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**DEMY-Coop
DEcision-Making Youth for
cross-border Cooperation**

**Deliverable D 1.4.3 Cross-Border
Participatory Governance Model**

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 **DEMY-Coop**



DEMY-COOP CROSS-BORDER YOUTH GOVERNANCE PARTICIPATORY MODEL

Deliverable D. 1.4.3

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1. Introduction

In recent years, it has emerged that including young people in decision-making processes is crucial to building a democratic and inclusive society. Such active involvement is essential to creating governance that reflects the needs and aspirations of the entire community.

Participatory models are the linchpin in this process. These models, by allowing citizens to directly participate in decision-making, enhance the quality of public policy by incorporating diverse opinions and experiences. They also play a pivotal role in promoting transparency and accountability in institutions. By facilitating the inclusive involvement of young people, these models help tackle complex issues creatively. Moreover, they foster the development of democratic understanding, a sense of responsibility, and the ability to work for the common good.

Developing inclusive, participatory models that aim to involve young people is not just a matter of equity. It is a strategic move that fosters societal cohesion. By enabling youth inclusion in decision-making processes, these models pave the way for governance that is not only responsive to immediate societal needs, but also capable of evolving and adapting to future challenges. Investing in participatory models is, therefore, a step towards a more just and equitable society that also meets sustainability needs.

This deliverable will present a cross-border youth governance model, underlining the importance of youth inclusion in decision-making practices. It will emphasize the necessity of an inclusive application space not defined by national boundaries but among different states.

2. Collaborative Governance

The current historical situation shows how two antithetical logics emerged, leading to difficulties in effectively responding to governance needs. On the one hand, there is social change, which, especially today, advances quickly and substantially; on the other hand, political institutions struggle to adapt promptly to current significant transformations. Therefore, there is a possible challenge in adapting governance to be effective in meeting administrative and civic inclusion needs. This has led to various negative consequences in society, including widespread discredit of politics, citizen dissatisfaction with governments, low electoral participation, and a growing influence of economic powers, but mostly, a high rate of youth disinterest in active political participation.

The academic world and various representative organizations at different government levels have repeatedly emphasized the importance of youth participation in promoting active citizenship, social inclusion, and contribution to the development of different countries. Therefore, there is a need to build inclusive governance models dedicated to strengthening youth participation in the decision-



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making process at all levels, making their involvement required in all decision-making processes to facilitate greater diversity, representativeness, and preparedness in youth participation.

Among the possible solutions to improve governance is undoubtedly the development of participatory governance at the local authority level, which should include citizen involvement, ensuring transparency and accountability to promote trust between all segments of the population and institutions. A crucial point is certainly the guarantee of a dedicated space for young people, including education and training for them.

In Italy and Croatia, the definition of “youth” is not regulated by law and varies according to the specific field of application. In general, youth policy legislation, both at the national and regional levels, identifies the 14th year as the minimum age from which youth-specific regulations apply. The maximum age limit varies depending on specific legislation and the target groups of the adopted measures, but it is most often set at 34 years of age.

Therefore, after the previous **EU Youth Strategy**, the new **Strategic Programming 2019-2027** was approved in 2018. It aims to promote collaboration among all countries regarding youth.

In this regard, the “**EU Youth Dialogue**” was launched, a codified model of participation through which the European institutions, primarily the Commission, gather and consider the demands of young people and the organizations representing them in developing EU youth policies.

According to the **Revised European Charter on the participation of Young People at Local and Regional Level**, elaborated by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, youth participation brings about “the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society”. Moreover, “young people have the right to be involved in the democratic structures and processes (...) and (local and regional) authorities must engage with young people on an equal basis, avoiding hierarchical relationships which put youth in an inferior position”. These initiatives reveal the imminent importance of developing ad hoc territorial governance to include a youth audience.

Generally, governance is a fundamental concept that embraces managing and controlling resources and decisions within any organization. Effective governance ensures that organizations operate in a transparent, accountable, participatory, efficient and equitable manner, contributing to achieving their goals and creating value for all stakeholders involved.

Therefore, a definition of the inclusive governance concept for youth is needed:

“a participatory process of structures and practices through which young people are actively involved to add value in the decision-making process, implementing strategies and creating policies that directly affect them”.

This concept recognizes the importance of youth perspectives and contributes to personal and civic growth. In addition, benefits such as increased representation by this citizen sector, a significant contribution in innovation due to young people's innovative perspectives and ideas can be recognized. However, most importantly, it contributes to personal and civic growth that promotes a sense of



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responsibility and belonging to the community. The key element is the creation of more inclusive and dynamic societies where young people have an active and recognized role in shaping their future.

The principles of youth participation determine the main characteristics: transparency, inclusivity, and accountability. They ensure that decisions are made in collaboration with young people and that diverse perspectives and interests are considered. This improves the quality of decisions and increases their transparency, legitimacy, and effectiveness.

One of the main characteristics of participatory governance is inclusivity. This means that a wide range of stakeholders, including citizens, civil society organizations, businesses, and institutions, is involved in the decision-making process. In this way, decisions reflect a variety of interests and perspectives. Transparency is another fundamental element: information about decision-making processes must be accessible and understandable to all participants, ensuring that decisions are made openly and responsibly.

Participatory governance promotes continuous dialogue and consultation among the actors involved, facilitating a mutual understanding of problems and solutions and fostering more informed and shared decisions. This approach also encourages shared responsibility, as participants feel more invested in the decisions made and are, therefore, more likely to support and contribute to their implementation. Another key aspect of participatory governance is the empowerment of citizens. It aims to strengthen citizens' roles in managing public affairs, increasing their ability to influence decisions and actively participate in community life. This approach promotes the co-creation of policies, where citizens and governments work together to develop innovative and effective solutions to common problems.

Participatory local governance is achieved through the active involvement of all stakeholders in an area (public and private, local and central, for-profit and nonprofit, individual and collective) and the design and implementation of the goods and services valuable for its economic and social development and the improvement of the quality of life of the communities that live there. It makes the most of the multiplicity of views and interests represented by these different actors as a fundamental resource for achieving balanced and sustainable forms of development, starting from the needs and potential of the territories and the assumption of mutual trust as the foundation for joint work to build shared scenarios, objectives and strategies.

In conclusion, participatory governance represents an innovative and inclusive approach to public policy and resource management. Promoting the active participation of citizens and other stakeholders improves the quality of decisions, transparency, legitimacy and effectiveness of government actions, helping to build more cohesive, trusting and innovative communities.

3. The importance of a cross border cooperation

An adoption problem has emerged in the implementation of traditional models. Increasingly, there is talk of applying these models in broader contexts, referring to a single European public space. This



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space is a unique area characterized by sectoral and territorial interdependencies, creating a growing expansion of cooperation between public and private actors in policy-making and service delivery. The relationships between these public and private entities are also changing, further emphasizing the need for greater coordination of the actions of various actors at different territorial levels. These innovative processes, triggered by the peculiar phenomena of the current era, have necessitated a rethinking of traditional methods of policy-making and implementation, as well as the roles and responsibilities in decision-making processes.

Therefore, it is crucial to underscore the pressing needs and challenges such as climate change, migration, security, and economic development. The uniqueness of these challenges lies in their scope, which extends beyond national borders into cross-border spaces. This underscores the urgent need for coordinating various actors on different levels and in different countries. Hence, the imperative solution is to design and implement governance that transcends national borders to effectively and sustainably address these issues. It is proposed that a cross-border participatory governance model, which can serve as an effective model even outside traditional areas of cooperation, be established, fostering inclusive and responsible governance.

The primary actors in this cross-border model are young people, who, through their participation in these processes, develop awareness and understanding of EU policies and achieve more substantial results. This underscores the potential for youth empowerment and their significant role in shaping the future of cross-border governance.

Cross-border cooperation, based on collaboration between local and regional authorities of different countries, is a powerful tool to solve common problems and promote shared development. This form of governance can bring numerous benefits, fostering optimism about the potential for positive change. It improves international relations by promoting dialogue and mutual understanding between different nations, helping to build stronger and more peaceful relationships and reducing the risk of conflicts. By ensuring close relationships between actors from different states, deeper and more lenient relations develop, helping young people to grow with a more global and comprehensive approach to the issues and resources that affect communities as a whole.

Moreover, it allows for sharing resources and expertise, reducing costs and improving the effectiveness of policies and public services. This is particularly important in limited resources, where intergenerational collaboration can make a difference in citizens' quality of life. For example, joint management of natural resources can lead to more sustainable practices and improved environmental quality. Another significant benefit is economic development. Cross-border cooperation can stimulate economic growth by creating trade networks and promoting joint investments, creating job opportunities, improving the welfare of local communities, and bringing young people closer to the work environment. Regarding environmental management, cross-border cooperation facilitates the integrated management of ecosystems, promoting sustainable practices that benefit multiple states. For instance, collaboration in managing water basins can improve water quality and prevent environmental disasters, or standard biodiversity protection policies can help preserve natural habitats.



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Another crucial positive impact is on social inclusion: it facilitates the integration of different communities and improves access to services for all citizens, regardless of nationality and age. This helps create more cohesive and inclusive societies where all members have equal opportunities to participate and prosper.

Best practices in cross-border cooperation provide effective models that can be applied even outside traditional areas of cooperation. For example, programs like the European Union's Interreg have shown how collaboration between regions of different countries can lead to tangible results regarding regional development and social cohesion. These programs offer a wide range of tools and methodologies that can be adapted and implemented in other parts of the world.

To achieve effective cross-border governance, an inclusive and responsible approach is necessary. This implies the active participation of citizens: they need to be involved in the decision-making process to ensure that policies respond to their needs and aspirations. Their role is undoubtedly that of key actors in this governance model, actively participating in decision-making processes. Additionally, the institutions and actors involved must operate with maximum transparency and accountability, explaining and justifying their actions and decisions.

Furthermore, the proposed governance model must be flexible and adaptable to the diverse contexts it encounters, capable of responding quickly to changes and new challenges. This inclusive and responsible approach can ensure that all citizens effectively benefit from the advantages of cooperation beyond national borders. The realization of cross-border governance represents a step towards a more interconnected, equitable, and prosperous future for all.

4. Best practices

Cross-border youth governance represents an innovative and essential approach to addressing global challenges by promoting cooperation and including young people internationally. Including youth in these models not only enriches the decision-making process with new perspectives and creativity but also contributes to developing their leadership skills and building responsible global citizenship.

Participatory governance for youth involves young people from diverse ages, socio-economic backgrounds, and cultures, ensuring that all voices are represented. This inclusive approach ensures that policies and projects are more equitable and responsive to the needs of all segments of the youth population. For youth participation to be effective, it is crucial to provide young people with the necessary tools, resources, and skills. This empowerment occurs through training programs, access to relevant information, and skill development opportunities, enabling young people to contribute significantly to decision-making processes. Creating dedicated platforms and spaces where young people can freely express themselves and actively contribute is essential, as these allow them to participate in public dialogue and political decisions.



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Offering learning opportunities is crucial to help young people better understand decision-making processes and acquire leadership skills. Educational programs, workshops, and training courses are essential tools to prepare young people for leadership roles and informed participation. Promoting collaboration between young people and adults is another key feature. This approach facilitates dialogue and mutual understanding, allowing the integration of diverse perspectives and creating positive synergy between generations.

There are several examples of programmes that involve young people in the development process, as:

- **Youth Councils**, which are advisory bodies operating at the local, regional, or national level, allow young people to influence political and administrative decisions;
- **Youth Parliaments bodies** that offer young people a formal opportunity to discuss and propose laws and initiatives, simulating the work of real parliaments;
- **Mentoring and Leadership Programs**, which connect young people with experienced leaders to foster the development of their skills and their active participation in governance;
- **Community Projects** that allow young people to take an active part in planning and implementing initiatives that improve their community;
- **Digital Participation Platforms**, which use digital tools to facilitate youth participation in political and social decisions;
- **Youth NGOs** promote youth participation and defend youth rights.

At the same time, a significant example of these best practices is the European Youth Parliament. This network involves young people from across Europe in simulated parliamentary sessions where they discuss and propose resolutions on common interest topics. This project stands out for its inclusivity, ensuring the involvement of young people from diverse nationalities, socio-economic backgrounds, and cultures, and for the empowerment provided through training on legislative processes and negotiation and leadership skills. The resolutions developed by the young people are then presented to honest European parliamentarians, influencing political debate.

Another example is the Erasmus+ youth exchanges, which promote youth mobility among European Union countries through exchange projects. Participants design and implement activities, promoting mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue. The projects focus on relevant themes such as the environment, gender equality, and social inclusion. The Youth Cooperation Fund supports youth cooperation projects between Nordic and Baltic countries, fostering cross-border collaboration through training programs that develop leadership and project management skills and creating networks of young leaders who can share resources and best practices.

The Black Sea Youth Cooperation project involves young people from Black Sea region countries to promote sustainable development and regional cooperation. Young people are directly involved in planning and implementing projects that address specific local and regional needs but with a global vision, including initiatives for marine conservation and environmental education.



In conclusion, the Danube Youth Network connects young people from the Danube Basin countries to promote cooperation and sustainable development in the region through transnational projects addressing issues such as water resource management and environmental protection, conferences, and forums to discuss and develop joint strategies, and educational and training programs to enhance skills and awareness on sustainability issues.

These models of participatory youth governance demonstrate how young people can be meaningfully involved in decision-making processes, contributing to creating more inclusive and dynamic societies. Participatory youth governance not only fosters their personal and professional growth, but also strengthens cohesion and collaboration among different nations.

5. Structure of participative model

The technicality of participatory models is fundamental to ensuring these processes are inclusive, transparent, and effective. Adopting appropriate structures, engagement methodologies, facilitation tools, and monitoring and evaluation techniques allows for the construction of participatory governance that meets community needs and promotes a more robust and inclusive democracy.

At the outset, the creation of structures and platforms that facilitate citizen participation is of paramount importance. These platforms, such as public forums, serve as the bedrock for the transparency and effectiveness of participatory processes. They enable the discussion of ideas of common interest and the implementation of monitoring and evaluation tools that measure the impact of initiatives. These tools include indicators that assess the degree of participation, the level of engagement, and the quality of interactions. The systematic collection of feedback allows for continuous improvement of the processes.

The methodology of participatory models is structured in several phases. The first step in a participatory process is the preparation and planning phase, a crucial stage during which it is essential to clearly define the objectives and the context of the process. This phase sets the foundation for the entire process, emphasizing the importance of a well-thought-out plan. Next is the phase of participant engagement. This phase is crucial because it ensures that all community groups, especially those traditionally excluded from decision-making processes, have the opportunity to participate. To achieve this goal, various techniques can be used, such as awareness campaigns, public meetings, and the use of social media. The aim is to reach as broad and diverse an audience as possible.

The third step is information gathering. It is essential to collect data that will be analyzed and used in the decision-making process. The information collected must be accurate and representative, reflecting the real needs and opinions of the community through surveys, focus groups, or interviews. The discussion and deliberation phase is the heart of the participatory process. Here, participants analyze the information gathered, discuss the different options, and collaborate to develop shared solutions. This phase is crucial as it leads to the decision-making phase, where the consensus achieved



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during the discussions is reflected in the decisions made. These decisions must be implemented transparently and responsibly.

The participatory process does not end with the development and implementation of decisions. The monitoring and evaluation phase is equally crucial. It allows for measuring the effectiveness of the participatory process and the impact of the decisions made. Monitoring can be conducted using participation indicators, such as the number and diversity of participants, the level of engagement, and the quality of interactions.

In conclusion, the effective implementation of participatory models hinges on their technical robustness and adaptability to different contexts. By meticulously planning, engaging diverse groups, accurately gathering and analyzing data, facilitating in-depth discussions, and committing to transparent decision-making and rigorous evaluation, participatory governance can significantly enhance the inclusiveness and responsiveness of democratic processes. Such structured engagement empowers communities and fosters a culture of collaboration and accountability, paving the way for more sustainable, equitable, and inclusive societal development. The commitment to continuous improvement and feedback integration ensures that participatory governance remains dynamic and responsive to the community's evolving needs, ultimately contributing to a more robust and more inclusive democracy.

6. Demy Coop Model

This deliverable aims to create a cross-border network where youth organizations can come together to discuss ideas, share experiences, and support each other. This network aims to facilitate collaboration and mutual assistance, fostering a community that can address regional issues and promote youth empowerment.

The network will bring together various youth organizations, starting with those identified in Deliverable 1 and developed here. The main activities include quarterly meetings aimed at highlighting and analysing difficulties, opportunities, and challenges. Thanks to working group activities, these meetings will allow representatives from different organizations to share updates, identify common challenges, and brainstorm solutions together. These organizations can leverage each other's strengths and resources by working collaboratively.

One key component of this network is the exchange of ideas and support. This will be facilitated through online forums, social media groups, and dedicated communication channels, where members can share best practices, offer advice, and assist each other with everyday challenges. This continuous dialogue will help build a resource pool of documents, guides, and templates for all members.

Educational workshops and training sessions will play a crucial role in the network, ensuring that participants have access to continuous learning and skill development. These sessions will cover various topics, such as grant writing, leadership and management skills, project planning, and advocacy. By



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learning from experts and experienced members within the network, participants will be better equipped to manage projects and apply for funding. Another critical aspect of the network is the implementation of collaborative projects. These projects will address regional issues, such as peace initiatives, social inclusion programs, environmental sustainability, and economic development. The network can pool resources and expertise to achieve a more significant impact by forming project teams with members from different organisations. Regular progress meetings and joint fundraising efforts will ensure these projects are well-supported and successful.

The impact of this network will be significantly positive. Enhanced collaboration will allow organizations to work together more effectively, while increased capacity through education and training will improve their ability to manage projects and secure funding. The network will foster a stronger sense of community and mutual support among youth organizations, giving them a more powerful voice in advocating for youth issues and influencing policy.

This identified network for youth organizations will provide a platform for discussion, support, and collaboration to find solutions for problems shared in several spatial contexts. Through regular meetings, idea exchanges, educational workshops, and collaborative projects, the network will empower youth organizations to address regional issues effectively and promote the active participation of young people in their communities. This inclusive and supportive approach will ensure that all participants benefit from the shared knowledge and resources, leading to a more connected, equitable, and prosperous future for everyone involved.

Annex 1: Outcome of demy coop meetings and recommendations

On field encounters and debates between young people, youth organizations and representatives of local bodies were essential to understand which are the needs and the direction towards which the participative model has to be structured. From encounters, a series of recommendations have risen from the confrontation. Among discussion points, the necessity to create strategies to engage and make young people decide was a priority. Other elements of discussion were the strength of these strategies lies in their inclusivity, which ensures they include diverse youth voices representing different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. It was suggested that this should be done through the creation of structures for engagement, such as youth councils and local councils, which foster democratic debate. A key aspect of these structures is the need for continuous feedback, highlighting the ongoing nature of the engagement process. Finally, they can be summarized in



1. Establish Clear Objectives and Principles

Clearly articulate the goals of youth participation. These include fostering civic engagement, improving policies that affect youth, and developing leadership skills.

2. Inclusivity and Diversity

The model's strength lies in its inclusivity, which fosters a deep sense of belonging among diverse youth voices from different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. This diversity is not just a checkbox but a crucial element that enriches the model and ensures it truly represents the youth it serves.

3. Create Structures for Engagement

a) Youth Councils: Establish local, regional, and national youth councils that advise on policies and programs, creating continuous feedback as well as b) Youth Assemblies: Organize regular youth assemblies or forums where young people can discuss issues, propose solutions, and vote on initiatives.

4. Embed Participation in Policy Processes

Consultation Processes are crucial to institutionalize youth consultation in policy-making processes. This ensures that their input is heard and considered in decisions directly affecting them, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among the youth.

5. Feedback Loops

Ensure there are robust mechanisms for providing youth with feedback on how their input has been used and the outcomes of their participation. This transparency is key to building trust and confidence in the process.

