Youth participation in Spanish urban periphery: its concept, spheres and conditioning factors

Introduction

With the onset of globalisation and the worldwide growth of migration we have witnessed deep structural changes in our societies, which, while they may be economically advanced and socially complex and diverse, are not always inclusive, just, or cohesive.

Previous studies of citizenship, identity, and social rights have demonstrated the need for an intercultural response to the challenge of achieving the sustainable development of democratic, pluralist societies (Favell, 2001; Portes, Celaya, Vickstrom, & Aparicio, 2012). Among the Common Basic Principles for Integration Policy agreed by the European Union, the commitment to social values features prominently as a key factor in structuring society and channelling political engagement, at least in the legislative sphere. Any integration policy of this type presupposes a concept of who we are and what holds us together and must therefore foster an intercultural social model that conceives of coexistence as the creation of arenas where differences can be negotiated and conflicts resolved, and where all citizens feel represented and can participate in a sociopolitical practice that constitutes real, effective citizenship. Thus, it is of key importance to build such arenas, the influence of which on people's development and behaviour are particularly stressed in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. From this standpoint, active civic engagement is a vital foundation stone for building social cohesion and coexistence.

According to Youniss (2011) and Levine (2009) civic education is mainly schooling matter, but not exclusively, because they cultivate the next generation of citizens and civic leaders on whom sustaining democracy depends. This effort is important for all schools but especially for those schools which educate the disadvantaged segment of youth population.

The major part of current literature about social rights emphasizes that citizen participation is as essential as it is moral, and a necessity for any truly democratic society, since it increases quality of life, fosters empowerment, favours psychosocial wellbeing and affords a sense of social inclusion (Matthews, 2003; UNICEF, 2003, 2012). And, the development of civic engagement is strongly related with the context in which it is built. However, some experts point out it is necessary to analyse closer to social context, focused on block and protection factors in the development process of youth community and citizen participation (Schulz et al, 2016).

Our study strikes to fill this gap. We examine the community participation among youth from disadvantaged urban contexts. Our goal is to provide some reflections to review the model of youth participation in these communities from a bio-ecological framework (Hart et al,. 2007), and a mesosystem (interaction) perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This work is focused on the interactions between young people-family-school- neighbourhood, highlighting their concept, spheres, and conditioning (block and protection) factors.

From youth community participation to young people's citizen participation: conditions and requirements

Despite the broad range and variety of its definitions, as well as the different processes and contents grouped together under the aegis of the concept, here we understand participation as a fundamental citizen's right consisting in taking part in decisions which affect one's own life and the life of one's community (Hart, 1992).

Starting from this definition, established scholars in this field such as Robert Hart (1992), Chawla (2001), and Trilla and Novella (2011) underline both the process and active dimensions of participation as essential features. For Sinclair (2004) the empowerment is what distinguishes participation from simply being heard or consulted.

To define participation in the social world more specifically, and taking community and social psychology as a reference point, we see citizen participation as the real and effective ability of an individual or group to make decisions on issues which directly or indirectly affect their lives and their activities in society.

Arnillas and Paccuar (2006) see youth participation as an exercise of power which necessarily acknowledges young people as subjects capable of thinking, acting, engaging in decision-making, defining the what and the how, taking on challenges, and handling the outcomes of projects. This exercise of power takes place within, and helps to build, a framework of horizontal relationships, and conceives communities, cities, and neighbourhoods as privileged actors and arenas for developing active participation and citizenship, and thereby coexistence, integration, and social cohesion (Cano, 2017).

As Novella (2012) remarked, participation is a personal and collective experience facilitating people's engagement in social projects which foster psycho-educational development, the construction of values, and the exercise of active citizenship through discussion and committed action in issues that concern them and which they feel are their own.

From the standpoint of this collective dimension we see young people's community participation as ranging from their participation in organized groups, either pro-social or political, to all activities which go beyond their school syllabus strictly speaking and which take place in public arenas such as squares, community centres and sports facilities (Díaz, Martínez & Cumsille, 2003); such as for example experiences of voluntary work in Service Learning, amongst others.

When we attempt to investigate the uses that young people make of the existing channels of social participation, how they rate them, what hindrances they find to taking part in them, what relationships they have with the other social actors in participation processes, and what alternative forms of participation they would like to develop, recent studies have pinpointed the

social media as a socialising agent and channel influencing and mediatizing young people's values and actions. Likewise, these digital networks have transformed what is learned and the way of learning it. Therefore, a young person who is learning to be and to act along with others in the new social media platforms, according to Balardini (2002), is an individual with the capacity to influence her/his surroundings and to create a stock of social capital; and this can help to redefine her/his role in public space and her/his way of participating, and to build the notion of youth citizenship. Thus, some analysts (Lasén &Martínez, 2008; Agudo, Martín & Tovar, 2011) point a new paradigm about group mobilization, in which people and channels of participation are at the same time subjects and objects of action.

Finally, it is often important and necessary to distinguish between real, full participation and other types of pseudo- or fictitious participation such as those Hart (1992) calls symbolic participation. In these cases, the chance to participate is offered but without any real influence on the final decisions taken. This model, in the particular case of youth, distorts the meaning of participation, since it gives rise to postures of stasis and passive acceptance which weaken both young people's action and adults' interest in fostering it.

In line with the above discussion, our definition of youth participation includes the following elements: (1) social or citizen participation is without doubt one of the dimensions in which youth build their world of group relationships and define their image of social reality; (2) young people construct and develop their participation in specific physical, social, and virtual settings of interaction whose ecology either promotes or hinders the youth's activities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); (3) we assume that youth community participation is a part of a learning process which culminates in the full exercise of citizen participation; and (4) in the development of this learning process the school microsystem and the neighbourhood exosystem represent the interactions and interrelations between individuals and their contexts and between contexts. In

short, these are key settings and actors for developing the participatory competencies that young people need to guarantee their ability to exercise their right of citizen participation.

The neighbourhood and the school: contexts and actors for community action and the promotion of citizen participation among youth

Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems enables us to understand the powerful influence that settings have on people's development. This perspective sees the environment as a set of structures on different levels in which each level contains the others. The individual is surrounded by these environments and her/his interaction with them influences learning and development. Thus, both the school and the local area are key interactional contexts for young people, since these are where they spend much of their time and establish multiple, often highly significant interactions.

Analysts such as Constance Flanagan (2013) argue that young people, before acceding to the right to vote, should understand participation and commitment to democracy, and that therefore civic education should begin at an early age. According to Flanagan (2013), civic interest, the basis of citizen participation, is underpinned by emotional identification and the desire to contribute to a cause. But these factors should be taught or communicated experientially, and it is here that the school emerges as the privileged field for sowing the seeds of civic commitment, democratic culture, and citizen participation. To achieve this, the school must provide situations or simulations on a democratic model: debates, elections, votes, discussions of electoral programmes, meetings on problems and issues of concern to students, etc. Flanagan argues that a democratic education of this type would form habits that youth would subsequently extend to their adult lives.

Also, the neighbourhood is the setting in which young people define their social world and residents' structure of opportunities (Wacquant, 2008), either in public areas or in their

interaction with local institutions such as schools and education centres, social centres, recreational and sports organisations, and businesses.

For some years, the local area has been seen as a decisive, harmful influence on its residents, especially in the case of the most run-down, socially blighted neighbourhoods, which carry a strong stigma both for the area itself and for its inhabitants. However, there are other studies that distance themselves from this image of the area as a site of social exclusion and claim, contrastingly, that it is a key context and actor in the repoliticization of the city and a privileged arena for developing new forms of solidarity, integration, and social cohesion (Musterd, Murie, & Kesteloot 2006). From this latter standpoint, every neighbourhood represents a structure of opportunities, which is ideal for developing social innovation through citizen participation.

In any context and, still more in those where social vulnerability and the concentration of disadvantaged households are on the increase, community action and residents' participation in education can be especially advantageous and are particularly important as drivers of social transformation. The community perspective should also play a central role in social and education policies, incorporating individuals into a range of social networks (Sandín et al., 2016).

In order to foment citizens' participation, especially youth participation, we need to develop ethical and reflexive approaches founded on a commitment to progress from a community-centred standpoint and develop the "citizenist" or "self-management" model (Quijada & Seller, 2012), in which participation is considered a right for all citizens and a means of improving quality of life, further developing democracy, and easing social articulation.

Method

Below we describe the methodological features of the study: the context analysed, the participants, and the data-gathering techniques used; and finally, we analyse the data collected.

Contexts of the analysis: the neighbourhoods studied and participants

The context of this study, the Great Barcelona (the city of L'Hospitalet in general, and the areas of Collblanc, Torrassa, and La Florida, in particular), includes advanced social marginalisation contexts (Wacquant, 2008), due to residential and school segregation processes, thus increasing the risk of social exclusion of a large part of their residents and, by extension, of students in their high schools.

The participants in the study were 297 secondary school students from 12 to 16 years old from three high schools in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat (Barcelona, Spain). The characterization of the sample is as follows (see table 1).

Table 1.

Data-gathering techniques

The participatory appraisal had a mixed triangulated design, combining complementary qualitative and quantitative techniques.

In this paper we present findings obtained by means of:

a) A questionnaire designed to determine, from the young people's perspective, the different spheres (both physical and virtual) of participation, its degrees or intensities, and its specific contents (see annex 1).

b) Three discussion groups designed for the young people to go into greater depth on their concept of participation, its different spheres, what factors they saw as affecting it, and what personal and social benefits it had (see annex 2).

The questionnaire

The main objective of the questionnaire was to obtain data on the young people's exercise of participation by exploring five scales corresponding to the dimensions below in Table 2: (1) the concept of participation; (2) the level or degree of participation; (3) the spheres of

participation (physical and virtual); (4) the factors affecting participation; and (5) the initiatives, actions and activities of the young people themselves.

Table 2.

The questionnaire was composed of Likert scale questions (from one to five, with a minimum value of 'nothing' and a maximum of 'a lot') and written open questions. The questionnaire was administered online and face-to-face in each of the high schools.

The design of this technique combined the general lines of a more conventional study with a triple deductive, inductive and participatory approach to yield the definitive version of the procedure.

This paper presents our findings from three of the questionnaire's scales, specifically the questions exploring the concept of participation, its spheres or contexts, and its conditioning factors (both positive and negative). The internal reliability of the three scales could be described as highly satisfactory, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, 0.81 and 0.77 respectively.

The focus groups

To complement and triangulate the information gathered in the questionnaire, three focus groups were set up, one in each of the high schools.

The script for these groups was organised around five main dimensions: (i) the concept of participation; (ii) the spheres of youth participation; (iii) the factors affecting participation; (iv) the benefits experienced; and (v) suggestions for developing social participation.

Each focus group was made up of 10-12 students, chosen intentionally -according to criteria of representation by courses and ages -, and with an equal proportion of males and females.

Data analysis

The analysis of the data obtained from the focus groups was organized via the following progressive steps of reduction and theoretical structuring:

1: Segmentation and identification of the units of meaning and their grouping into categories.

2: Building a system of core themes on the topics of most interest to the study.

3: Identifying the categories of analysis.

We used a constant comparative approach for the data analysis. Once a system of categories had been created (see Table 3) the information was processed with the QSRNVIVO 11 program.

Table 3.

This article presents the main results derived from the more relevant categories of analysis. As we appreciate in the matrix encoding (see annex 3) nodes or categories with higher percentage of encoded words (percentage column) are: *factors affecting participation* and *spheres of participation*.

In order to analyse the quantitative data two techniques were employed, one univariate (descriptive) and other multivariate, using the figures resulting from an exploratory factor analysis of the scales' outcomes.

Results

Here we set out our findings in the following order: the reduction of the scales "What does participate mean?" and "Levels of participation, spheres and frequency" using an exploratory factor analysis of their main components with varimax rotation.

In these analyses we tested the adequacy each scale, confirming it with Bartlett's sphericity test and the KMO sampling adequacy test. Thereafter we performed a descriptive analysis of the items composing the factors obtained; and the triangulation of complementarity carried out with the focus group information is shown by the content analysis.

Young people's views on youth participation

The factor analysis of the "What is participation?" scale showed that it consisted of eight components with values over 1 (see Table 4): these explained 65% of variance (10.46%, 9.82%,

8.83%, 8.38%, 7.76%, 7.42%, 7.03% and 5.37% respectively) and enabled us to identify more closely, from the viewpoint of respondents, the purposes of participation and their engagement in the different spheres.

Table 4.

As we see in Table 4.1, the items of factor 1 (which we have called "utility and obligation") essentially links the concept of participation to helping people and to its utility in building a better society. The item of obligation also appears in this factor, although very evenly shared with factor 6 ("participation in private and public spheres"). These data may be interpreted as an ambivalence in the concept, although the means tend to show that for the youth the most representative feature of participation was its utility.

Table 4.1.

Probably participation-as-obligation can best be understood in the light of the specific actions shown in factor 6 ("participation in the private and public spheres"), namely, helping at home, helping loved ones and voting in elections. On the descriptive level we see that helping at home had the highest mean score. It seems that the youth saw these three activities as obligations; in other words, participation became obligation when it was seen as a formal imposition, either at home on in the public sphere.

This mental representation that the youth had of participation confirms two of the basic dimensions of civic interest suggested by Flanagan (2013): emotional identification and the desire to contribute to a cause. Likewise, it shows that some youth tended to link these acts of cooperation and collaboration with a close micro-system such as the family, school or friends. Factor 4 ("helping") comprises all aspects of offering help or aid and is made up of the following items (see again table 4.1): helping psychologically, economically and socially. Next, factor 5 ("connections") shows how participation is associated with feelings of belonging and is composed of the following items: it is joining in with something, it is being part of

something and it is having an opinion. In both factors the concept of participation that emerges refers to the young people's preference for forming part of a particular context in order to help in a wide variety of ways.

The factors discussed so far confirm the multidimensionality of youth participation (Liebel, 2013) and tend to relate it to a personal and collective experience of engagement in social projects favouring psycho-social development, building values, and political participation through debate and committed action on issues which concern youth and which they feel as their own (Novella, 2012). Seen in this way, participation offers them the chance to develop their potential as citizens taking an active part in the community.

Factor 2 ("personal consequences of participation") comprises the items denoting the personal consequences of participating: fun, learning and sharing. Factor 3 ("social consequences of participation") shows participatory action in terms of its social consequences: it is responsibility, listening and a right.

Another dimension yielded by the factor analysis corresponds to youth's perception of the personal and collective benefits of participation, reflected in factor 7 ("personal and collective benefits"), which is composed of items such as: gaining personal benefits and gaining collective benefits.

The last in the scale is factor 8 ("individual versus collective action"), in which the individual side of participation is shown to have more weight than the collective. However, on a descriptive level the young people's response placed individual action below collective experience.

The data outlined here shows that our respondents related participation to learning and communication and clearly understood its collective dimension, while prioritising the individual in the sense that it is the person who decides to spend time working with others and take on social responsibility for the collective good. Furthermore, the youth saw participation

as linked with living in a democratic community in which they shared responsibility for groups and social wellbeing. These outcomes, then, concur with the importance that Flanagan (2013) gives to responsibility towards others as the core of citizenship.

Spheres of youth participation: from offline to online

Considering the factor analysis outcomes for the "Levels of participation, spheres and frequency" scale, we identified 5 components with values over 1, which between them explain 66.7% of variance in the responses (the contribution of each is 16.7%, 16%, 13.5%, 10.5% and 9.7% respectively). Of these 5 components we discuss two in this section: factor 1, "participates in neighbourhood context," and factor 2, "participates in online context;" the three remaining will be examined in the following section ("channels and conditioning factors of participation") (see table 5).

Table 5

As Table 5.1. shows, the data enable us to demonstrate that the youth participated both in various offline spheres, mainly the local area (factor 1, "participates in neighbourhood context) and online (factor 2, "participates in online context"). This can be demonstrated from the items making up these two factors: factor 1 comprises: *in my neighbourhood I participate in activities where my opinion has been taken into account; in my neighbourhood I participate in activities with older people; in my neighbourhood I participate in initiatives that I suggest; and I attend activities that my friends go to*. And factor 2: *I take part in websites where I can give my opinion; in online initiatives where we take decisions together; in online initiatives that I suggest; and in online activities suggested by my friends on social media*.

Table 5.1.

Grouping the items that refer to where the youth participated, the descriptive data place neighbourhood organisations first (social, civic, sports, etc.); second the neighbourhood public sphere; third high school; fourth the virtual and online contexts; and lastly at home.

The information provided by the focus groups reinforced the importance of these spheres of participation for the youth, as their testimony shows:

> *I take part in a lot of activities… Cicerone programme, cello, Hospitalet human towers group. I don't have much time for anything else. (Student 1)*
>
> *We like meeting with my friends in the Little Birds Park, underground entrance, we just hang out, nothing else. (Student 2)*

Turning to online participation, the items with the highest scores (over 80%) were the social networks, the most visited sites being Facebook (91.2%), WhatsApp (91.2%), and YouTube (88.9%), while the lowest-scoring (under 20%) were the online press (15.5%) and informer sites (17.8%). Other scores fell between 25.9% for blogs and 66.3% for Instagram. This online context basically represents social support and the extension of personal contacts, including friends far from the most frequent offline spheres of participation (Costa, Cuzzocrea, & Nuzaci, 2014):

> *I've got Friends in Facebook. And I see some of them and others I don't. (Student 3)*
>
> *I've got WhatsApp and Instagram, I've got a few friends. But what I don't use much is Facebook or Twitter. (Student 4)*

For 88.9% and 83.8% of the young people respectively, the virtual world motivates them in their interpersonal relationships (contacts with friends and family) and their hobbies and pastimes (sharing their tastes in IT, artistic pursuits, music, etc.).

These data confirm recent studies (Torrego & Gutiérrez, 2016; Jenkins, 2008) showing that youth participation in social media seems more ludic than ideological.

Without underestimating the potential of the social media as spaces for the exchange of information, collaboration, interaction, and mobilisation (Balardini, 2002), it was clear that the young people in our study preferred to engage and interact in physical arenas which held

significance for them, such as the high school microsystem and the neighbourhood exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This was also illustrated by the focus groups:

> *Helping people motivates me. That's why I take part in these projects at school. (Student 5)*

> *Learning things motivates me. I help in the reception classes for immigrant kids, and I do it to learn stuff. (Student 6)*

In short, the youth tended to choose participation in face-to-face, familiar, everyday spaces in which they felt an involvement: offline spaces where they could take a leading role and be pro-active around the issues affecting them, and where they took on responsibilities in the participatory tasks (giving opinions, taking decisions and creatively appropriating participation strategies and procedures) of the school and family contexts.

Channels and factors affecting youth participation: blocks and challenges

As remarked above, this section centres on analysing the three remaining factors identified in the factor analysis of the "Levels, spheres and frequency of participation" scale: factor 3, "participates at home;" factor 4, "intervention in the task;" and factor 5, "organization of activities" (see Table 5). Likewise, in this section we explore the influences bearing on youth participation.

The data show a variety of ways or forms of participation in the different spheres analysed. Thus, in the family the role of youth was essentially consultative; their adult counterparts limited themselves to taking their opinions into account. At high school the main channel of youth participation was in response to teachers' proposals, and in these cases our respondents shared the organization with their schoolmates. This was illustrated by the items composed of the factors mentioned above (see table 5.1): (a) factor 3, "participates home context" (at home we take decisions together; at home they take my opinion into account; at home I suggest the

task to do; (b) factor 4, "intervention in the task" (at school I participate in response to teachers' proposals; at home I do the jobs they ask me to do; at school the teachers take our opinions into account in activities; and (c) factor 5, "activity organization" (high school activities organized by myself and friends; high school activities organized jointly by teachers and students.

According to the young people, and as table 6 shows, the main hindrances to community and citizen participation were, in order of importance and in line with the descriptive statistics: (a) adult attitudes; (b) the workings of the system and of the channels for participation; (c) the self-perception of having little influence on others (feeling that others took no notice of them; (d) lack of personal participation competences (not knowing how to express themselves, not having leadership qualities); and (e) economic problems. To a lesser extent factors relating to cultural backgrounds and gender were alluded to.

The focus groups confirmed these outcomes and nuanced further the factors associated with lack of trust and empowerment from parents or significant adults, in addition to economic problems and lack of time due to family responsibilities:

> *My parents make it difficult for me. I'm sure if I wanted to spend time doing something else that they saw as more useful they'd help me more…* (*Student 7*).
>
> *Out of school I prefer to meet my friends in the parks… everything else is really expensive (Student 8).*

The youth also referred to antisocial behaviour and lack of security in their contexts as a further factor hindering their participation in the local area. Both of these factors stemmed from the precarity and vulnerability of the environments we studied:

> *Here there are fights between kids sometimes, and also between adults… so obviously you don't feel like spending much time in the street. (Student 9).*

Regarding the conditions favouring face-to-face participation, the questionnaire included three types of factors: the first relating to people ("Who do you participate with?"), the second to places ("Where do you participate?") and the third to times ("When do you participate?"). In the first of these "participating with my friends" was the highest-scoring item (avg. 4.20%); in the second, "participating in class" (avg. 3.64%); and in the third – although there were scarce differences here – "participating during elections" (avg. 3.29%).

From the focus groups we found that the youth participated mainly with their friends and family, in familiar places where they felt comfortable (in class and at high school), in a climate of safety and trust, and at the appropriate times for engaging in their personal interests, hobbies, pastimes and artistic interests.

> *At home they help me, but both there and at school they always tell us what we should be doing. It's true that I do loads of things that take up my time in the evenings, but the question is: I'm interested in music, why am I wasting my time doing maths? (Student 10)*

> *A cheap way is to ask a friend who's better than you at something to help you and explain things. (Student 11)*

The factors identified in this section display a type of youth participation closer to the symbolic and fictitious (Hart, 1992) than the effective, much less the spontaneous or self-managed. Here we note a pervading adult-centric and/or paternalistic attitude towards youth which hindered them from participating more and from exercising their citizenship more effectively in issues affecting them and to which they could feel a commitment. From the standpoint of citizenship seen as sociopolitical practice (Ramiro & Alemán, 2016); these data encourage us to foster its exercise in everyday relationships and in the youth's ways of living in the school, family, and community contexts; in other words, boosting youth community participation. To the extent

that young people engage in these participatory experiences they embrace and develop new habits and abilities that guarantee their full participation as citizens (Flanagan, 2013).

Conclusions

These results invite us to reflect on the model of youth participation in their communities from bio-ecological framework (Hart et al., 2007), and mesosystem (interaction) perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Our findings are focused on the interactions between young people and the family and school microsystems and the neighbourhood exosystem, highlighting their concept, spheres, and, conditioning (block and protection) factors.

Firstly, related to their concept, they reveal a symbolic construction of participation stressing its utility for helping or improving, and which is only felt to be an obligation when it was seen as formal imposition in the private (helping at home) or public spheres (voting). The youth's concept of participation associated it with feelings of belonging (participating is being part of something) and with social responsibility, in terms of working with others towards collective benefits. Further, the youth saw participation as a personal experience but also collective, involving discussion and action around issues, which concerned them and they felt to be their own. Thus, in line with Flanagan's (2013) notion of civic interest as the basis of citizen participation, it is important to widen and strengthen the community and collective dimension of participation, encouraging young people to go beyond their most familiar and significant microsystems. To this purpose it is advisable firstly to reinforce schools and neighbourhoods as key contexts and actors in a form of civic education that should boost youth community participation to foment their full participation as citizens; and secondly to promote the community aspects of social and education policy, for example Service Learning projects.

Secondly, regarding spheres, our findings show that in these spaces the youth were active around issues affecting them and took on participatory responsibilities (sharing their opinions, taking decisions jointly, proposing tasks). These were arenas in which they brought their

experience of citizenship into play (Flanagan, 2013), strengthening the value of community participation organised by the school together with the neighbourhood. Therefore, we should encourage youth's active role in joint initiatives with a range of social actors, setting up coordinated structures of participation between these and the associations on the ground (Cano, 2017; Sandín et al., 2016).

However, our analysis of the factors conditioning youth participation describe a situation tending towards simple and consultative participation, according to Trilla and Novella's (2001), or in Hart's (1992) merely symbolic or "fictitious." Following those classifications, the youth were simple executors rather than social actors with a leading role in issues affecting the life of the community. Thus, the actions were consultative rather than involving the real exercise of power which Arnillas and Paccuar (2006) stress in a more active and self-organising concept of youth participation. In the same way, the young people stated that one of the main difficulties they faced in participation was simply being trusted, and they remarked on resistances and limitations from the adult world which delayed or blocked their participation in the issues affecting them and to which they felt they could commit themselves.

Thirdly, our findings suggest that we should move from a policy of presence (symbolic rather than transformative) to one of influencing young people's microsystem. This urges us towards more experiential, meaningful, functional initiatives based on the commitment to social improvement through community participation (Eurydice, 2012). Three basic prerequisites stand out what are consistent with the principles of social participation in education: (a) motivation (wanting to participate); (b) training (knowing how to participate); and (c) organization (being able to participate) (Muñoz, 2009). Also, when respect, trust, active listening, and the right of the child or young person to be heard are placed at the core of school projects they make education more effective and are indicators of its quality (Sandín et al.,

2016). What happens within the school in terms of civic learning is not only important to young people, but also brings benefits to the surrounding area and the community.

Finally, another important aspect of our findings is the value of online spheres of participation for youth. Without leaving aside the importance of the local area and the school as key actors and spheres for promoting social participation in education, we should also understand and accept that youth today grow up in a context saturated with communication and relational technologies. Thus, we should rethink our view of their online participation; while the internet offers possibilities for participation, the challenge is to know how to channel these in the sociopolitical sphere, in the community in the widest sense, and especially in the schools as agents of socialization *par excellence*, not only promoting the development of digital competencies but also bringing critical awareness and democratic and civic values to them (Balardini, 2002).

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TABLES

Table 1

Characterisation of sample

Total number	297 students
Age	12-16 years
Education level	Compulsory secondary education
City	L'Hospitalet de Llobregat (Barcelona, Spain)
Neighbourhood	26% in La Florida 14% in Collblanc 14% in Torrassa *the remaining percentage did not furnish information on this question.
Place of birth	6% were born in Spain 15% in Ecuador 12% Bolivia 11% the Dominican Republic 7% India 29% were from other non-European Community countries, mainly Asia and Latin America

Note: The sample calculations were made posteriori for a confidence level of 95.5% for finite populations (p and q = 0.5), yielding a margin of error of ± 0.055.
Source: created by the authors.

Table 2

Specific fields of the questionnaire

Dimensions	Indicators	Type of question
Concept of participation	Agreement and/or disagreement with statements defining what participation is and what it entails	Scale (1 to 5)
Contexts of participation	Spheres of participation	Scale (1 to 5)
Level of in-person participation	Degree of participation in particular activities	Scale (1 to 5)
Obstacles to in-person participation	Degree of difficulty of participation in different contexts	Scale (1 to 5)
	Factors hindering participation	Scale (1 to 5)
Feelings aroused by participation	Feelings experienced in the course of participation	Scale (1 to 5)
Factors favouring participation	Factors favouring participation	Scale (1 to 5)
Online participation	Virtual platforms participated in	Nominal
	Uses of the internet	Nominal
Factors favouring online participation	Factors favouring online participation	Nominal
Obstacles to online participation	Factors hindering online participation	Scale (1 to 5)
Satisfaction with participation	Assessment of the degree of satisfaction with participation	Scale (1 to 5)
Features of the sample	Personal data	

Source: created by the authors.

Table 3

Scheme of categories for focus group discussion

CATEGORY: NAME	CODE		DEFINITION
CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATION	CONCPARTI		CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATION
FACTORS AFFECTING PARTICIPATION	COND		FACTORS AFFECTING PARTICIPATION
SPHERES OF PARTICIPATION	EP		SPHERES OF PARTICIPATION
ONLINE SPHERES	ONLINE		ONLINE SPHERES
BENEFITS	BENE		BENEFITS
SUGGESTIONS FOR PARTICIPACIÓN	PROPPARTI		SUGGESTIONS FOR PARTICIPACIÓN

Source: created by the authors.

Table 4

Grid showing the components of the "What is participation?" scale and the corresponding weights of each item in each component.

	FACTORS							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Participating is useful for feeling good about yourself	.657							
It means helping anyone who needs it	.642							
Participation is useful for improving society	.577							
Participation is an obligation	.493					.413		
Participation is fun		.801						
Participation is learning		.782						
Participation is sharing		.710						
Participation is a responsibility			.775					
Participation is listening to others			.658					
Participation is a right			.654					
Participation is helping psychologically				.751				
Participation is helping economically				.729				
Participation is helping socially				.692				
Participation is joining in with something					.830			
Participation is being part of something					.754			
Participation means sharing your opinions					.438			
Participation is voting in elections						.805		
Participation is helping at home						.597		
Participation is helping the people I love						.484	.439	
Participation is useful for getting personal benefits							.800	
Participation is useful for getting collective benefits	.424						.618	
Participation is an individual action								.802
Participation is a collective action	.415							.578

Note: Factor_1: "utility and obligation"; Factor_2: "personal consequences of participation"; Factor_3: "social consequences of participation"; Factor_4: "helping"; Factor_5: "connections"; Factor_6:" participations in private and public spheres"; Factor_7: "personal and collective benefits"; Factor_8: "individual versus collective action".

Source: created by the authors.

Table 4.1.

Average score of component items from factors of "What is participation?" scale

FACTORS	ITEMS	AVERAGE SCORE
Factor_1: utility and obligation	Participating is useful for feeling good about yourself	4,02
	It means helping anyone who needs it	4,09
	Participation is useful for improving society	3,90
	Participation is an obligation	1,97
Factor_2: personal consequences of participation	Participation is fun	3,67
	Participation is learning	4,00
	Participation is sharing	3,87
Factor_3: social consequences of participation	Participation is a responsibility	3,44
	Participation is listening to others	3,75
	Participation is a right	3,52
Factor_4: helping	Participation is helping psychologically	3,30
	Participation is helping economically	2,70
	Participation is helping socially	3,77
Factor_5: connections	Participation is joining in with something	4,02
	Participation is being part of something	3,84
	Participation means sharing your opinions	4,01
Factor_6: participations in private and public spheres	Participation is voting in elections	3,27
	Participation is helping at home	3,88
	Participation is helping the people I love	3,54
Factor_7: personal and collective benefits	Participation is useful for getting personal benefits	2,91
	Participation is useful for getting collective benefits	3,46
Factor_8: individual versus collective action"	Participation is an individual action	2,97
	Participation is a collective action	3,68

Source: created by the authors.

Table 5

Matrix of components from the "Levels, spheres and frequency of participation" scale.

	FACTORS				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Neighbourhood_Participated initiatives where my opinion was taken into account	**.840**				
Neighbourhood _ Participated activities older people	**.840**				
Neighbourhood _ Participated in initiatives that I suggested	**.797**				
Neighbourhood _ Attended activities friends go to	**.681**				
In websites where I can give my opinion		**.870**			
In online initiatives taking decisions together		**.807**			
In online initiatives that I suggested		**.771**			
Online activities suggested by friends		**.637**			
At home_we take decisions together			**.875**		
At home _they take my opinion into account			**.825**		
At home _I suggest the task to do			**.742**		
High school_participate in response to teachers' proposals				**.751**	
At home _Jobs they ask me to do				**.688**	
High school _activities teachers take our opinions into account				**.656**	
High school _Activities organised with friends					**.795**
High school _Activities teachers and students organise together					**.722**

Note: Factor_1: "participates in neighbourhood context"; Factor_2: "participates in online context"; Factor_3: "participates at home"; Factor_4: "intervention in the task"; Factor_5: "organization of activities".

Source: created by the authors.

Table 5. 1.

Average score of component items from factors of "Levels, spheres and frequency of participation" scale

FACTORS	ITEMS	AVERAGE SCORE
Factor_1: participates in neighbourhood context	Neighbourhood_Participated initiatives where my opinion was taken into account	2,19
	Neighbourhood _Participated activities older people	2,04
	Neighbourhood _Participated in initiatives that I suggested	1,93
	Neighbourhood _Attended activities friends go to	2,64
Factor_2: participates in online context	In websites where I can give my opinion	2,47
	In online initiatives taking decisions together	2,17
	In online initiatives that I suggested	2,20
	Online activities suggested by friends	2,88
Factor_3: participates at home	At home_we take decisions together	3,12
	At home _they take my opinion into account	3,43
	At home _I suggest the task to do	2,93
Factor_4: intervention in the task	High school_participate in response to teachers' proposals	3,63
	At home _Jobs they ask me to do	4,07
	High school _activities teachers take our opinions into account	3,76
Factor_5: organization of activities	High school _Activities organised with friends	3,55
	High school _Activities teachers and students organise together	3,12

Source: created by the authors.

Table 6

Youth views of factors influencing their participation: difficulties they encountered

ITEMS	AVERAGE SCORE
Adults see me as too young	2,82
Being a girl	1,88
Being a boy	1,80
Being from another country	2,11
They take no notice of me	2,74
The workings of the system (corruption)	2,75
Expressing myself poorly	2,47
Having few leadership qualities	2,44
My way of being	2,29
Having economic problems	2,13

Source: created by the authors.