guide and promote sustainability initiatives in the city.

Engaged youth also drafted a manifesto, which outlines their vision, principles, and the role they aim to play now that the city has been nominated EU youth capital. A meeting is planned to invite other youth associations and individuals to sign the manifesto, which will serve as a foundational document for future action. Moreover, to ensure young people have a concrete role in governance, the city will establish a decision-making committee for the European Youth Capital initiative, composed of representatives from companies, institutions, and other stakeholders—none of whom will be over the age of 35. This reflects the city's broader commitment to youth leadership as well as the critical role of partnership in achieving this success and, further down, turning it into concrete actions.

Implementation and Participation

Parma's approach to youth engagement is interest-driven activities, with the belief that trust is best built when young people are free to choose their level of involvement. The youth group that emerged from this process named themselves Direzione Futura ("Direction Future") and have become key actors in keeping their peers engaged. This had to be built overtime as prove the increase in number since the first open call when the 32,000 emails sent by the municipality received 23 responses, underscoring also the need to rethink communication.

An example of initiatives developed to open up for engagement is Parma Passepartouts, a series of monthly informal meetings held in public parks where young people gather over drinks to speak directly with city councillors. These events are relaxed in format, encouraging open dialogue and youth themselves proposed some games to spark meaningful discussions with councillors around the topics that matter most to them. The result has been rich, thoughtful exchanges and a deeper understanding of the city's projects and priorities.

Challenges and Barriers

The City of Parma recognizes the need to broaden its outreach, particularly toward disadvantaged groups. In response to that, the plan moving forward involves mapping relevant associations and entities that represent these communities, engaging directly with their leaders to share the project's vision, and collaboratively refining the approach. The ultimate goal is to create peer-to-peer connections, where young people already involved in the project can reach out directly to others.

More than youth, the source of scepticism come from adults. Despite Parma's strong network of active stakeholders, not all were initially open to engaging with the project. Internally, some municipal colleagues were also hesitant, particularly when introduced to tools like the Youth Impact assessment framework, highlighting the broader challenge of cultural change within institutions. To address this, training sessions were organised to foster understanding and support. The shift toward involving youth more directly—moving from speaking about young people to speaking with them—has been essential.

Impact and Outcomes

Assessing impact is a central pillar of Parma's youth engagement strategy, seen as essential for shifting institutional mindsets, tracking progress, and generating meaningful data that can be used to set measurable goals

and (re)allocate resources. Since 2023 the city introduced a generational impact assessment—an approach also referred to in the EU as a "youth check" or "youth test", appearing to be the first municipality in any OECD country to adopt this tool at the local level.

All internal administrative acts, when processed through the city's management system, must now include a dropdown classification indicating whether a resolution is generational, potentially generational, neutral, or anti-generational. The assessment process also required a review of the city's strategic planning document—the Documento Unico di Programmazione (DUP)—through a youth lens by the administration first and by young people afterward, who were invited to present to the city council their assessment.

Sustainability and Future Plans

Parma's vision on youth engagement is rooted in leaving a legacy. Every activity and event are designed to meet the real needs of young people but also to offer opportunities for learning, experimentation, and skills development. Besides the manifesto, the assembly and the strategy to increase the outreach to underrepresented groups, particularly vulnerable individuals and young workers, the city keeps creating opportunities for youth to experiment and take the driving seat. This is possible thanks to the dense network created with local stakeholder, which also translate in monetary support. The application for European capital of youth was supported by 218 letters of support and gathered 12.5 million, 56% coming from the private sector.

Key Lessons and Advice

- Be transparent with the young people you engage. It's important to acknowledge that municipalities cannot resolve every issue, but they can listen, collaborate, and build relationships based on mutual respect. At the same time, institutions must take responsibility for navigating the administrative and bureaucratic aspects that come with implementation.

- Start from the interests of young people and let those guide your work. Meaningful engagement grows when initiatives are rooted in what truly matters to them.

- Actively involve local groups, foster connections among them, and build a network. Despite living in a hyperconnected world, real synergies are often lacking—creating those links is where real value emerges.

- Don't hesitate to look at what other cities are doing and replicate good practices. Inspiration and innovation often begin by learning from others.

- Trust is built over time. In our case, more than 200 meetings and focus groups over the past few years have revealed just how much potential can be unlocked through sustained dialogue and shared commitment.

- The alignment of institutional leadership with the voices of young people has proven to be a turning point, helping to build a shared narrative and begin a deeper transformation in how youth engagement is understood and practiced.

Conclusion

Parma's journey as a candidate for European Youth Capital demonstrates how municipalities can foster youth engagement when they commit to listening, sharing power, and embedding participation into governance. By creating space for young people to lead, experiment, and contribute meaningfully, the city has strengthened trust, enriched its own policy processes and triggered a change in conceiving youth role in decision making which can go beyond the public administration realm. Key to this success has been a willingness to connect existing local energies, and to adopt innovative tools such as the generational impact assessment.

05 Case studies /
Friesland

Background and Goals

Friesland, a region in the Netherlands, recognizes that youth must play a central role in shaping long-term environmental and climate policy. With limited youth turnout in traditional participation platforms, the region aimed to better involve young people—aged 12 to 35—in climate visioning and spatial planning. Youth are seen as critical stakeholders, especially in decisions that will directly affect their future.

A key initiative supporting this goal was the development of a serious game—a participatory, role-playing exercise designed to immerse youth in the complex trade-offs of climate-resilient regional planning. The game focused on the IJsselmeer region and introduced the national planning principle of Water and Soil as Leading, helping participants explore realistic solutions in a playful yet strategic setting.

Planning and Development

Friesland engaged youth through school projects, guest lectures, youth networks, and targeted events. One major milestone was the inclusion of youth perspectives in the preface of the regional Climate Vision, giving symbolic and practical weight to their ideas. The serious game was co-developed by the Province of Fryslân and Waterschap Hunze en Aa's as part of broader outreach and awareness efforts tied to national climate directives.

The game was designed around real-world challenges—such as biodiversity loss, freshwater availability, and sustainable economic growth—encouraging players to think holistically. Schools and universities were essential partners in recruiting participants and embedding the game into learning environments.

Implementation and Participation

The serious game was played over three interactive rounds: (1) defining a strategy, (2) collecting possible measures, and (3) implementing those measures on a visual game board representing the IJsselmeer area. Participants were assigned stakeholder roles (e.g., municipality, water board, resident, farmer, business), each with different priorities. They had to negotiate, make trade-offs, and seek "meekoppelkansen" (synergy opportunities) to score the highest combined benefit across five pillars: water safety, freshwater access, ecosystem health, economic vitality, and landscape quality.

This game-based method complemented ongoing youth activities such as school visits, the Stim fan Fryslân platform, and the youth-led Generation Friesland 2035 (GF2035) network. These efforts collectively created a landscape of informal yet impactful participation.

Challenges and Barriers

Friesland's youth engagement is not yet part of a fixed program, often relying on one-off activities that occur during school terms. Youth face barriers such as limited time, varying levels of interest, and lack of experience with complex governance. Political scepticism has also surfaced—some officials view youth proposals as overly idealistic or detached from short-term realities. These challenges highlight the need for clear communication and managed expectations.

Impact and Outcomes

Youth input has shaped both policy direction and public discourse in Friesland. Their vision helped set the tone of the Climate Vision, while the serious game fostered creative thinking and revealed the value of experiential learning. Youth networks like GF2035 and young farmers' collectives have developed their own agendas, supporting continued engagement beyond formal processes.

The serious game succeeded in translating abstract policy goals into tangible, interactive experiences that made youth feel both heard and empowered. It also helped participants better understand the roles and constraints of various stakeholders.

Sustainability and Future Plans

Ongoing engagement efforts continue through education-based outreach such as workshops and lectures. However, a long-term, institutionalized youth inclusion strategy is still under development. The serious game format, having proven effective, is seen as a replicable tool for future use across schools and public engagement campaigns.

Key Lessons and Advice

- Use serious gaming to make complex policy decisions tangible and engaging.
- Start early and diversify engagement across age groups and education levels.
- Work through trusted intermediaries like schools and youth organizations.
- Be transparent about the impact of youth input and manage expectations.
- Encourage self-organization, allowing youth networks to define their own agendas.

Conclusion

Friesland's innovative use of serious gaming illustrates how creative tools can activate youth in climate and environmental planning. Combined with flexible, education-driven outreach, the region is cultivating a generation that not only understands but also shapes a sustainable, resilient future. Serious gaming offers a promising model for other regions aiming to turn youth participation into a meaningful and lasting force in policy development.

Recommendations for local authorities

Make NBS Learning Experiential and Accessible

- Organise field visits, guided tours, and exploratory walks.
- Facilitate hands-on restoration activities and citizen science projects.
- Use outdoor classrooms and living labs.
- Embed NBS in school curricula through core subjects and real-world case studies.
- Promote transdisciplinary projects and STEM integration.
- Provide training and resources for educators.

Empower and Support Youth-led NBS Initiatives

- Provide seed? funding, mentorship, and training for youth projects.
- Organise competitions and public exhibitions of youth-designed NBS.
- Partner with youth organisations and networks to co-create solutions.

Involve Youth in Governance and Decision-making

- Establish youth councils and mentorship programs (e.g., Espoo Future Mentors).
- Include youth voices in planning, visioning, and goal setting.
- Ensure youth roles in governance with open feedback mechanisms.
- Recognise youth as key stakeholders from the start.

Use Digital Tools to Inspire and Engage

- Launch interactive social media campaigns
- Produce engaging digital content (videos, infographics, podcasts)
- Develop gamified experiences and storytelling platforms
- Collaborate with influencers and content creators
- Establish youth awards and recognition programs
- Publish youth success stories

Conclusion

Local governments are on the frontline of responding to the climate and biodiversity crises—yet they are not alone in this effort. As this toolkit has demonstrated, young people are ready and willing to be key partners in co-creating NBS that serve both people and the planet. What they often lack is not motivation, but meaningful access, recognition, and support. This is where municipalities can lead by example.

From the outset, this document has highlighted the importance of including youth—particularly vulnerable and underrepresented groups—in NBS education and decision-making. As outlined in the introduction, youth inclusion is not just a moral imperative; it is a strategic advantage. Young people bring lived experience, innovative thinking, digital fluency, and a deep commitment to environmental and social justice. Their engagement contributes directly to more relevant, responsive, and regenerative NBS.

The methodology chapter detailed the co-development process with youth, local governments, educators, and other experts. It reflects real-world experiences, validated tools, and shared learning across diverse contexts. This process underscored a critical insight: inclusion must be intentional, ongoing, and embedded in the structures of governance and education—not just an afterthought.

The tools and case studies presented in this document offer concrete ways to act—from hackathons and participatory budgets to youth councils, scenario planning, and digital engagement. These tools are not one-size-fits-all, but they are adaptable and designed to be shaped around local priorities, capacities, and cultural contexts.

Ultimately, meaningful youth inclusion in NBS is not about ticking a box. It is about building partnerships that strengthen local democracy, deepen ecological literacy, and foster long-term resilience. Municipalities that embrace youth as stakeholders, co-creators, and leaders stand to gain not only fresh perspectives and community trust, but also a generation of engaged citizens who feel more connected to their environment and more agency about their future.

This toolkit is a starting point. The work ahead requires continued collaboration, investment, and reflection. But by acting now, local governments can create the enabling conditions for youth to thrive—and in doing so, help shape greener, fairer, and more resilient communities for all.

Relevant Resources

Youth Inclusion Toolkits*

- Youth Participation Toolkit
- Inclusion Youth Voice Toolkit - Youth Sport Trust
- Meaningful Youth Participation Toolkit - Youth At Heart
- Toolkit Inclusive Youth Participation - Stichting Alexander
- Toolbox: how to make the EU Youth Dialogue more inclusive - Youth Goals
- Youth Council Toolkit - FCM

Inclusion Toolkits*

- LGBTQ Inclusion in Youth Program Environments
- INCLUSION TOOLBOX - EYF
- YOUTH COLLABORATION TOOLKIT - TrueColorsUnited

Youth Manifesto*

- Youth Declaration on transforming Education
- Youth declaration on "The European Year of the Youth- beyond 2022"
- Youth Declaration UNECE
- Manifesto for Young People by Young People! – European Commission 2020
- EUROPARC Youth Manifesto - 2018
- Renew Europe Youth Manifesto - 2023
- Youth Manifesto for Nature and the Environment – Wildlife Ulster 2022

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