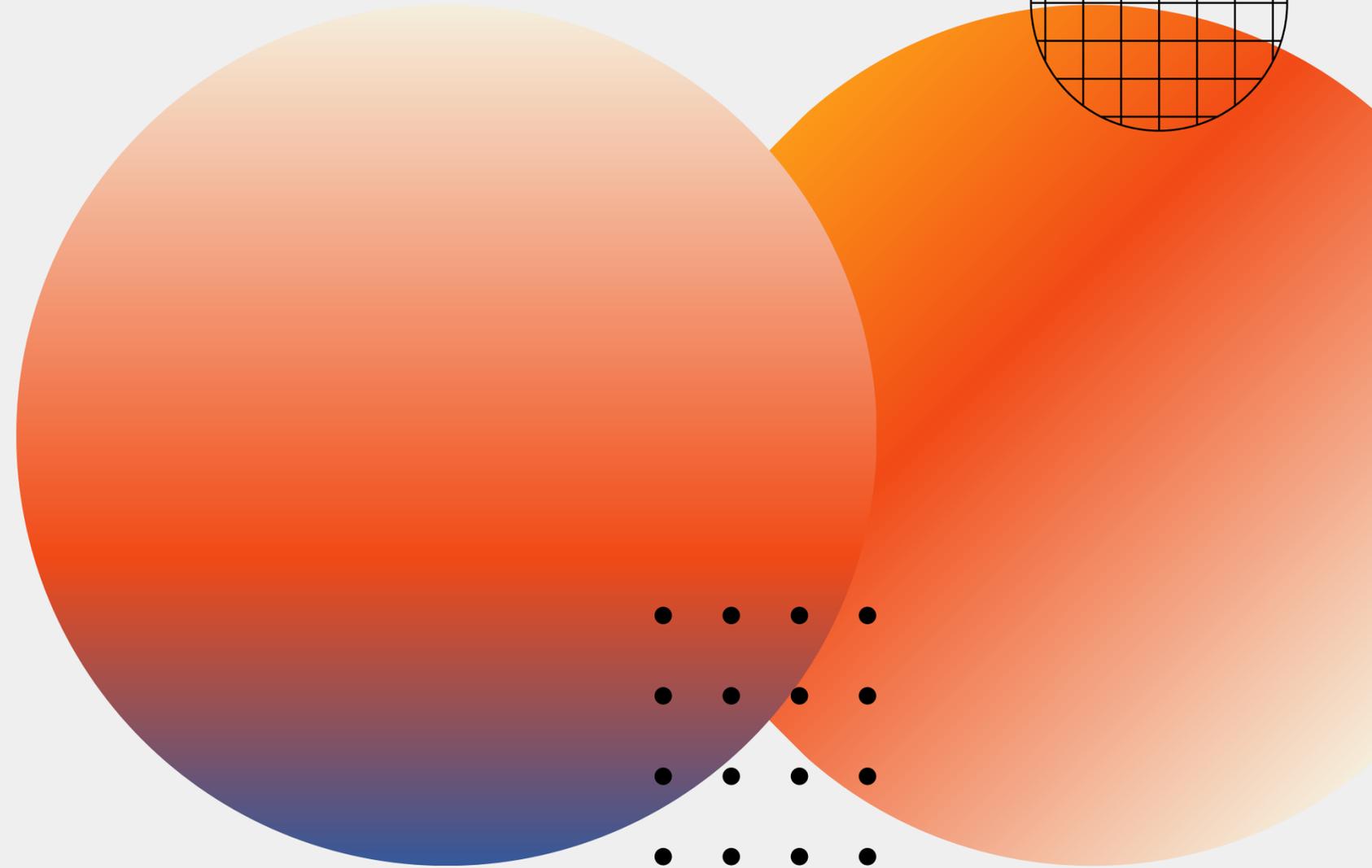
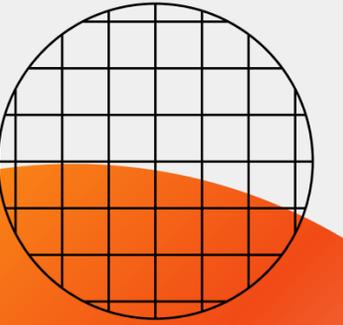


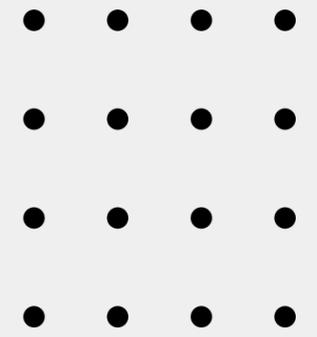
Cristina Bacalso

Opportunities, space, competencies & skills

Democratic participation as a cross-sectoral priority for Erasmus+



Who am I



- Researcher in the **field of youth**
 - **Focus: Participation** (civic, political)
 - Adolescent & youth development, youth policies, human rights
 - Over 20 years in the sector
 - United Nations, European Commission, Council of Europe, (I)NGOs
 - SALTO PI (strategy review & development)
-

Today



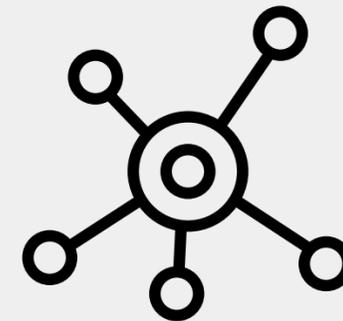
Understanding the current policy context of the E+ priority



“Participation” in the field of youth in E+



Possible synergies between youth & education sectors



Visioning towards cross-sectorality (& why it matters)

-
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Participation

What do we mean by it



- In everyday parlance: “to take part”
- In EU/Erasmus+ additionally means:

the ability to have a say in & shape the decisions that impact your life

(its about autonomy, agency, self-determination,
and also: democracy)

How (youth) participation is present in the EU

**UNCRC Art. 12
Right to be Heard
enshrined in human
rights law & folded
into EU level**

EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child applies this at the European level

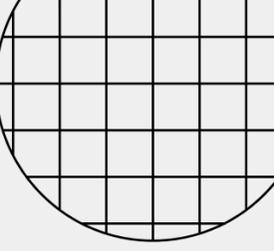
**Central pillar of
the EU Youth
Strategy**

Engage, Connect,
Empower; 11 Youth Goals

**Built in to EU
processes &
frameworks**

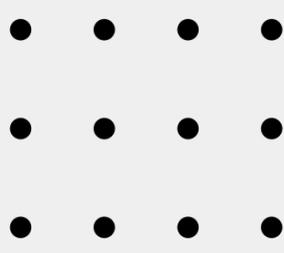
EU Youth Dialogue (every 18 months), Youth Policy Dialogues, EU President Youth Advisory Board, EU Youth Stakeholders Group, EU Youth Sounding Boards (DG INTPA)





Understanding the current policy context of the E+ priority

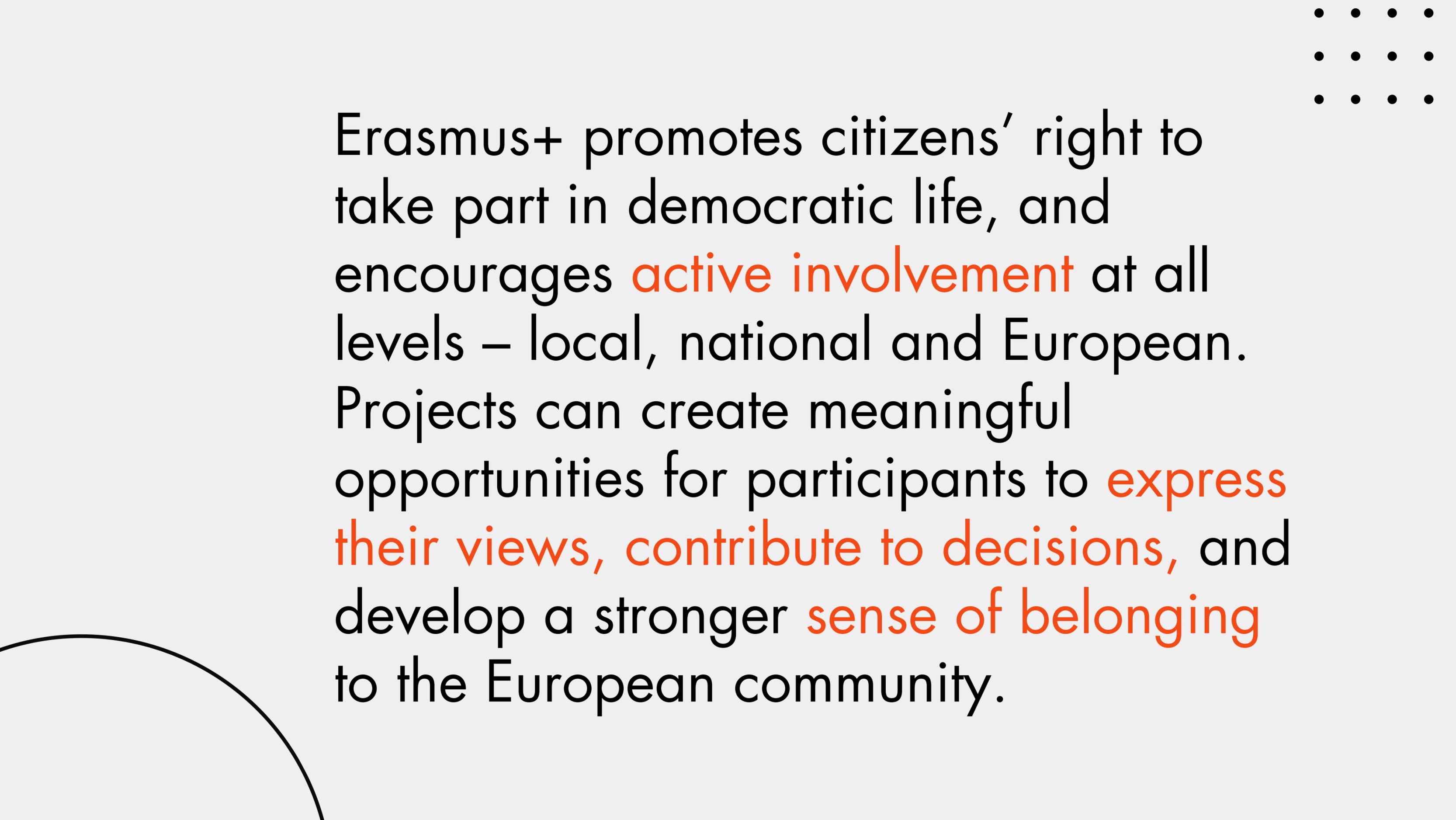




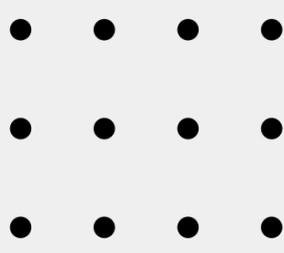
Erasmus+ horizontal priority:

**Participation in democratic life,
common values and civic
engagement**



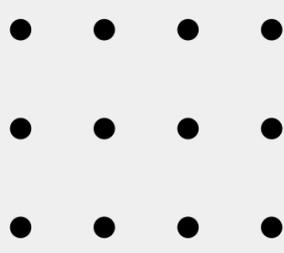


Erasmus+ promotes citizens' right to take part in democratic life, and encourages **active involvement** at all levels – local, national and European. Projects can create meaningful opportunities for participants to **express their views, contribute to decisions,** and develop a stronger **sense of belonging** to the European community.



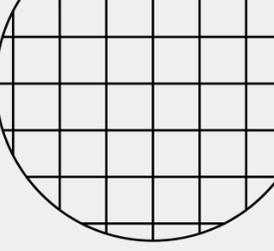
Priority is given to projects that put participation at their heart and **engage target groups directly in shaping and delivering** activities.





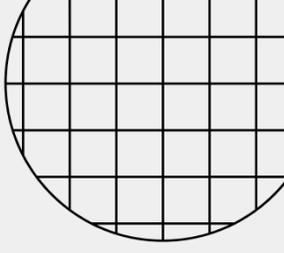
Through both formal and non-formal learning, Erasmus+ supports the development of **key competences** such as **critical thinking, media literacy, civic and intercultural skills**, and understanding of shared **EU values**.





SALTO Participation & Information (PI)





But no equivalent strategy for the fields of education & training (or sport)...

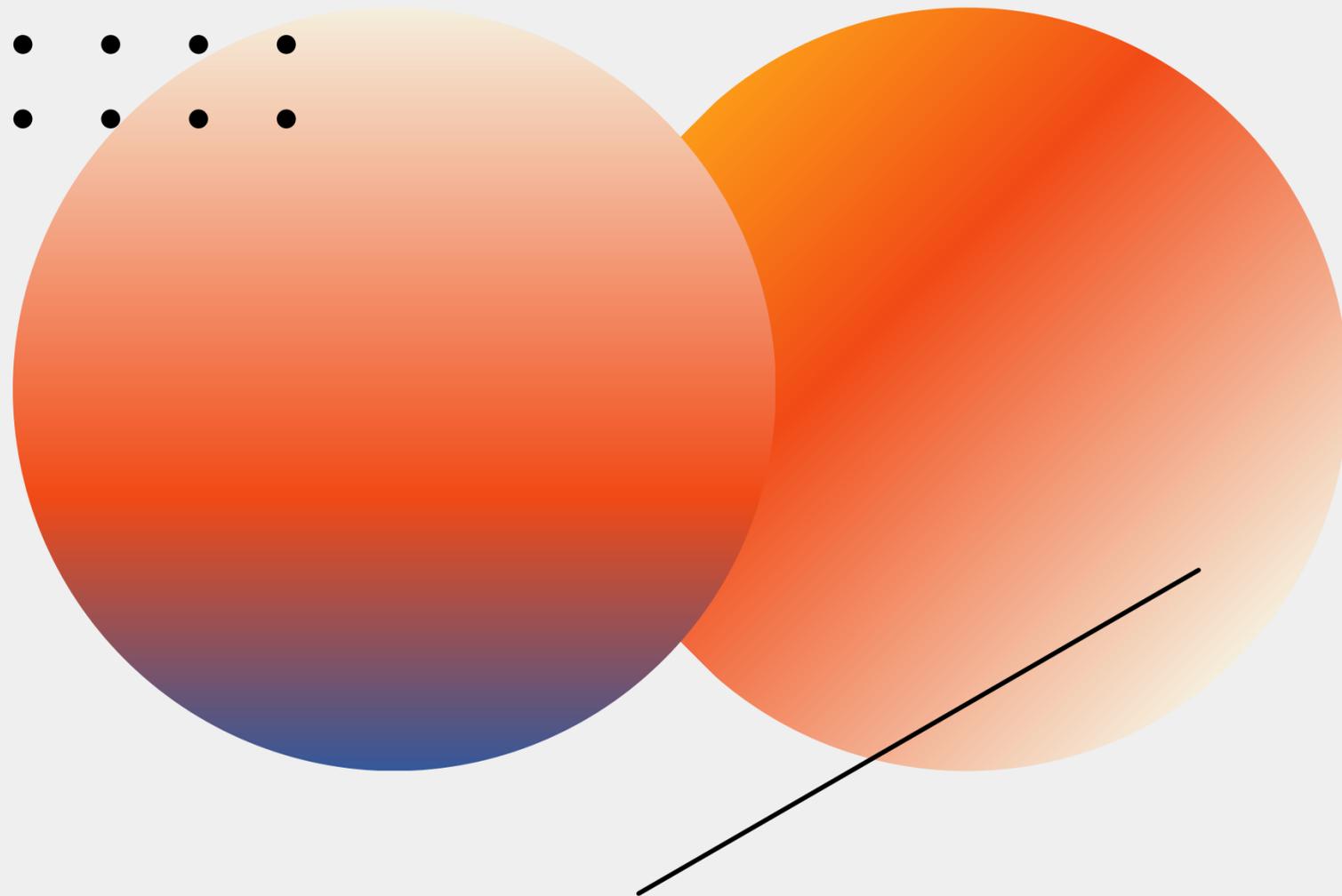


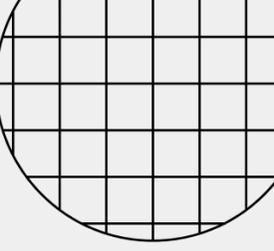
Current situation

Much less conceptual development (and practical guidance) for what participation means for education & training in E+

Youth Participation Strategy expires end of **2027**

European Commission in process of developing a cross-sectoral participation strategy



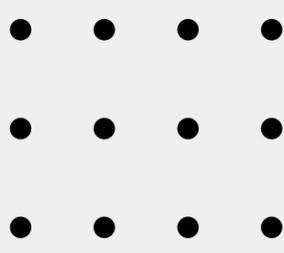


Participation in the field of youth in E+





Youth Participation Strategy (p. 19)



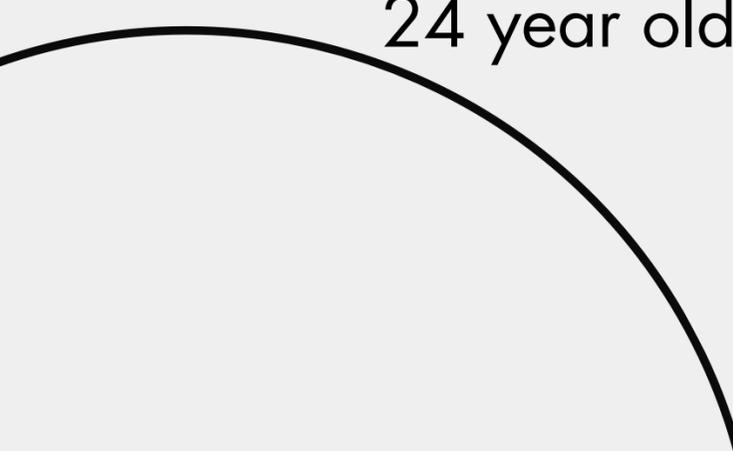
Ways E+ supports participation in the field of youth

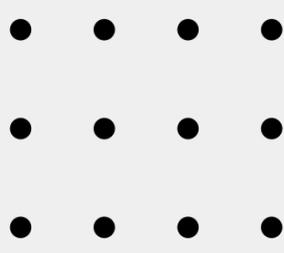
(not mutually exclusive)

A. Using E+/ESC projects to **enable learning** about participation/democracy

When E+/ESC projects are designed to support learning about participation and democracy among its participants. The goal is for young people to **gain knowledge and understanding about participation and democracy** itself.

E.g. a project to create a campaign to increase voter registration & voting among 18-24 year olds in European elections, or an initiative to deliver a training programme on climate justice and activism in local communities.



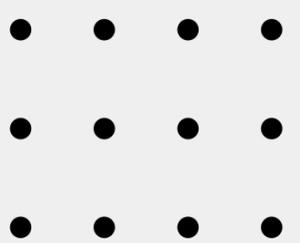


B. Ensuring E+/ESC projects are run on a **participatory basis** / young people are involved in project design / implementation

When E+/ESC projects are designed and implemented in a participatory way, meaning that young people have the opportunity to **shape and influence decisions made in the project itself**.

E.g. projects to raise awareness of digitalisation and democracy, where the project's aims, activities, and budget are decided by an advisory group of young digital activists, or a training for youth workers on green practices, where the training is designed and implemented by young people.



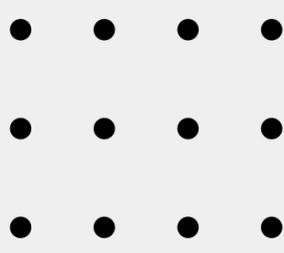


C. Promoting young people's involvement in **shaping E+/ESC** (Eg steering groups at NAs)

When young people are involved in decision-making at the E+/ESC programme level, meaning that young people have the **opportunity to shape the programme itself at a strategic level**. This involvement typically happens in NAs

E.g. a youth advisory council established to provide feedback to NA work programmes, or a consultation (survey and focus groups) is held with young people as part of a strategy development process within the NA.



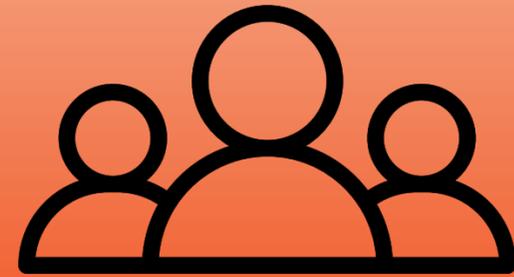
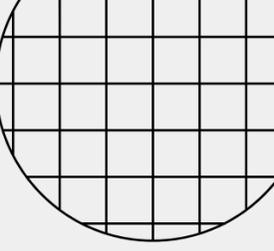


D. E+/ESC projects that enable young people to **engage in broader political and civic life** as **active citizens & volunteers**

Another way participation is an outcome is when projects aim to support the engagement of young people in political and civic life through **volunteerism and other engagement.**

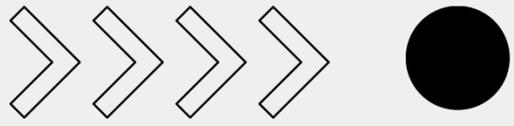
E.g. Volunteering opportunities under the European Solidarity Corps, projects that support young people and youth CSOs taking part in the EU Youth Dialogue, or a training course that builds the capacities of young climate activists who will attend the COP UN Climate Change conferences.





Possible synergies between youth & education sectors





Opportunities

in the field of youth

Space

in the field of youth

**Youth &
Higher
Education**

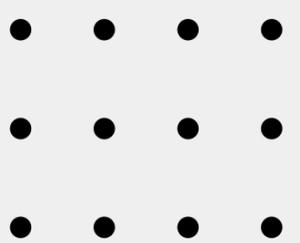
Competencies /Skills

in the field of education

Knowledge

in the field of education





Opportunities & space for participation

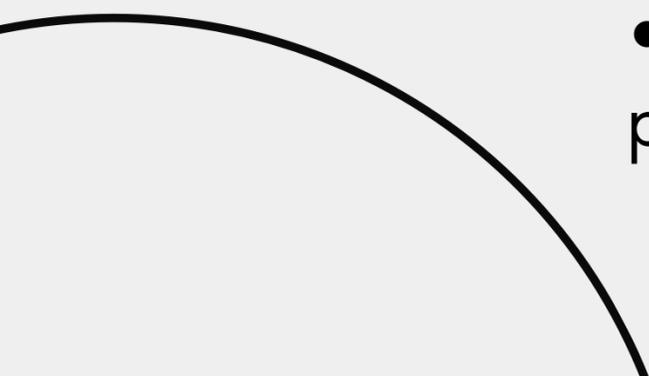
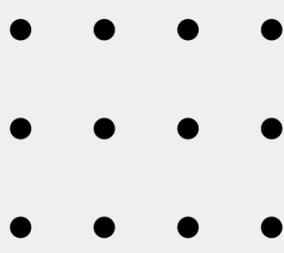
In the field of youth

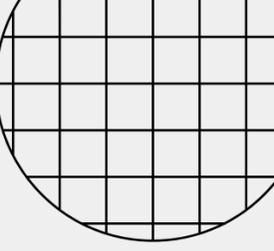
- Young people excluded from formal decision-making due to age (e.g. voting) or are new to it – creating spaces becomes more important
 - Non-formal education through youth work, open to non-hierarchical approaches (participation in practice) - youth worker-youth relationship one of equals
 - Non-formal education focusing more on soft skills/life skills, less pedagogic/domain expertise, less focus on teaching
 - Youth CSOs the main beneficiaries – by nature can be more flexible, experimental, decision-making can be done in participatory ways (& some funders demand it)
- 

Competencies, skills & knowledge for participation

In the field of (higher) education

- Learning, competency and skills development the domain of education (e.g. civic education, courses about EU law & politics)
- Formal education and classroom classic setting for participation in practice: critical thinking, debate, collaboration, consensus-making, democratic pedagogy
- Classrooms more formalised, teacher-student relationship one of hierarchy
 - Universities are more standardised, regulated, less flexibility to open processes for participatory approaches





Visioning towards cross- sectorality (& why it matters)





Cross-sector

approach to participation:
Why would it matter?

(not just because there is a cross-
sectoral strategy in development)

Cross-sectorality matters because participation matters

POLITICO

EU-US relations | War in Ukraine | Newsletters | Podcasts | Poll of Polls | Policy news | Events

How Italy's Meloni is making the far right cool for Gen Z

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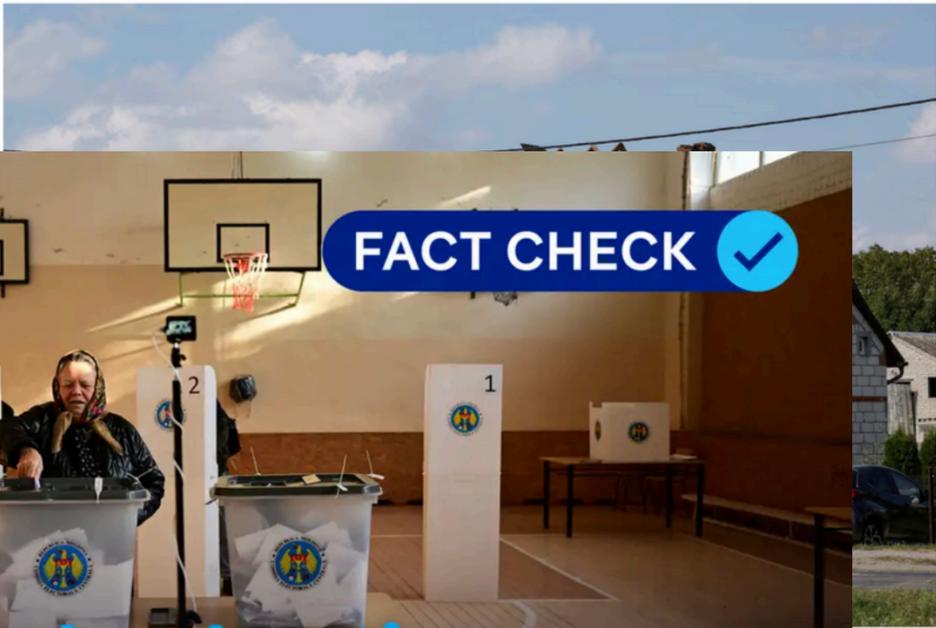


World | Business | Markets | Sustainability | Legal | Commentary | Technology | Investigation

Ukraine says Russia drone incursion part of pressure plan against West

By Tom Balmforth

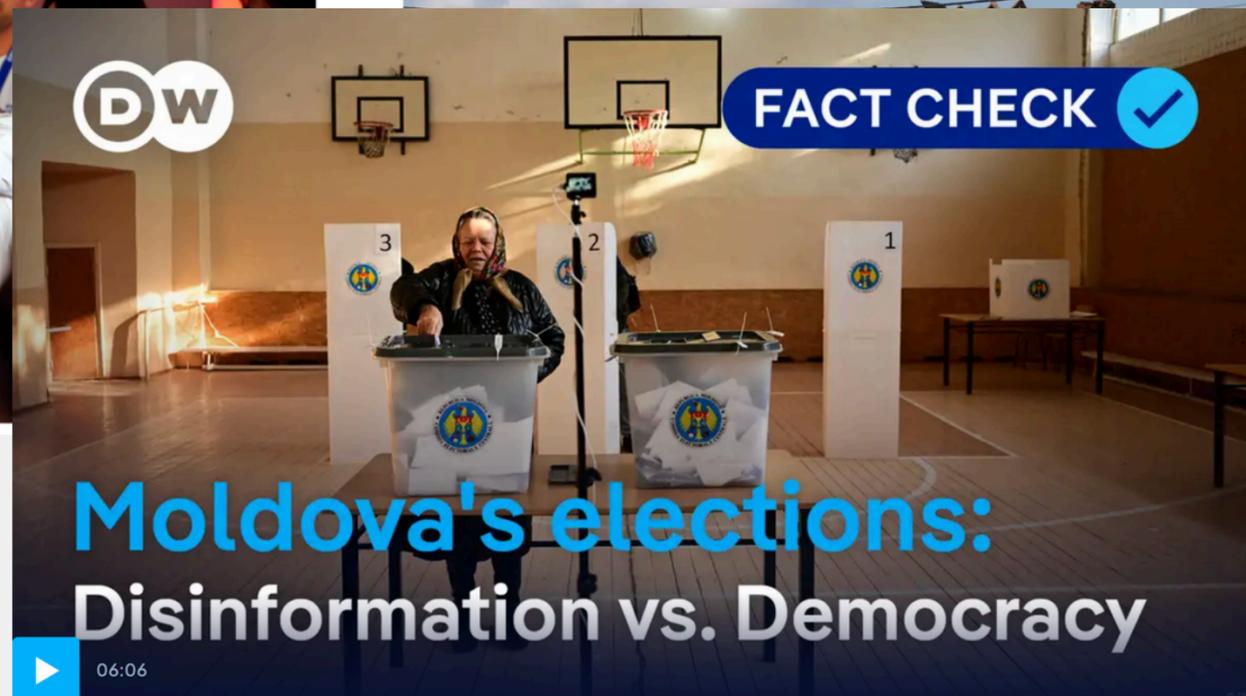
September 26, 2025 9:10 PM GMT+2 · Updated September 26, 2025



DW **FACT CHECK** ✓

Moldova's elections: Disinformation vs. Democracy

06:06



The New York Times

Exxon Urges Europe to Repeal Rules to Make Companies Track Climate Pollution

Its chief executive called the E.U. regulations one part of a “very misguided effort to kill oil.” His words followed comments by Trump administration officials criticizing Europe’s climate policies.

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Europe > Europe News

European rights watchdog raises concerns over freedom of speech in Germany amid Gaza protests



What could a cross-sectoral approach for participation look like?

- Young people, Students, "Citizens": Both sectors engaging overlapping groups - initiative can reinforce and build upon each other
- Schools & universities often the first (& main) public institution young people interact with - build trust in the public good, public services delivered in a democracy
- University campuses as *de-facto spaces for participation*, activism and free speech – universities as safeguarding this space
- Universities are community stakeholders and could work more with social partners like youth CSOs, youth workers
- **Result: Participation higher on the political agenda, empowered, critical & mobilised students and young people, Erasmus+ as a stronger tool for democratic strengthening**

Cristina Bacalso

Thank you

cristina@bacalso.me

