Formal Mechanisms of Consultation

French public authorities have had a long-standing concern over young people's participation in drawing up public policies. However, that approach is most often followed at local level within local councils: participation is more effective and active in local democratic bodies (municipalities) than in national bodies, where it occurs on a more one-off basis. Since the 1970s, local authorities have worked at promoting young people’s participation in local democracy.

Several initiatives have been launched recently, for example the creation of the Advisory Youth Council comprised of youth organisation representatives.

Local authorities in particularly are committed to youth participation in the local democracy. Local authorities have a measure of freedom in the setting up of youth representative bodies, which has led to considerable diversity in such councils’ design, frequency of meetings and implementation.

Young people are consulted on a wide variety of themes, not only those that concern them directly. In the case of local councils (regional and municipal alike), consultations may have bearing on local life, in such topics as participatory lycée budgeting, mobility, the environment and access to culture.
There are just as many questions raised at national level, where they are a matter for ministerial action. Themes tackled arise from ministries’ areas of concern: healthcare, accommodation, professional integrations, political representation of young people, civic commitment, mobility, etc.

There are no any specific texts that legally govern and define young people’s participation in drawing up public policies. Young people’s participation is based on general texts, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child [1] and the Council of Europe’s European Charter on the participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life [2].

Associations for promoting political participation by young people and local youth councils can draw up their own guides and charters. The ANACEJ - National Association of Children’s and Youth Councils (Association Nationale des Conseils d’Enfants et de Jeunes) has drawn up reference guides and texts that set out the operating procedures of youth councils, such as Our Agreement 2 (Notre Accord 2) [4]. That text was adopted on 26 June 2013, and it reaffirms the value and significance of participation by children and young people, especially as a tool for “education in citizenship aimed at improving the local authority as a whole”.

Levels of participation

At municipality and intermunicipality level, youth councils may give opinions and make suggestions either upon the Mayor’s request or on their own initiative. Young people may therefore be involved in decision-making for certain municipal projects.

At regional level [6], a number of participation initiatives have been developed by Regional Councils, including:

- ad-hoc consultations giving the floor to young people’s opinions; for example, the “États Généraux” (Hauts-de-France region), consultations with youth organisations during development of the Regional Plan (Bretagne regions);
- event-type participation;
- consultative bodies (regional youth councils) serving as permanent youth representation;
- involvement in development of such policies as participatory lycée budgeting.

At national level, the Cross-Ministerial Committee for Youth (CIJ, see 1.3) “encourages and supports dialogue with young people with a view to regarding them as stakeholders in and providers of solutions on matters that concern them”. Ministries concerned may introduce various forms of youth participation in development of public policies. There exist, however, three main types of ministerial consultations:

- approaches encouraging young people’s presence in the public areas of institutional policy debates. For example, in 2013 the Ministry of the Interior decided to increase youth representation in Conseils Économiques, Sociaux et Environnementaux Régionaux (CESERs - Regional Economic, Social and Environmental Councils). The measure was the subject of a Memorandum on 27 June 2013 [8];
- consultations based on dialogue with youth associations;
- schemes for the co-development of policies with young people. Such co-development is based on partnership work and horizontal dialogue between young people, associations and the public authorities.
It is important to specify that all those actions aimed at having young people take part in the development of their territory are not necessarily carried out on a regular basis; they can also be one-off actions.

**Actors**

There are many bodies involved in youth participation. Distinctions should be made between institutional stakeholders (ministries), youth association federations, youth representative bodies and associations.

Main stakeholders in youth affairs include:

**Youth actors**

- the Comité pour les Relations Nationales et Internationales des Associations de Jeunesse et d’Éducation Populaire (CNAJEP) [9] – Committee for National and International Relations between Youth and Non-Formal Education Associations. The CNAJEP contributes to co-construction of public policies, managing national implementation of the “structured dialogue” decided upon by the Council of European Ministers, which adopted a resolution on 23 November 2015 aiming to “improve youth political participation in democratic life in Europe”.
- the Forum Français de la Jeunesse (FFJ – French Youth Forum) [10]
- The Association Nationale des Conseils d’Enfants et de Jeunes (ANACEJ – National Association of Children’s and Youth Councils) has existed since 1991 and helps set up and develop local youth councils. It is a member of the CNAJEP.

**Specific target groups**

Although mainstreamed youth participation is promoted by public and community stakeholders, they are as yet no special practices or schemes designed to foster consultation of or participation by the most socially disadvantaged young people.

Despite such advances in youth consultation, and NGOs’ and the public authorities’ determination to implement best practices, a number of obstacles to youth participation still remain. **One of the major problems is the lack of “social diversity” due to under-representation of the more disadvantaged young people in youth representative bodies**, and a contrasting over-representation of young graduates proficient in the codes of political participation. The lack of generational renewal of members of associations and institutional bodies may also have an influence on French youth representativeness.

**Public authorities**

- All ministries take part in developing youth participation. However, the leading authority in the organisation of consultation is the ministry in charge of youth, which works in partnership with
the CNAJEP/ANACEJ and the FFJ.

- Since 2008, student organisations and youth movements have been represented as a group in the Conseil Économique, Social et Environnemental (CESE) – Economic, Social and Environmental Council).

- Local authority officials responsible for youth affairs can also organise and administer local youth councils; usually local authority employees also manage municipal youth councils.

Additional stakeholders

In addition to the French public authorities, such international organisations as UNESCO also promote youth participation and consultation in France through the “UNESCO Youth” programme and UNESCO Youth Forum.

Information on the extent of youth participation

The National Institute for Youth and Non-Formal Education (INJEP) has published numerous reports on youth consultation at local and national levels alike. They are based on field work and (statistical) surveys that include information gathering via questionnaires. In Les dispositifs de participation des jeunes au niveau des conseils régionaux (Youth participation schemes at regional council level - 2015) by Laurent Lardeux and L’État des lieux des dispositifs de participation des jeunes dans les départements ministériels (Inventory of youth participation schemes in ministerial departments - 2014) by Jean-Claude Richez, the two INJEP researchers highlight the diversity and specificity of youth consultation schemes introduced by the public authorities.

INJEP had already carried out an exploratory survey in 2010, with a view to measuring “the impact of youth councils on municipal policies”.

Outcomes

This approach based on co-construction with young people is most often placed in the public domain by ministries, which, where appropriate, provide the (youth) associations with which they have worked with information on changes to policies and projects.

As an example, the ministry of youth (Ministère de la Jeunesse) has provided public information on co-constructing public policies in conjunction with young people as part of the Priority Youth Policy in 2012-2017 (Plan).

The study report “État des lieux des dispositifs de participation des jeunes dans les départements
“ministériels” (Inventory of youth participation schemes in ministerial departments), published by INJEP in 2014, highlights a number of “best practices” in youth consultation introduced by the authorities, including:

- “young people are involved in monitoring implementation of the policy decided upon”;
- “young people are represented in sufficient number in workgroups”;
- “young people are kept informed and receive work documents upstream”;
- “young people’s proposals are incorporated by the workgroup when they form the subject of an agreement, and are mentioned and indicated as coming from young people”.

Young people’s and youth organisations also play a part in drafting ministerial texts, by producing analyses and making proposals upstream in the form of contributions.

**Large-scale initiatives for dialogue or debate between public institutions and young people**

As part of the establishment of **National universal service** (Service national universel, SNU), a new commitment scheme that is part of the civic path of youths aged over 16 (See 5.5 Existence of a national strategy to increase young people's political participation), the Government has organised several consultation events, some of which including youths.

National consultation was carried out in three stages: a phase of consultation with some youth organisations, student unions, parent representatives and association stakeholders followed by a phase for consultation with youths in territories and an on-line consultation, carried out in October 2018.

A “Hackathon” of the National universal service was organised. During this event, the Minister of National Education and Youth, and the State Secretary, were able to speak with participants, who were invited to imagine their future experience of the SNU through creative tools and workshops.