



by IMCITIZEN Project

WE PARTICIPATE, we take action!

Co-designing a Child Participation Platform

Illustrated by Cinta villalobos

WE ARE
CITIZENS!

WE DO
IMPORTANT
THINGS

IMCITIZEN

WE PARTICIPATE, we take action!

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UNIVERSITAT DE
BARCELONA



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Each group wrote descriptive texts on the ten steps for co-designing the platforms.

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WE PARTICIPATE, we take action!

Co-designing a Child Participation Platform



We know, we can and we want to participate

When Anna met her friends in the square, she was still thinking about the situation she had experienced at the family dinner. The adults were discussing ways to improve the neighbourhood, and she wanted to contribute an idea. Although her family found her intervention amusing, they ignored her suggestions. According to them, they were just 'kid stuff'. When she mentioned this to her friends, some of them recalled similar situations.



The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a document based on four guiding principles: non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to development, and the right to be heard and to participate. It recognises children's citizenship in Articles 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17, which articulate children's civil rights.

Why are we citizens and participate?

A few days after the conversation, the group of friends was still thinking about situations like Anna described, so they decided to take action. A study room in the neighbourhood library became their makeshift meeting place, where they could discuss issues that concerned them. Bruna took the floor and said:



The idea excited the rest of the group; this way, if someone questioned their right and ability to participate, they would have arguments. They produced a document of their thoughts, which they wanted to share with all the children.



- Our participation is important because...
- WE HAVE RIGHTS
Participation is a fundamental right for children. We are able to propose and develop ideas in the present before we are older.
 - WE ARE CITIZENS
We live in a city or town and we care about what happens there. Our contributions need to be heard.
 - WE KNOW HOW TO PARTICIPATE
We have the skills and abilities to participate. We know how to express our ideas, listen to others and work in a team.
 - WE ARE COMMITTED AND SHARE RESPONSIBILITY
We are part of the city/town and want to contribute to its improvement.
 - WE SEE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY
We have unique experiences, curiosity, creativity and fresh perspectives that allow us to see opportunities and innovative solutions to transform our environment.
 - WE ARE IRREPLACEABLE
Decisions should not be made for us without listening to us and taking us into account.
- HERE AND NOW WE WANT TO GET INVOLVED TO ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS. WE ARE INFLUENCERS.

But...what does it mean to participate?

The next day, when they met during the break, Salma, who always spoke her mind, said, —Yesterday, we talked for a long time about participation, but I've been thinking about it. Do we really know what it means? This question sparked a new debate in the group. Everyone had something to say.



By sharing their ideas and experiences, they realised that they DID participate in very different ways.

Salma added: —Think of Greta Thunberg or Francisco Javier Vera, who have mobilised other children for the environment. They are like us, fighting for what they believe is important and just. I am confident that more children will take action and mobilise to make a difference.

GRETA THUNBERG is a Swedish environmental activist who is leading action to combat climate change.

FRANCISCO JAVIER VERA He is a Colombian climate justice activist, founder of 'Guardians for Life' and creator of the concept of 'eco-hope'.



ImCitizen

When she got home, Anna was still thinking about it, so she decided to look for information about children's participation. Her mother joined her in the search, commenting on the content together and avoiding unreliable sites. Two of the search results caught her eye. She clicked on them and read them out loud:

She found out that **IMCITIZEN** is a project where children come together to create platforms for children's participation. While browsing the website, she saw videos of members of each platform describing their experiences and giving tips on how to create one. She couldn't help but visit the other website she found, that of the European Union, which

also encouraged children to have their say on issues that affect them.
—Girls, dinner!
Her father's voice brought them back to reality. Anna was thrilled with the two projects. Tomorrow she would tell her friends about them. Not to forget, she wrote down the web addresses.

What are platforms?

The group of friends had the links Anna had given them. They checked the websites at home and met during the break to discuss it. They felt more than ever that it was possible and necessary to participate. Without noticing, they had organised themselves. Jalel

volunteered to be the secretary, taking notes of the main ideas. —How about we start by explaining what a platform is? Everyone can say what they understood and we'll write it down,' Salma suggested.



What is a PLATFORM?

1. A group of people who want to participate in making things better, working together for a common purpose.
2. A children's organisation that raises awareness of and advocates for children's rights.
3. A participation point linked to local, national and EU children's councils.
4. A place where children can seek support from an adult or other children when in doubt.
5. A place where there is participation and trust.
6. Adults also organise themselves in platforms to participate.

WHAT CLEAR IDEAS THEY HAVE! I WILL BE HERE TO SUPPORT THEM IN WHATEVER THEY NEED.

Everyone was encouraged to participate. Anna couldn't wait: — What do you think? Should we create our own platform for the issues we care about? Everyone replied enthusiastically: 'Yes!!!!!!' The headteacher came over and listened carefully to their proposal. She noticed how well they knew what platforms were and how committed they were to the project. They were eager to create their own platform as a participation space. She thought it was a great idea and offered to help them with the process. They wanted to let everyone know about it.



10 steps to co-designing a child participation platform

Motivated by the idea, they set to work and explored the necessary steps to co-design a platform. In the end, thanks to the experience of the ImCitizen children, they came up with the 10 most important steps.

IN EACH STEP YOU WILL FIND A DESCRIPTION AND A PRACTICAL GUIDE.



1. Forming a group
Working together in order to address issues of interest.



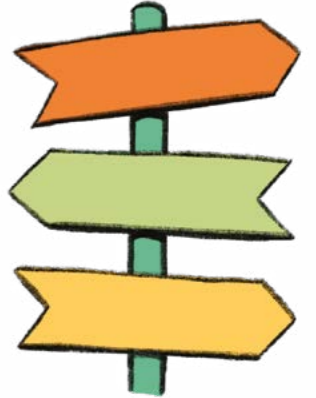
2. Designing a logo
Finding a symbol that identifies us as a group.



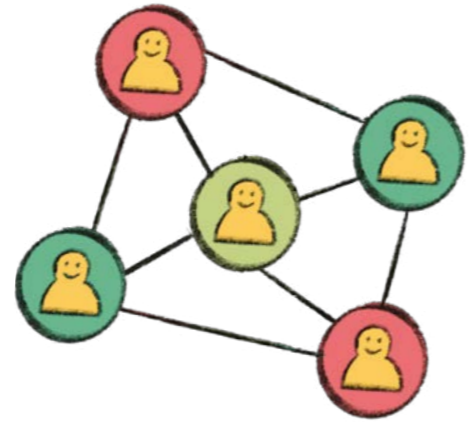
3. Knowing our rights
Right to express our opinion and be heard. (Art. 12)



4. Having goals
Defining why we partner up, what unites us.



5. Thinking about ideas and making suggestions
Deciding what we care about and what interests us.



6. Organising the group
Considering how we organize and what we need to participate.



7. Getting ready for a work session
Agreeing on how we imagine our meetings.



8. Collaborating with other people
Joining efforts with others to tackle shared challenges.



9. Reviewing to move ahead
Assessing the work we have done with the group.



10. Taking action
It is time to take action and participate together!

They wanted to, could and knew how to participate. Time had come to shape their PLATFORM.

Step 1

Forming a group

Working together in order to address issues of interest

An initial group of children looked for ways to reach out to others, talk to them, encourage them to participate and join a group to stand up for their rights. First, **we informed** them about the participation platform (we talked to the children at school during break time) and asked them if they would like to participate. Then we made **posters** to announce an **information meeting**. We put them on the school walls so that anyone who wanted to join could come, find out more details and decide if they wanted to be part of the group!

TOGETHER, WE CAN ACHIEVE ANYTHING WE SET OUR MINDS TO.

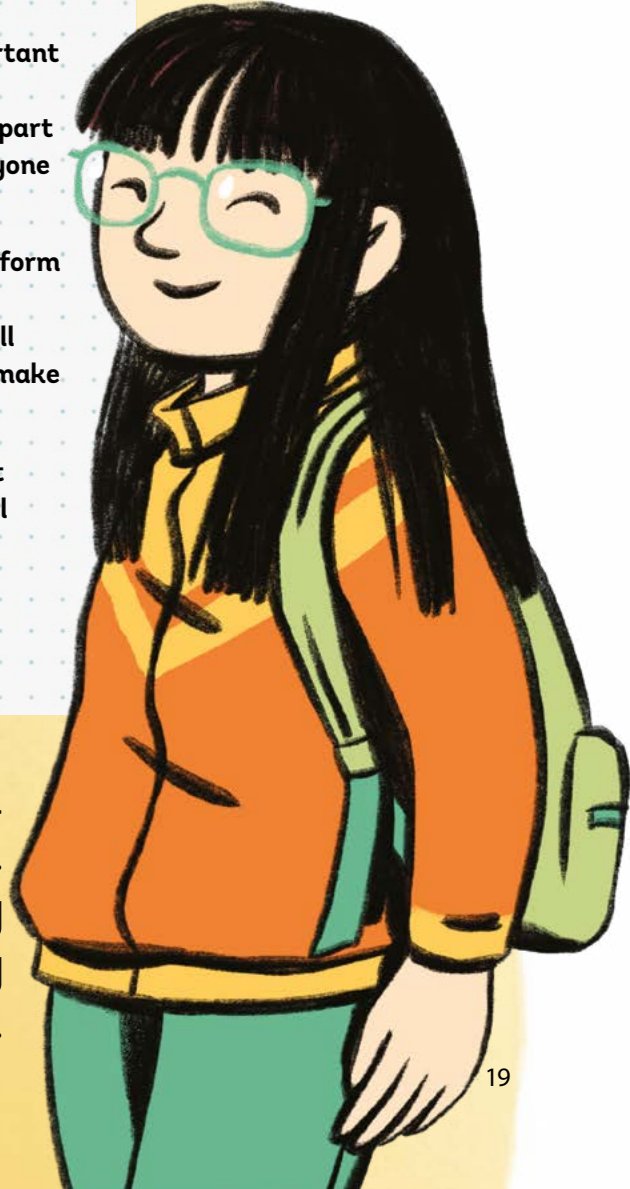


The information meeting

Guide for the first meeting

- 1. Children will be accompanied by their mother, father or legal guardian because they are minors.
- 2. During this session, the steering group will introduce the challenge, explain the rights and the right to participate, explain why it is important for children to participate, and discuss where and when they will meet to create the platform.
- 3. There will be space for questions and concerns. It is important that children feel encouraged to take part in the process. Everyone can participate.
- 4. They will be given a form to formalise their commitment and will have a few days to make their decision.
- 5. The date of the first working meeting will be announced.

The process of forming and strengthening a group is ongoing. A positive and welcoming atmosphere is essential for feeling good about working as a team.



Step 2 Designing a logo

The symbol that will identify us as a group

To make a logo, we need to start with an image related to our work. A good logo doesn't need to be overload; otherwise, it won't be easy to understand. To start with, we will make a list of things that represent us. Then, each member of the group will design a different logo. Finally, we will organise a vote to choose the one we like best and that best represents us. It is also possible not to vote and to combine elements from different logos.



The logo is our own brand. It helps us be recognised and visually communicates who we are and what we stand for.

The platform logo

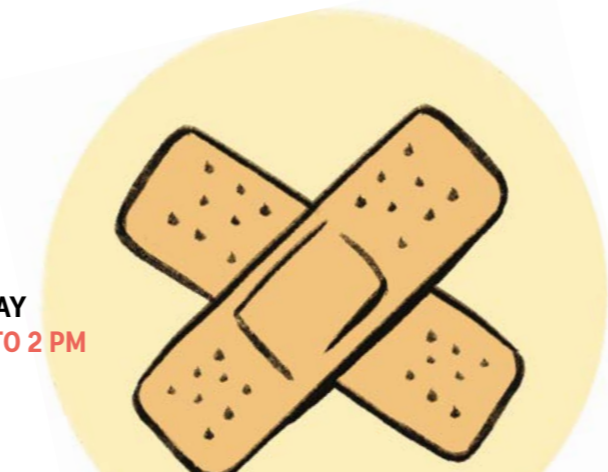
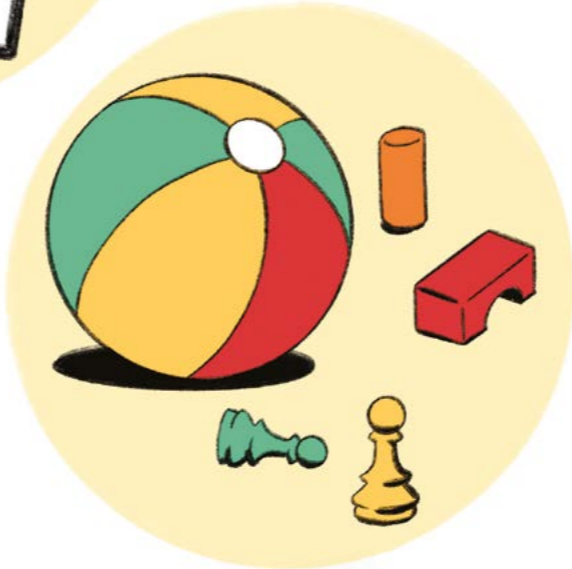
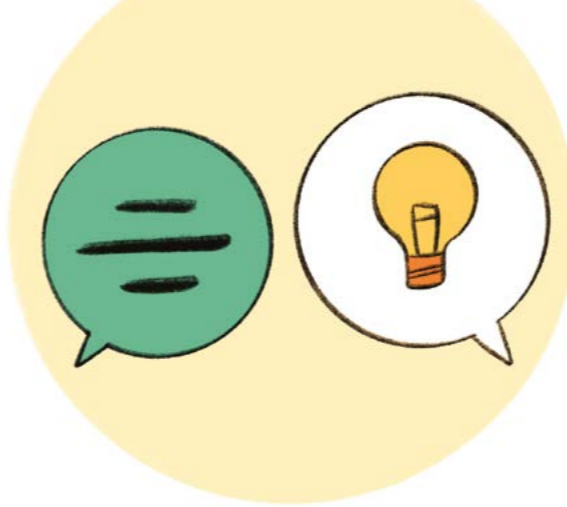
Guide to logo design

1. A logo should be beautiful, simple, meaningful and related to the platform's activities, because it will be used on associated items (posters, badges, t-shirts, pens, etc.).
2. The creative process can start with a brainstorming session, during which the group can share their ideas and highlight the ones they like best.
3. Based on an initial individual proposal, they will work in small groups to create a joint proposal.
4. Each proposal will then be presented, explaining why it was made in this or that way.
5. The platform logo will be chosen among the most popular proposals. The final vote may be open to other children.

Step 3 Knowing our rights

How can we participate?

Children want to and can express our opinions or ideas in class, at home and anywhere else. The platform is a tool for sharing these opinions so that our contributions can be used to improve things and stand up for our rights. We can make improvements and create a chain effect where we all contribute. What if we form a group that is willing to participate? What if we create a platform where children can get involved in making our world a better place? How about getting started?



Children's rights

Guide to expressing our opinions

1. List the rights of the child that you know and compare them with the abbreviated Convention to see if you have overlooked any.
 - Why should children be heard?
 - Why should they be considered citizens?
 - How can they participate in their communities?
2. Read Article 12* carefully. 'Right to express your opinion and to be heard' and discuss it. You will then be asked the following questions:
 - 3. Developing slogans to let other children know they have rights will be necessary. It is important to exercise the right to participate!
 - 4. The importance of being advocates for children's rights should be highlighted.

*ARTICLE 12 of the Convention on the rights of the child: RIGHT TO EXPRESS THEIR OPINION AND BE HEARD. All children have the right to express their views freely and to be heard in matters that concern them. They have the right to participate in judicial and administrative proceedings in which they are involved.



Step 4

Having a goal

How do we reach our goals?

Setting common goals is very important to achieve a united group and make our voices heard. In order to agree on the goals of each platform, it is necessary **to listen to, observe and express** what is important to us and other children in our community. The goals must be **realistic and achievable** so that we can work well together.



Setting common goals

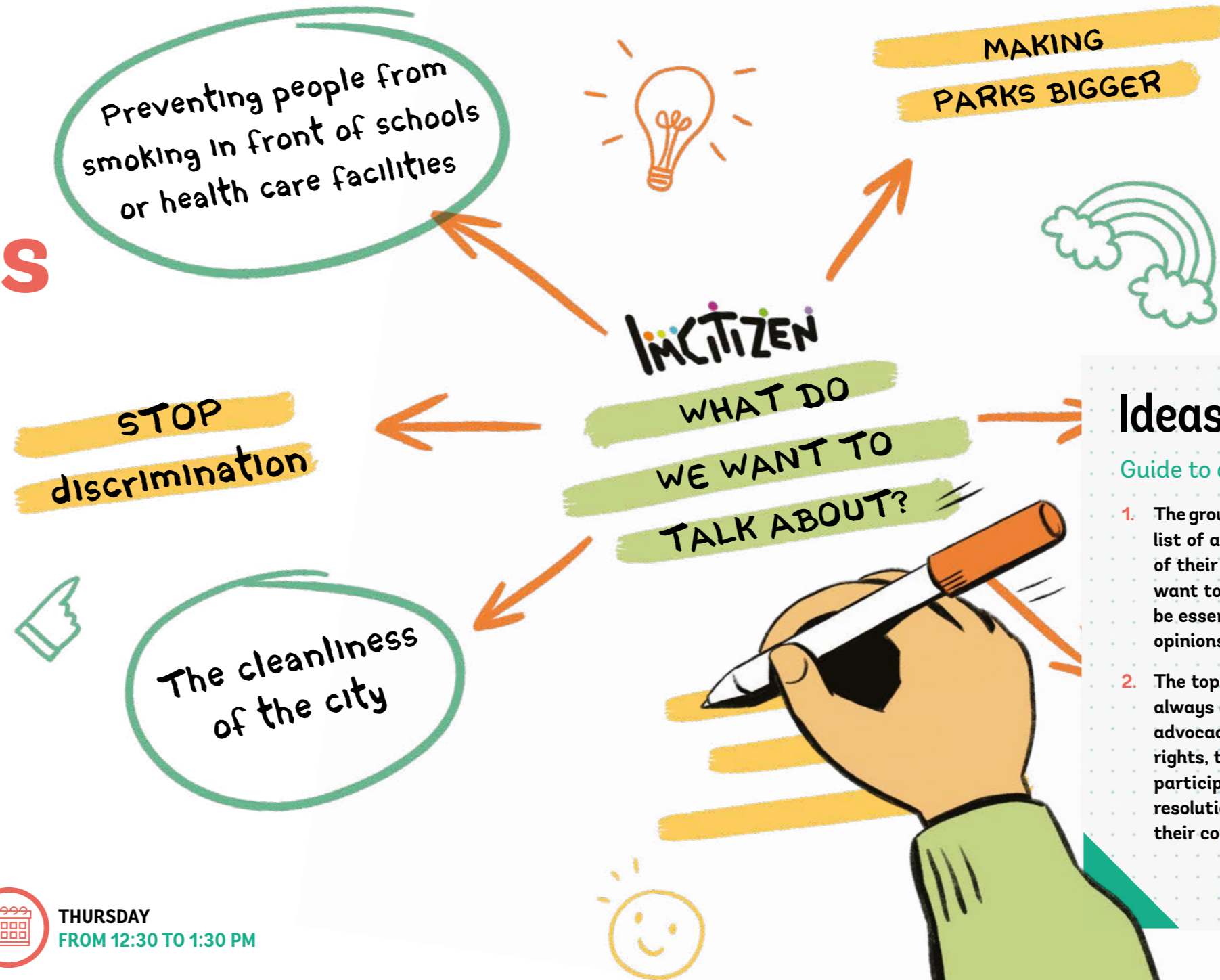
Guide to defining our common ground

1. Organise a brainstorming session to answer the following questions:
 - ➔ What would we like to achieve with the IMCITIZEN platform?
 - ➔ Why do I want to be IMCITIZEN?
2. Write down the answers in a notebook so that they can be reviewed at the next working session.
3. Explore the participatory experiences of the children who are part of the platform.
4. At the next meeting, share what has been discussed in the previous sessions and decide if you need to add more goals.
5. Once the objectives have been agreed, a set of rules and regulations should be drawn up to reflect them. This is best done in writing but can be illustrated with drawings or pictures!

Step 5 Thinking about ideas and proposals

Let's suggest topics that concern us

Deciding on the topics and suggestions is the **starting point** for guiding the future **actions** of a participation group. It is also an easy way to start participating, as we, the children, will choose the issues that **interest us** or **matter** most to us and make **suggestions** based on what we consider to be the most urgent.



Suggestions for improvement should be specific actions that address a common issue.

Ideas and suggestions

Guide to deciding the issues we care about and want to address

1. The group will make a joint list of all the issues of their interest they want to address. It will be essential to get the opinions of other children.
2. The topics chosen should always align with the advocacy of children's rights, the right to participate and the resolution of issues of their concern.
3. Use the traffic light technique to prioritise the issues you need to work on:
 - **RED** Very important issues that need to be addressed immediately.
 - **YELLOW**: Important issues that can be dealt with in the next few days.
 - **GREEN**: Issues that are important to us but can be put on hold.
4. The list will always be open, so it can evolve, and any child can participate whenever they want. You can even set up a mailbox to collect ideas... All suggestions will be taken into account!

Step 6 Organising the group

It's time to put things in order!

The steering group decides when and where to meet to work. Given the roles assigned, each platform member knows what to do at each meeting. These roles include an analyst, time keeper, content creator, material manager, etc. We can dress up with distinctive accessories to get into the role and recognise each other's tasks, so it is more fun! If we need help with an activity, we can call our support group, which is made up of other children who want to take part but have little time.



The power of organisation

Guide to deciding how to organise the platform

1. The organisation should facilitate decision-making and ensure that everyone takes part. It must promote group cohesion and the importance of ideas and suggestions.
2. Discuss how to organise the group and its work so that the children lead the space for participation.
 - ¿What responsibilities and roles make it easier for us to participate?
 - What are the responsibilities of each role?
3. Draft a document setting out the agreed roles and responsibilities, and how they will be carried out. It is important to review the roles regularly to assess their effectiveness.
 - How should these responsibilities be carried out?

Step 7 Getting ready for a work session

We define the roles

- We welcome the children who will be taking part.
- We introduce ourselves and play an icebreaker game.
- We discuss the topic to be addressed and how to approach it.
- We collect everyone's ideas.
- We discuss and vote on the suggestions.
- We thank everyone, play a game and say goodbye until the next meeting.
- We develop the suggestion and share it with others.



How can we work together?

Guide to getting started

1. First of all, deciding what the meetings will look like is essential.
2. Creating a positive atmosphere based on respect and initiative is very important. Remember that everyone is responsible for ensuring that all group members feel valued and listened to.
3. Each person's role will be carried out to develop the working session in a participatory way.
4. If you have many topics to discuss, consider forming small groups to examine each one in more detail. Then, share the results.
5. Take notes of the agreements reached during the meeting so that everyone is aware of them and the shared commitments are fulfilled.
6. The meeting will conclude with a brief summary of all issues discussed and agreements reached.



Step 8 Collaborating with other people

Joining efforts

In the platforms, we seek to represent children, so it is important to be close to them, **listen** to their concerns and **encourage** their active **participation**. We always engage in respectful dialogue and express different opinions on issues that are meaningful to us. This is how we come up with solid and concrete ideas. This way of working opens doors to new perspectives and helps us collaborate better in our community.



Collaborating with others

Guide to influence issues that matter to us

1. We start by sharing and understanding that a platform cannot do everything on its own, it needs everyone's help!
 - How can we reach them?
 - How can we present our ideas and projects to them?
 - How can we work together to improve the community?
2. We should think about how to inform and disseminate what is being done in the platform and what kind of cooperation is needed.
3. To encourage other children to get involved, it may be helpful to find out how they want to participate or how they can help so that they can do it in their own way. We will ask them: How would you like to contribute to the platform?
4. It is also necessary to consider working with the local children's council and city/town/village representatives. We will establish this:
 - 5. Meetings will be held with policymakers to collaborate and influence public policy.
 - 6. The time and place of the platform meetings will be announced with posters. This is an effective way to communicate that we are a participation platform, accessible and open to all who want to participate actively.

Step 9 Review the process to move ahead

How do we analyse the work done?

To review means to evaluate, as a group, the different moments in the process of creating the platform in order to understand what did work out and what needs to be improved. It is important that each member contributes their own arguments, expresses their feelings and identifies challenges. The main purpose of this analysis is to **learn and improve** together in order to increase participation in everyday decisions.



THE REFLECTIVE CIRCLE WAS VERY USEFUL FOR RECORDING AND DOCUMENTING THE PROCESS.

WE WERE A GOOD TEAM, BUT THERE WAS A LACK OF COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE GROUP.

RECORDING OUR INITIATIVE GAVE US A LOT OF IMPACT.

Reviewing to move ahead

Guide to process evaluation

1. To understand and improve the process, the group should pause and share how things are going. What did we do? How did we do it? How did it go? What helped us achieve our goals?
2. This group analysis will lead them to reflect on their participation, acknowledge progress and suggest ways to improve.
3. It's a good idea to record the thoughts exchanged during these reflective sessions. The group should decide how to keep them: in writing, audio or video...
4. The 'reflective circle' is a fun way to evaluate. The circle, which can be a hula-hoop, is placed on the floor, and whoever is inside gives their evaluation while another person records it.

Learning from the work done and identifying what went well and what needs improvement is key to moving forward!

Step 10 Taking action

Let's act and participate together

It's time for action! To do this, we need to evaluate the materials and resources developed throughout the process and act effectively to put our ideas into practice. Now that we have designed and created our **participation platform**, it is time to take action and do what we set out to do. We will inform the other children of our intentions and invite them to join us in improving our community or whatever we decide to do. It is important to have specific tools that allow us to participate and improve our environment.



IMCITIZEN RAMÓN DE LA SAGRA
PLATFORM



A CORUÑA
GALICIA



10 PARTICIPANTS
11 - 12 YEARS OLD



FRIDAY
FROM 4 TO 5:30 PM

Let's Activate the Participation Platform!

1. The co-design process makes it possible to define the participation space:
 - ➔ What are the issues to be addressed?
 - ➔ How will the team be organised?
 - ➔ When will it be done?
2. Tell all the children that a participation platform has been set up to deal with issues of common interest so they can contribute their ideas. We suggest making posters or holding an information session.
3. The time and place of the meeting can be posted in case other children want to join.
4. Report on progress and activities carried out to encourage other children to contribute their ideas and suggestions.
5. Cooperation with other participation groups, such as local, national, or European children's councils, is strongly recommended.
6. The local council can be informed about achievements and challenges. Municipal officers and political authorities will then be aware of what is being done and will be able to provide support.



The Child Platform needs to be linked to local stakeholders to ensure that its actions have impact.

Guide for adults

How to support the platform's co-design process?

As socioeducational agents, we adults support and facilitate the process with the conviction that the platform's co-design must result from an informed, conscious and free decision on the part of the children.

We are taking on a new challenge: to develop a participatory process for creating a participation space.

You may already be supporting children's participation. However, the challenge is to engage with them in the co-design process so that they can take ownership of the participation space and discover that they can and know how to participate autonomously with shared leadership.

Principles to support the process

- ▶ Supporting children in discovering their rights, especially the right to participate. Facilitating a process of awareness-raising so that children know and recognise themselves as subjects of rights that they can exercise, defend and promote.
- ▶ Promoting and strengthening their identity as citizens in the present, with

capabilities and motivation to participate in improving and transforming their communities.

▶ Ensuring that the process is child-led. Their ideas, suggestions and actions are what need to be addressed. Adults will support them by providing strategies and activities to follow the steps and by being aware that this is an organic process in which the unexpected is welcome.

▶ Define a clear and shared roadmap so that girls and boys can anticipate and give meaning to the process. Participating without knowing why or for what purpose can be very abstract. Therefore, boys and girls must identify their motivations as a group and know where their actions are directed in the co-design process.

▶ Strengthening both the group's participatory skills and each child during the co-design process. They should become aware of how they use their competencies and how these competencies enhance their ability to participate.

▶ Promoting children's recognition of themselves as participatory subjects in the co-design process allows them to see that they know how to participate, that they can participate, and that it is worth-

while. Co-design gives shape to a space for participation. It also allows them to experience participation, signify it and make it real.

▶ Adding dynamism to the process by using "co-thinking" strategies, playful activities and facilitating games that encourage collaboration, decision-making, group cohesion and a sense of belonging to crystallise participation.

▶ Sensitive to children's languages, cultural codes and timing, adults should communicate understandably and adapt to the children's pace. To this end, it will be helpful to draw up a calendar of meetings and a timeline of activities to clearly identify goals and moments.

▶ Examining the perceptions and barriers of those facilitating the process. Adults must be committed to the proposal and pass this confidence on to the children so they feel empowered and know they are capable citizens.

Keys to supporting and facilitating each step

The group is formed with the challenge and commitment to develop a co-design process that will help them define and shape a child participation platform. The children must recognise themselves as citizens who want to, know about and can take part in shaping a participation space that they will lead and sustain through their engagement and compromise.



[Pag 18-19]

Step 1 Forming a group

The aim is to form a group of motivated children to come together and take up issues that are important to them. To facilitate the meeting, they are invited to an information session on the proposal to create a child participation platform. The inclusion of all children is ensured, thus promoting the elimination of possible inequalities based on gender, ability, origin, etc. Participants are free to decide whether they want to take part in the process of creating the platform.



[Pag 20-21]

Step 2 Designing a logo

The adults support the group in defining and understanding who they are as a group and what they want to do. They ask them questions to reflect on the aspects they might consider when imagining and designing their logo. Depending on their age, they can also be encouraged to have a mascot or slogan and to create merchandising material to promote themselves.



[Pag 22-23]

Step 3 Knowing our rights

The children must see themselves as subjects with rights and the ability to participate. They must know and understand their rights, especially the right to participate, based on their awareness of the concept that will enable them to act within this common framework. They must also be aware of their competencies to participate.



[Pag 24-25]

Step 4 Having goals

The key is understanding and defining what brings participants together: 'designing a participation platform'. They will draw up their rules of procedure (a reference document in which they represent their group identity, what they do and how they do it) and configure the participation space they will run autonomously. They will start by defining what they want to achieve with the platform and what issues and ideas they want to address.

A 'participatory culture' needs to be nurtured: building a space amongst us all that produces a participatory culture and promotes a more inclusive and democratic society.



[Pag 26-27]

Step 5 Thinking about ideas and proposals

The group has a twofold purpose. On the one hand, it is an association of children who exercise and defend their rights, especially the right to participate. On the other hand, it is a space where they decide which issues they are interested in and want to address at the local, national or European level.



[Pag 28-29]

Step 6 Organising the group

One key moment is deciding on the platform's structure, since a well-defined structure sharpens roles, facilitates decision-making and encourages collaborative teamwork.



[Pag 30-31]

Step 7 Getting ready for a work session

The group leads the planning and development of their sessions, which must be designed and delivered according to the challenges set. The sessions must be a safe and trusting space for organised participation that includes play and fun.



[Pag 32-33]

Step 8 Collaborating with other people

The children in the platform need to talk and act with other people who are also working to improve the community. They should work with other participation groups to join forces and tackle common challenges. They also need to

introduce themselves to the local authorities to present their proposals and find avenues for cooperation.



[Pag 34-35]

Step 9 Reviewing to move ahead

Evaluation is ongoing and regular throughout the process of co-designing the platform. Thinking and reflecting on what has been done to configure the platform allows for new ideas to adjust its functioning, goals and initiatives.



[Pag 36-37]

Step 10 Taking action

Once the participation space has been defined and designed and the platform's functioning has been established, it is time to put into practice the prototype that the children imagined. In one way or another, the co-design process will continue to be active, as adjustments to the definition, organisation and operation will be necessary due to children's participation and participatory leadership.

Discover how to co-design a Child Participation Platform! 10 steps explained by girls and boys who have already done it



This illustrated book results from the joint effort of children from several schools who have participated as active and committed citizens in co-designing Child Participation Platforms. In it, you will find practical tools to support this process and resources presented by the protagonists themselves. You can also access their stories on the [project website](#).

The IMCITIZEN project in which this book is included is funded by the European Union and seeks to promote changes to advance child participation. This has been possible thanks to the cooperation between ten schools, five town councils, three universities, and two associations.

