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Youth participation or youth agency?

Desk study on the use of AI in youth participation and in youth work

DYPALL
DEVELOPING YOUTH PARTICIPATION AT LOCAL LEVEL

Finnish Youth Research Society

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Desk study on the use of AI in youth participation

Introduction

This report presents the findings of a mapping study on the use of artificial intelligence in youth work, focusing on digital youth participation processes. The aim of the study has been to identify stand-alone AI-driven digital tools relevant to youth engagement across Europe, examine how they are currently used, and assess the opportunities and challenges they may create in participatory contexts and understand what user's experiences with these tools has been like.

In this report, artificial intelligence (AI) refers to machine-based systems that use data, computational methods, and statistical or learned models to generate outputs such as text, translations, summaries, classifications, recommendations, visualisations, or other forms of analysis and content. These systems can perform tasks that would otherwise require human cognitive work, such as interpreting language, recognising patterns, generating content, or supporting communication and decision-making.

The report uses the term AI in a practical and inclusive sense. It covers both stand-alone AI applications, such as chatbots and generative AI tools, and digital participation platforms that incorporate AI-supported functions, such as automated translation, transcription, moderation, clustering, sentiment or topic analysis, visualisation, and content generation. The term does not imply that a tool operates autonomously or replaces human judgement. In the context of youth work and youth participation, AI is understood primarily as a support layer whose value and effects depend on how it is designed, introduced, facilitated, and governed.

The study is part of ***Empowering youth voices Harnessing AI to Strengthen Youth Engagement*** -project, which seeks to investigate and experiment on how AI can be used to address the unique needs and challenges of youth participation. During the mapping we attempted to identify unexplored opportunities in the use of AI-driven tools in youth participation processes. Rather than treating AI tools as inherently beneficial or harmful, the report approaches them as socio-technical solutions whose effects depend on their purpose, design, context of use, and the safeguards surrounding them.

The report combines different sources of evidence to provide a broad view of the current landscape. Alongside the mapping of tools and practices, it draws on survey and interview material that explores how youth workers currently use AI, what kinds of benefits they associate with it, and what concerns they raise in relation to privacy, bias, transparency, inclusion, and the preservation of human-centred youth work. During the process we found it challenging to find youth workers willing to take the survey or participate in the interviews. This finding tells us that perhaps AI as a subject matter is still new to youth work, and youth workers felt that they had nothing to offer on the subject. The survey and interview data should therefore be interpreted as exploratory and contextual rather than representative, but they still provide valuable insight into the practices, perceptions, and concerns that are currently visible among those who did engage. We shall conduct further interviews once we have a better view on the prototypes being developed in the project.

The findings suggest that AI is already present in youth work, most often as a supportive layer around participation rather than as a stand-alone participation method. Reported and anticipated benefits relate especially to accessibility, multilingual communication, idea development, analysis, efficiency, and the processing of large amounts of input, while the main risks concern data protection, limited transparency, misleading or biased outputs, unequal treatment, and the possibility that technological efficiency may come at the expense of trust, contextual understanding, or meaningful youth involvement.

We wish to thank all the youth workers who participated either in the survey or in the interviews. Our colleagues at Tree Company and DYPALL provided comments that helped us better formulate our arguments.

Digital youth work and AI

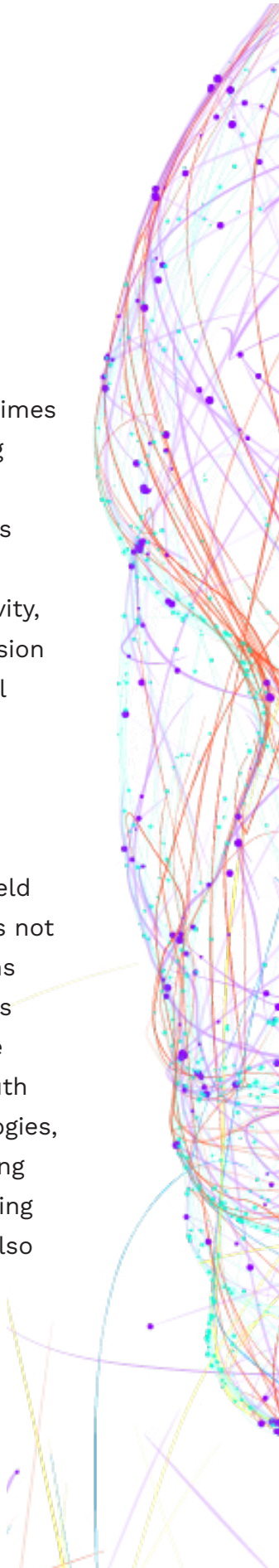
The youth work field in Europe is characterized by diversity. In different national and regional contexts, youth work practices, stakeholders, and traditions vary. In this article, we rely on a shared European understanding of the common ground of youth work. Youth work is seen as a social process that engages with young people and the societies they live in. Young people participate on a voluntary basis. Youth work is about personal and social development. Key values of youth work include inclusion, integration, youth participation, and democratic principles. Youth work can be carried out by paid professionals or volunteers, and it takes place in both face to face and digital settings (Williamson 2024).

While drawing strict boundaries is not our goal, we wish to emphasise that youth work is different from working with small children. One of the cornerstones of youth work is recognising adolescence as an important formative stage of human life and respecting the agency, cultures, and wishes of young people.

According to a European expert group definition, “Digital youth work means proactively using or addressing digital media and technology in youth work. Digital youth work is not a youth work method – digital youth work can be included in any youth work setting (open youth work, youth information and counselling, youth clubs, detached youth work, etc.). Digital youth work has the same goals as youth work in general, and using digital media and technology in youth work should always support these goals.” (European Commission 2017a, 11.)

In the European youth policy discussion, digital youth work, or as it is sometimes called, smart youth work, gained increasing attention in the 2010s. According to the EU Council conclusions on smart youth work, technologies provided “great potential for empowerment of youth” by, for example, providing access to information, enhancing one’s capabilities and competences, providing opportunities for connectivity, “but also for voicing one’s opinions, for creativity, for self-realisation of one’s rights and active citizenship” (European Commission 2017b). In this understanding, digital technologies provided tools for personal growth, getting in touch with friends, for learning and for participation – all of which are important goals of youth work.

In order for this to happen, the emphasis was on the competences of youth workers, the youth policy framework, and on sharing best practices in the field (European Commission 2017, 21). In 2017, the role of artificial intelligence was not highlighted in the document. Two years later, in 2019, the Council conclusions on digital youth work noted that “Artificial intelligence, virtual reality, robotics and block-chain technology, inter alia, are affecting our societies beyond the sphere of communication”. Therefore, new and specific competences for youth workers were required. The conclusions called for innovative use of technologies, guidelines and policies supporting digital youth work, and for better promoting access of young people to technologies. Empowering young people by engaging them in digital and other innovative forms of democratic participation was also called for (European Commission 2019).



In the pandemic times, youth work rapidly took a digital leap which enabled youth work to further communicate with young people. Built on past experiences, youth workers continued to utilize digital platforms. One of the noted benefits of digital youth work was that through it, youth workers were able to contact young people in fragile conditions better (Williamson 2024). According to the RAY DIGI study conducted in 2024, youth workers are aware of the benefits of digital youth work. At the same time, they emphasise the need to leverage the benefits, be aware of challenges, and to blend offline and online youth work activities. Despite these positive outlooks, some of the youth workers experienced what Horta and Schwentzer call 'digital fatigue', and they have a strong desire for on-site encounters (Horta & Schwentzer 2024).

Given the policy concern about the need to develop youth work, it might strike as surprising to note that studies on youth work continue to emphasize that digital youth work, and especially the use of AI, continues to be little known and under-used. Related concepts, such as digital transformation, are seen as being external to the youth field (Schwentzer & al. 2025). There are only a few studies which analyse the frequency of the use of digital youth work. In Finland, a country often seen as one of the most stable youth policy environments or frontrunners (Stefan 2022) of digital youth work, only 8 per cent of municipalities see digital youth work as being among the five most important youth work methods. In Finland, the municipalities are the main organizers of youth work. In their study on shrinking civic space, Deželan & al. note that "the swift development of artificial intelligence (AI), as well as its increasing presence and use in all areas of life, represents a little understood but likely influence on civic space" (2026, 13).

It might be fair to state that digital youth work is still an emergent field, and that this is true for AI as well. However, there are studies emphasizing that the use of digital tools in the youth work context is beneficial and is in accordance with youth work values. Among the noted arguments are the following:

- Youth workers already use AI tools, such as Canva or Mentimeter, in their youth work practice (Abruzze & al. 2024).
- Digital technologies attract young people to youth work, and may be especially beneficial for young people with fewer opportunities (Horta & Schwentzer 2024).
- Digital tools and AI are an integral part of our everyday lives, and learning about them is the task of both formal and non-formal education (Kiilakoski 2011).

- Younger generations will bear the structural effects of AI in the future, and excluding them from processes of design and governance reproduces a generational asymmetry. Cultivating the capacities required to understand and critically engage with these technologies is needed (Lalande & al. 2026).
- AI tools are assets for content creation and can increase productivity (Abruzze & al. 2024).
- Potentially, AI tools can enhance inclusion and empowerment (Abruzze & al. 2024).

Some of the voices in the youth field have been critical towards the use of AI. A classic study by Larry Cuban (2003), titled Oversold and Underused, emphasizes that emerging technologies often create a lot of expectations, but educators are often slow or even reluctant to use these tools. This analysis is repeated in the context of AI transformations (Helén 2025). Even according to studies otherwise sympathetic towards the use of AI, it is noted that there are issues such as privacy and the storage of data that require attention (Abruzze & al. 2024, 89). The concerns of youth workers are amplified by studies in formal education, which state that the tension between privacy concerns of young people and the use of AI is one of the key ethical issues in the design of formal curriculum (Chang & al. 2025). More critical voices have stated that the youth work field has been naively adopting digital technologies without thinking about societal implications of the use of digital technologies or the power of algorithms created by tech giants coming from a limited cultural background (Siurala 2026). This means that the discussion about the scope and necessity of digital tools is far from being settled.

Currently, we have found no articles analysing the use of AI in youth work. Some of the studies conducted in other fields provide us with relevant points of view. In their systematic literature review on AI and collaborative learning, Ba & al. (2026) conclude that AI tools are better suited to lower-stakes orchestration tasks such as monitoring, flagging, triaging, and proposing prompts. According to them, teachers should control high-stakes and value-laden decisions that require contextual judgment and moral accountability. Similarly, Rosyanafi & al. argue that in the context of non-formal adult education, paying attention to contextual issues when designing AI programs is needed. They also note that the use of AI may enhance learner autonomy if it is embedded as a facilitative mechanism (as opposed to a substitutive mechanism) (Rosyanafi & al. 2026). Moreover, Lalande & al. note that in the context of youth participation, young people are often expected to maintain critical literacy on new technologies,

but they are excluded from the design processes. According to them, coming up with projects where young people can engage in designing is needed. One of the hindrances for this is the lack of competences among the adult stakeholders working with youth. (Lalande & al. 2026.)

These requirements mean that youth workers should also possess competencies which enable them to work with digital tools. What is known from the existing body of work, however, is the need to pay attention to the competencies of youth workers. The lack of digital competencies of youth workers is noted in previous accounts (Kiviniemi 2022). Of the existing competence frameworks, DigComp is often seen as being among the most prominent ones (Horta & Schwentzer 2024, Stefan 2022). The current version, DigComp 3.0, was given during the timeline of this project in 2025. It integrated AI into these competences and stated that there is a need for individuals to understand what AI is, how to use AI for their own good, and AI's safe and ethical use. The AI aspects are integrated into the five competence areas of DigComp, which are shown below.

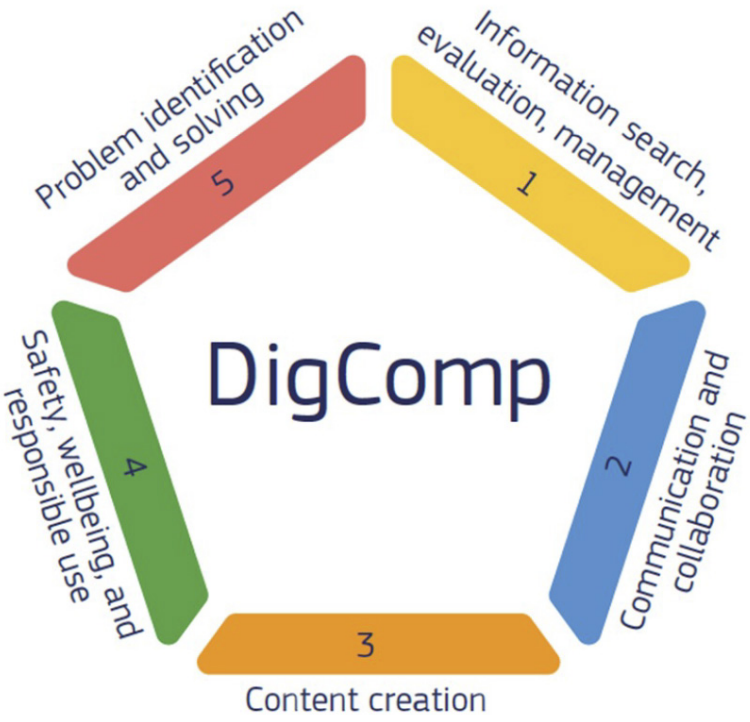


Figure 1:
The five DigComp 3.0 competence areas.

Source: European Commission, DigComp 3.0.

To summarize the main points of this section:

- Digital youth work means intentionally using digital media and technology in any youth work setting while maintaining the same goals and principles as traditional youth work. Similarly, the use of AI in youth work can be done in different settings, both face-to-face and digital.

- Digital youth work has been developed for a long period of time, since 2010s. There are experiences and youth policy initiatives to support this. Despite this, digital youth work is an emerging rather than an established field.

- Integrating digital youth work into existing youth work practices will be needed to secure that the tools comply with youth work values and practices.

- Studies highlight benefits of digital tools and AI: improved inclusion, attraction of young people with fewer opportunities, and support for content creation. At the same time, concerns persist, including privacy risks, data storage, ethical issues, and the danger of adopting technologies without considering broader societal and cultural implications.

- There is a need to further support the competency development of youth workers in digital field. This can be done by using the existing competence frameworks, such as DigComp, which take into account the use of AI.



The framework of youth participation of this study: the Shier model

Interpretation of the results based on Harry Shier's model of participation

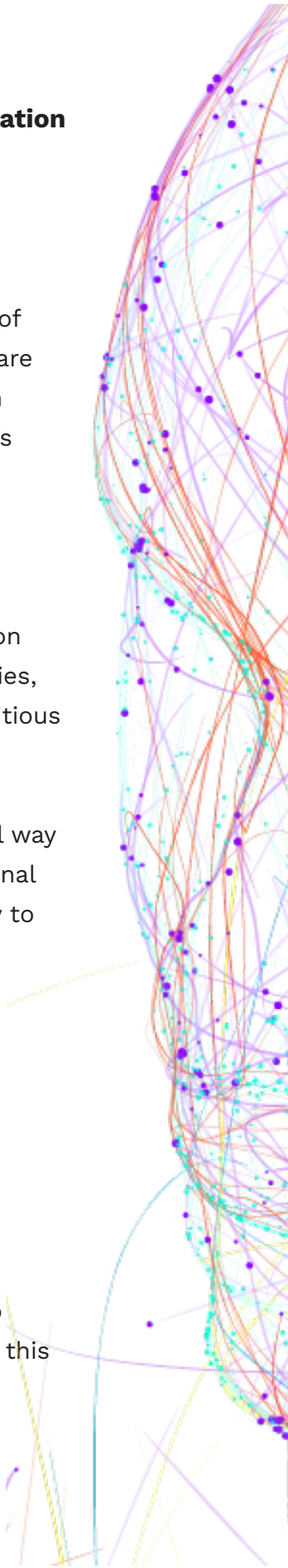
There is an abundance of different models for describing child and youth participation. All of these models share a commitment to enhancing the right to participate and to developing a process for doing so (Corney et al., 2020). Especially in the youth work context, challenging adultism has been of importance. Adultism refers to a set of beliefs which highlights that adults are somehow superior or more important than young people. This belief system contributes to treating young people as objects of activities instead of rights holders (Corney et al., 2022).

Ever since Roger Hart published his seminal work on youth participation (Hart 1992), which described the ladder of youth participation, a branch of participation models has aimed at describing different stages of participation (Kiilakoski, 2020). These models describe a hierarchy of participation activities, often moving from lower or less ambitious activities to higher or more ambitious activities.

For our purposes, the model proposed by Harry Shier in 2001 offers a useful way of interpreting how AI can be used to promote youth participation. The original article referred to children, but we have adapted the key principles to apply to young people. Shier proposes five stages of youth participation:

- Young people are listened to.
- Young people are supported in expressing their views.
- The views of young people are taken into account.
- Young people are involved in decision making processes.
- Young people share power and responsibility for decision making. (Based on Shier 2001).

As can be seen, Shier's hierarchy is based on what kind of power is given to young people. Applying this framework to the use of AI, we can reformulate this model accordingly:



1. AI is used to improve consultation processes, for example in communicating the ideas of young people or in making consultation more inclusive.

2. AI is used to make participation more “attractive” to children and young people. To achieve this, AI is integrated into processes in ways that help empower young people to state their views.

3. AI is used to promote the ideas of young people so that they can be better taken into account. This can be done, for example, by translating the ideas of young people to better fit the agenda of the city council.

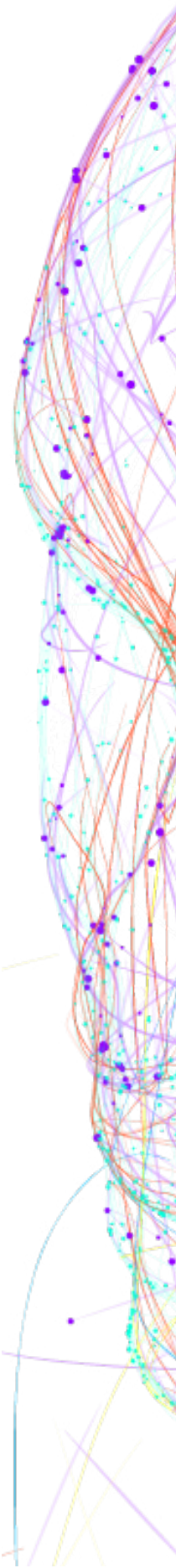
4. AI is used to help young people take part in decision-making, for example by translating the language used by young people, to adult stakeholders during the decision-making process.

5. AI is used to share power and responsibility with young people.

To further reflect on the results, youth participation in the youth work context can be divided into two different aspects. Firstly, young people may participate in youth work activities and take part in decision-making. Secondly, young people may participate in the local community outside youth work with the help and guidance of youth workers (Forkby & Kiilakoski, 2014). These two forms of participation may require different tools. Since participation is one of the key values of youth work, it is relatively easy to integrate young people into organisational processes within youth work. In contrast, promoting youth participation in the context of municipal decision-making is usually not as straightforward. Therefore, the needs for tool use are also connected to whether we are referring to the needs of youth organisations or the needs of municipalities.

Methodology

A desk study was carried out at the beginning of the project to map existing knowledge and practice related to AI in youth work and youth participation. This involved reviewing prior Erasmus+ reports, examining examples of how youth work organisations had already used AI, and consulting relevant resources to help shape the survey and interview design. The desk study provided an initial evidence base for identifying key themes, practical use cases, and emerging questions to explore further through the survey and interviews.



The survey was planned based on the desk study and discussions held at the first project meeting in Antwerp. A rough survey draft was developed, shared with project partners for comments, and then revised accordingly. The final survey was opened in the spring of 2026 and distributed through various European youth work networks to gather input on the use of AI in youth work and digital youth participation processes. Even after extending the original response window, the survey received only 33 replies.

The survey also included an option for youth workers to volunteer for follow-up interviews and to share examples of AI-related projects or tools used in their organisations. No additional relevant AI tools were identified through the survey responses themselves. Four youth workers volunteered to be interviewed, and three interviews were completed ultimately.

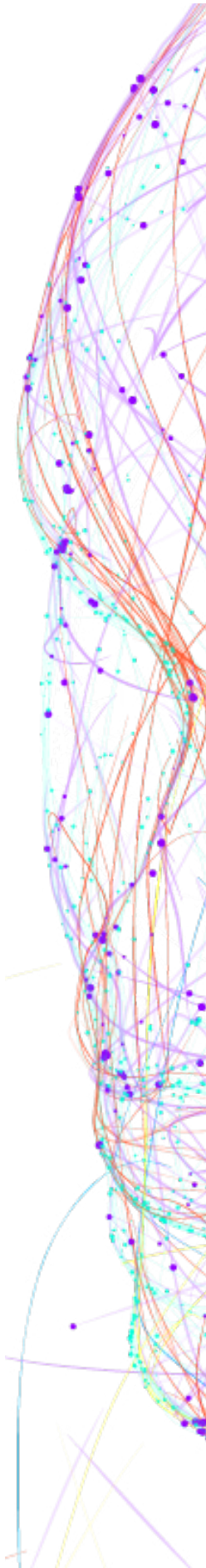
The project conducted three semi-structured interviews with youth workers using Microsoft Teams. The interviews followed a thematic guide with a small set of questions under each topic, while still leaving room to explore interesting points raised by the interviewees in more depth before returning to the planned structure. The recordings were transcribed, and the transcripts were then analysed to identify common themes across the three interviews.

In parallel with the survey and interview work, the project also reviewed AI-driven youth participation tools to identify possible gaps and blind spots in relation to the pilot applications. However, relatively few tools were found that had been designed specifically for youth participation, so the scope had to be widened to include broader participation platforms and related AI-enabled tools that could still offer relevant lessons for the project. This made it possible to capture a more realistic picture of the current landscape and to identify opportunities and limitations that might otherwise have been missed.

Generative AI tools were used to support desk research, drafting and language editing. The authors have reviewed and verified all content and are responsible for the report.

Survey and interview findings

In this section we will go through the survey results adding insights from the youth worker interviews into the results. The findings presented in this chapter should be interpreted with caution, since the number of respondents is quite low.

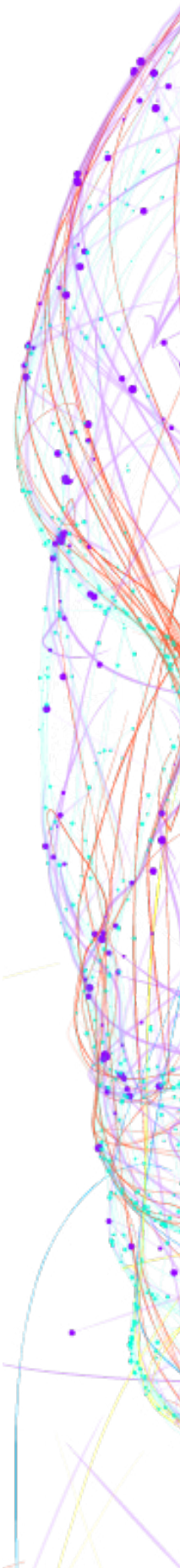


The survey on which this paper is based was launched in early 2026. It was intended for youth workers in Europe. The answering time was prolonged to be sure that all the informants could answer the survey. The survey was gathered using Webropol. 33 respondents answered the survey. For the analysis this means that the number of respondents is too limited to analyse the differences within groups. For this reason, the analysis is done by examining total answers in most of the cases.

It should be noted that the study has serious limitations. These include that there is no selection of participants, and that the respondents are likely to be biased. Usually, it is impossible to properly analyse which groups did not answer the survey. The analysed survey was conducted in English, which limits the pool of people who can answer the survey. Additionally, international surveys usually attract youth workers who have experience in international youth work. Since this survey was about the use of AI, it could have attracted youth workers who are more interested in digital youth work than their peers. When conducting interviews, snowball sampling technique was used to select participants after initial contacts. In this method, the participants recommended other informants among their acquaintances.

We wish to stress that the results cannot be generalized. In other words, they do not tell us how all youth workers in Europe think about AI tools. Instead, they are a sample of youth workers who are likely to be more skilled in English, more favourable towards digital youth work and more interested about international aspects of youth work. The readers are advised to take these results as an example of how certain youth workers view the matters instead of seeing them as talking about attitudes of the community of youth work as a whole.

While the material consisting of 33 survey responses and three interviews does not provide a representative picture of the situation across Europe, it still offers valuable insights into current understandings and uses of AI in youth work and digital youth participation processes, both for this project and for others interested in the topic. Interview quotations may have been lightly edited for grammar, clarity, and accessibility where necessary. The edits do not alter the intended meaning of the interviewees' statements. The country of the interviewee is indicated after each quotation.



Respondent characteristics

The respondents came mainly from municipal youth services (55 %) and local youth organisations (27 %), with smaller numbers from regional and national organisations, research or educational institutions, private companies, and other types of organisations. Most (60 %) respondents in the “other” section were from a local government.

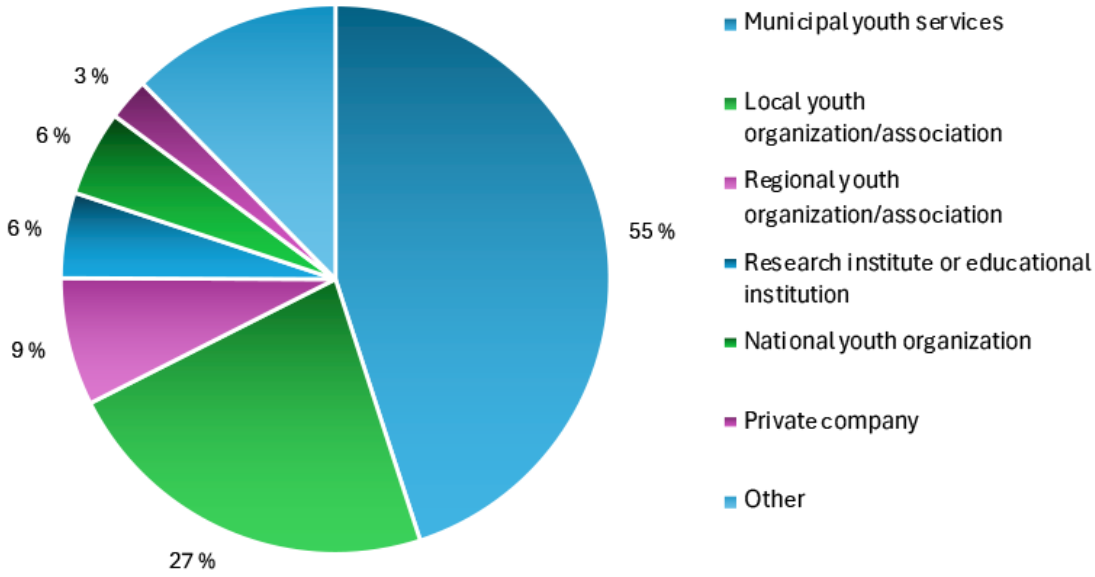


Figure 2: Which type of organization do you work for?

Since the survey was distributed primarily through the project countries, the country distribution largely reflects the project’s partnership and outreach structure, as can be seen on figure 3. Belgium accounted for 33 % of respondents, while Finland and Portugal each accounted for 21 %; the remaining 21 % came from other countries.

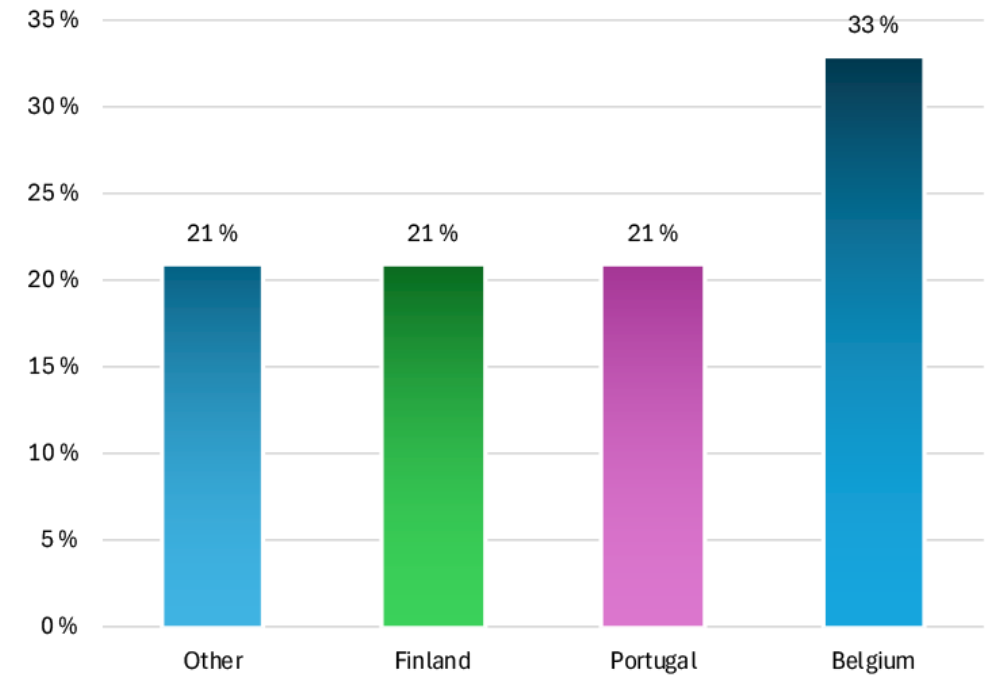


Figure 3: Which country do you operate in?

The respondents mainly held professional or leadership roles within their organisations. Youth work practitioners in paid positions formed the largest group, at 46 %, followed by respondents in management or leadership positions, at 42 %. Smaller proportions reported development or research roles, combined volunteer and paid positions, volunteer youth work positions, or other roles. Overall, the respondents were therefore mostly people with direct professional experience or organisational responsibility in youth work, rather than volunteers alone. The combined share seen in figure 4 exceeds 100 %, as respondents were able to select multiple roles.

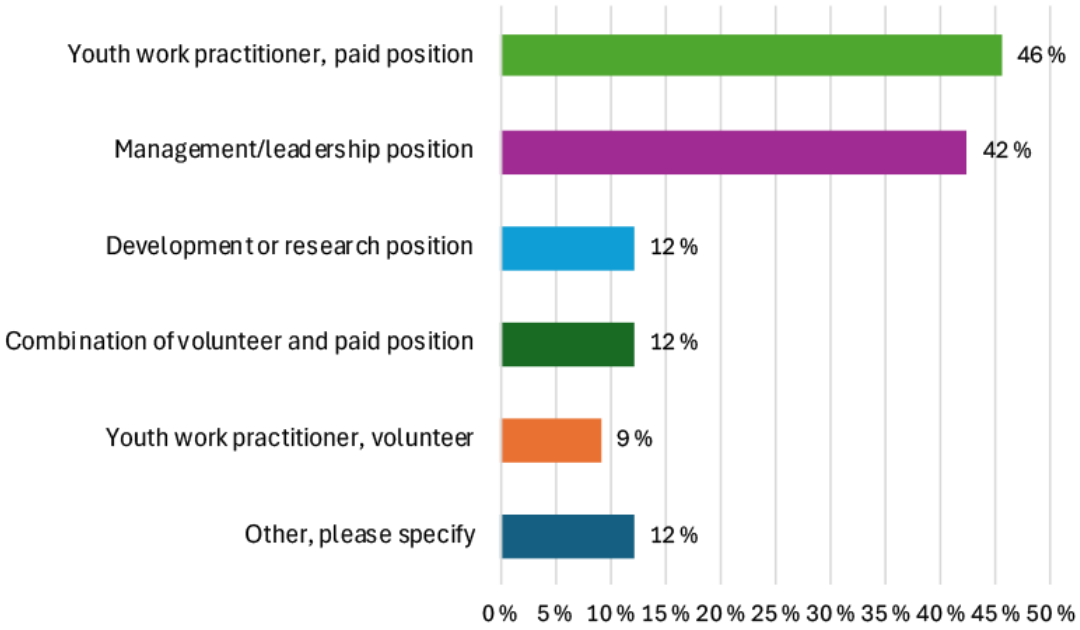


Figure 4: Your role in the organization?

Current Use of AI in Youth Work

The figures in this section highlight the main patterns in current AI use, the purposes for which AI is used in youth work and participation processes, and the possibilities and concerns that accompany its use. Together, these results provide a descriptive overview of how respondents understand the role of AI in their youth work practices.

The results seen in figure 5 suggest that AI is already present in the field, although the level and form of use vary between respondents. Only about one in six respondents said that they do not use AI at all, while 72 percent of respondents said they use AI sometimes or actively.

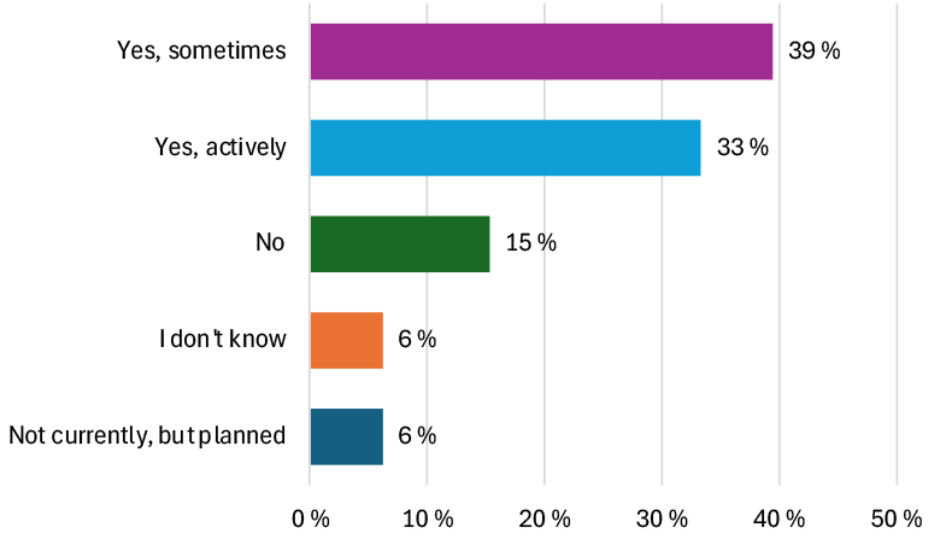


Figure 5: Do you currently use digital tools that use AI in youth work?

The most used AI-enabled digital tools were chatbot-based services, reported by 79 % of respondents, as seen in figure 6. Content-generation tools followed at 63 %, while language translation and content analysis or classification tools were each used by 50 %. Data visualisation tools were mentioned by 33 % of respondents, and 29% reported using automatic audio or video transcription. Less frequently used tools included workflow automation tools at 21 %, voice- or video-based participation channels at 17 %, smart survey tools at 13 %, and predictive analytics or forecasting tools at 8 %. Overall, the responses suggest that AI is used mainly for communication, content creation, translation, and analysis, while more specialised predictive and adaptive participation tools remain uncommon.

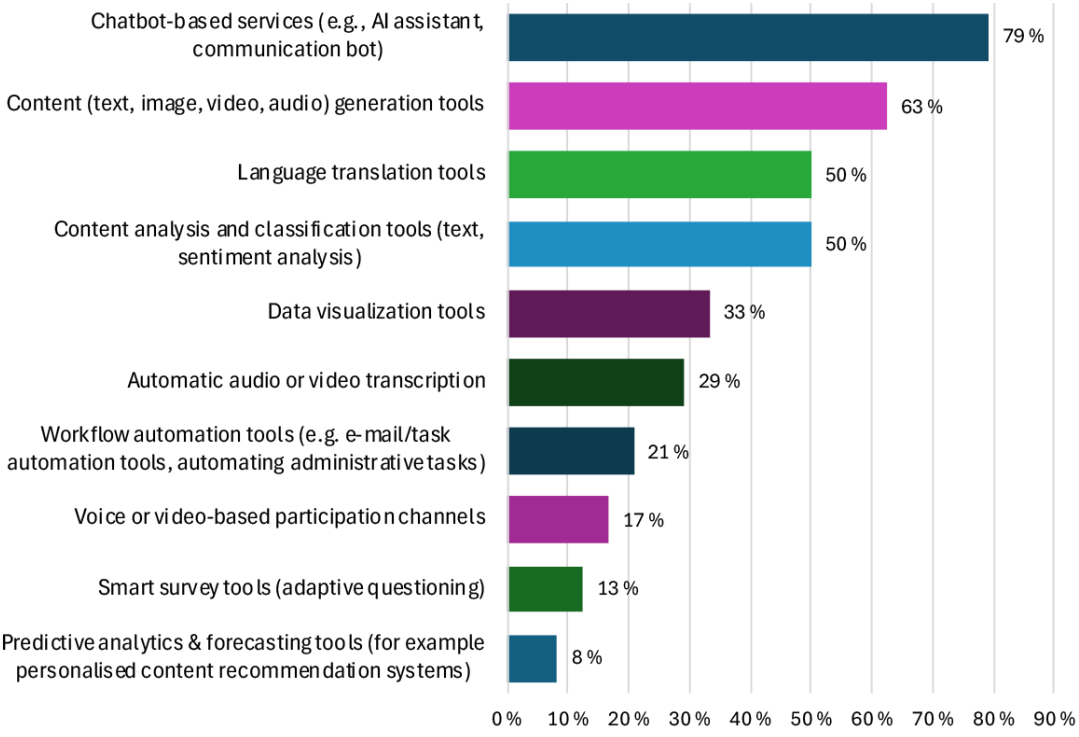


Figure 6: Which of the following types of digital tools that use AI do you use?

ChatGPT was the tool most often named by a wide margin, as can be seen in figure 7. In addition to the AI tools shown in the chart, respondents also mentioned a wider range of digital platforms and everyday work tools that include AI elements or built-in automation features, such as Mentimeter, Canva and Trello. These tools are not always used primarily as AI systems, but they nonetheless support tasks such as communication, transcription, translation, content creation, survey work, and data processing. This suggests that AI in youth work is often embedded in familiar digital environments rather than appearing only as standalone AI applications. At the same time, chatbots and other AI-enabled digital tools were used to collect young people's opinions, ask targeted questions, enable anonymous contributions, and create more interactive participation formats.

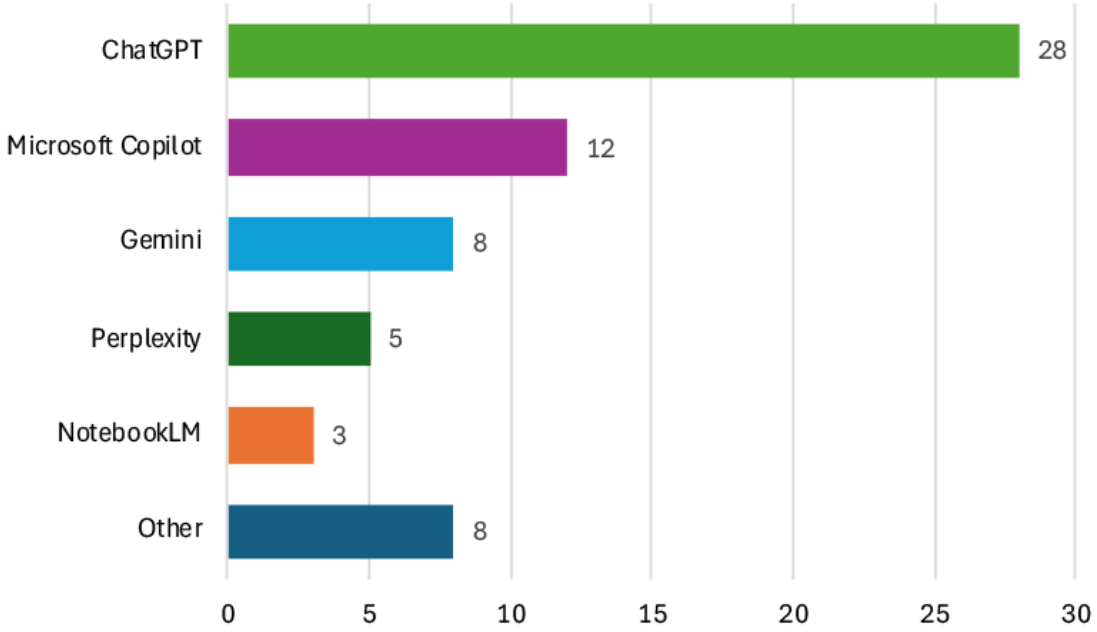


Figure 7: Please name the tools that you use.

Use of AI in youth participation processes

This chapter examines how artificial intelligence is currently used, perceived, and anticipated in youth participation processes. Drawing on survey responses and interviews from different national and organisational contexts, it considers both the practical benefits of AI—such as summarising, analysing, translating, and communicating young people's input—and the conditions that limit or shape its impact. The findings suggest that AI currently functions mainly as a support layer around participation, helping youth workers organise their work and make youth perspectives more accessible, while direct interaction, interpretation, trust, and relationships remain largely human-led. The chapter also explores concerns related to bias, transparency, privacy, technical capacity, digital inequality, and

environmental impact, and concludes by identifying areas that future prototype development could investigate, including more accessible forms of direct participation, stronger feedback loops, and greater youth agency in the use and design of AI-supported tools.

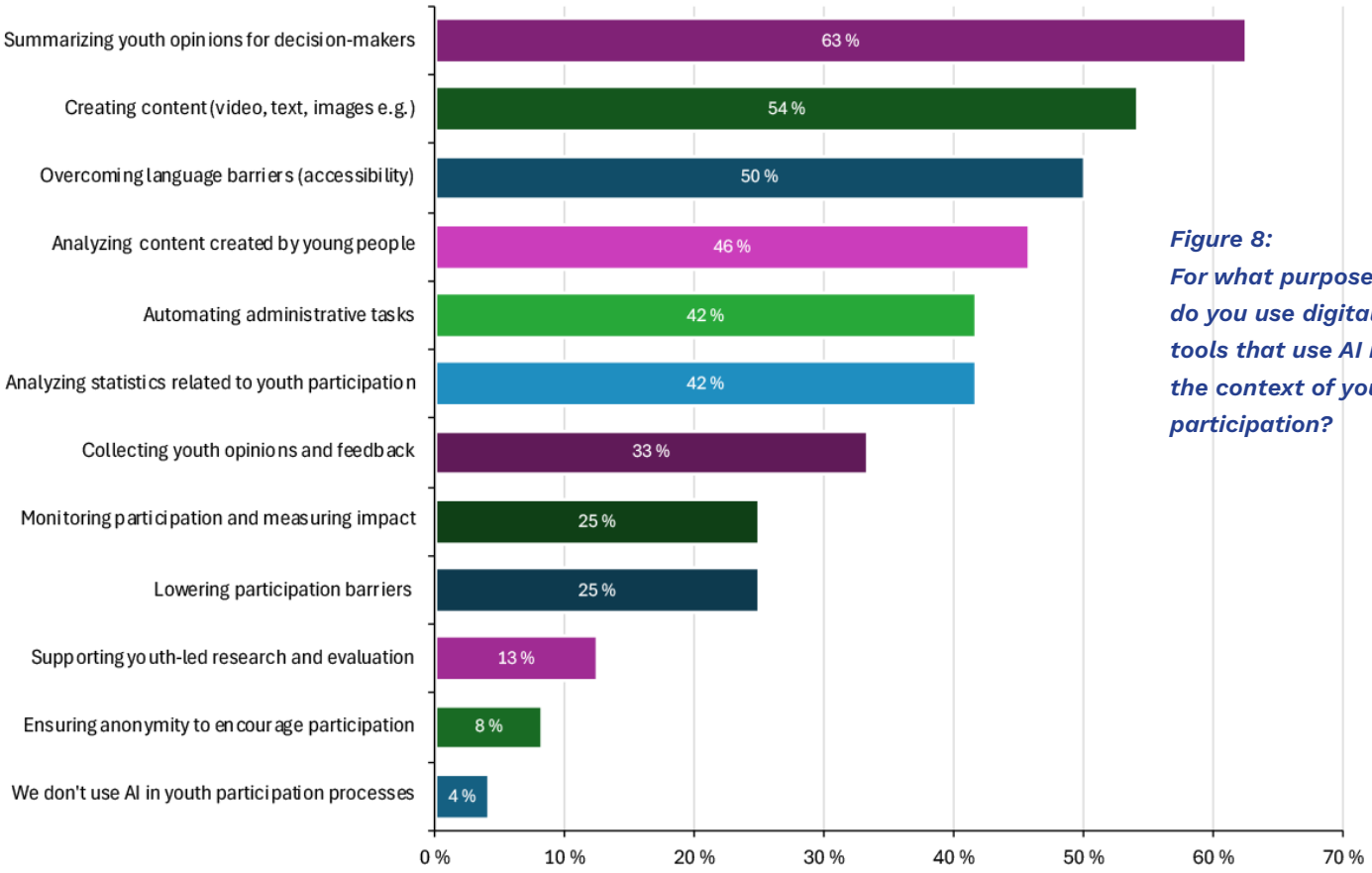


Figure 8: For what purposes do you use digital tools that use AI in the context of youth participation?

The strongest patterns relate to summarising youth opinions (63 %), creating content (54 %), overcoming language barriers (50 %) analysing input (46 %) and automating administrative tasks (42 %). The open answers suggest that these tools are used mainly to make participation easier to organise, easier to understand, and easier to act on. Respondents describe them as helping with collecting youth feedback, summarising and analysing large amounts of input, translating across languages, and lowering barriers for young people who may be less confident, less fluent, or less likely to speak in formal settings.

The interviews broadly reinforce the survey pattern shown in figure 8. Interviewees from Serbia, Albania, and Portugal described using AI primarily to summarise and analyse young people's input, prepare communication and presentation materials, support translation, process feedback, and reduce administrative work. In practice, AI functioned mainly as a support layer around participation: it helped organisations make youth input more manageable and decision-ready, while the collection of views, contextual interpretation, and relationships with young people remained human-led.

"AI has made this a lot easier, for example, in terms of synthesising information, sending data we have and asking to collect in viewpoints."

— Interview, Portugal

"Basically, we are using those tools to save us the time so we can focus more on other practicalities."

— Interview, Serbia

According to the results, the four most frequent uses of AI tools are synthesising and summarising the opinions of young people for decision-makers (63%), creating content (54%), overcoming language barriers (50%), and analysing and thematising the content created by young people (46%). As can be seen, at least some of the tools are used to reformulate the ideas of young people. Therefore, it might be safe to say that these tools are used in a consultative way, staying close to the first level of the Shier model described earlier in this article. In this, we reformulated the first stage 'young people are listened to' to 'AI is used to improve consultation processes, for example in communicating the ideas of young people or in making consultation more inclusive'. There are already examples of making participation more effective in the first stages of participation ladders.

The survey also asked respondents: ***"How do these tools help amplify youth voices in participation processes?"*** as an open question. The answers suggest that AI currently contributes mainly indirectly, by helping youth workers collect, process, clarify, and communicate young people's views.

Several respondents described using ChatGPT and other writing tools to structure and clarify young people's ideas and feedback without changing their meaning. AI was also used to summarise large amounts of qualitative and quantitative input, classify responses, transcribe audio recordings, and create visual summaries or infographics that make youth perspectives more accessible to decision-makers. In this way, AI can help transform diverse contributions into clearer and more manageable material for analysis and communication. Of course, this remains one-sided, and as many models describing youth participation emphasise, the level of consultation alone is not yet full participation.

Respondents also identified ways in which digital tools with AI elements can make participation more accessible. Translation and language-support tools may help

reduce language barriers and support young people who have difficulties with writing or interpreting formal language. Chatbots, Mentimeter, Zoom, WhatsApp, and similar platforms were mentioned as ways to collect more responses, enable anonymous input, encourage quieter or less confident young people to participate, and offer flexible participation formats for young people living in rural areas or with limited availability. Chatbots were also described as useful for asking targeted questions and creating more interactive or engaging participation experiences.

At the same time, several respondents questioned whether AI directly amplifies youth voices. Some stated that the tools mainly simplify organisational and administrative work or speed up existing tasks, rather than changing young people's participation itself. Others explained that AI helps youth workers involve more young people by freeing up time but does not directly support participation. Overall, the responses indicate that AI's strongest current contribution lies in making youth input easier to express, process, interpret, and present, while its direct impact on participation depends on how the wider process is designed and facilitated.

Interview findings illustrate several ways in which tools may amplify youth voices. In Serbia, ChatGPT helped some young people "put their thoughts into words and organise ideas," while Canva helped make their presentations clearer. In Albania, translation tools were seen to "reduce language barriers," and anonymous polling was reported to encourage quieter or less confident youth to contribute. However, the Portuguese interview offered an important qualification: the tools "automate processes for us" and help organisations involve young people, but "do not directly support their participation." Together, these findings suggest that AI amplifies youth voices mainly by reducing expressive, linguistic, and organisational barriers, while its direct effect on participation remains conditional.

> *"ChatGPT helped some of them put their thoughts into words and organise ideas when preparing presentations, especially when they were unsure how to start or how to structure what they wanted to say."*
>
> *— Interview, Serbia*

These examples highlight how AI can be used to reach second level of our reformulated model, namely 'AI is used to make participation more "attractive" to children and young people. To achieve this, AI is integrated into processes in ways that help empower young people to state their views.' If and when AI tools are used to help young people have their say, reduce the barriers in participating, they are helpful in promoting youth participation. However, the further stages of participation

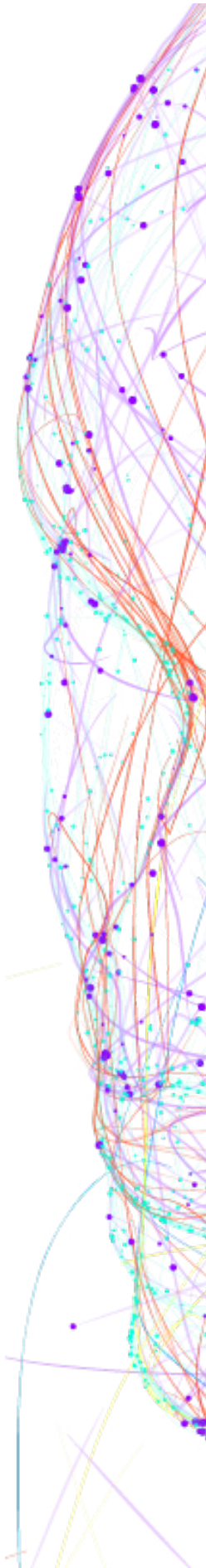
require taking into account the views of the young, and thus falls under the responsibility of decision-makers.

Young people's attitudes towards these tools, as reported by the respondents, were mixed but mostly positive. Many appreciated the anonymity, accessibility, and easier ways of expressing their views when using chatbots and online survey tools compared to face-to-face discussions, while others valued the more engaging format and visual presentation of the activities. At the same time, some young people were neutral, unaware that AI was being used, or openly critical, showing that acceptance depends strongly on trust, transparency, and the way the tools are introduced. In one case young people's opposition led the organisation to stop using AI-generated content in their promotional material, as some young people opposed it strongly. The ambiguous attitude of the young towards AI tools is analysed in other studies as well (Lalande & al. 2026, pp. 13-14), so finding mixed reactions in this study was to be expected.

The respondents were also asked: ***"How has the use of these tools affected the outcomes of participation processes?"***

The answers suggest that digital and AI-supported tools can affect participation outcomes in several ways. Some respondents reported higher participation rates, more diverse input, and more structured and actionable feedback when using tools such as Mentimeter, Google Forms, Zoom, and chatbots. Chatbot-based formats were considered particularly engaging because they offered a novel way to participate, used accessible language, included strong visual elements, reduced the pressure of group activities, and allowed young people to respond to targeted questions. Other tools supported young people in expressing and organising their thoughts, exploring creative forms of self-expression, and producing clearer presentations and communication materials. One survey respondent described using ChatGPT to role-play a character in an educational activity. The respondent reported that the format gave students anonymity, immersion, and interactivity, and enabled more students to participate by reducing the pressure to form groups.

The reported effects were not uniformly positive or clearly established. Some respondents reported no clear impact, said that the effects had not been assessed, or explained that the tools were mainly used to analyse youth input and support internal processes rather than to involve young people directly. Overall, the responses indicate that tools can improve participation and the quality of its outputs when they are well matched to young people's needs, but their effects depend strongly on how they are introduced, designed, and used.



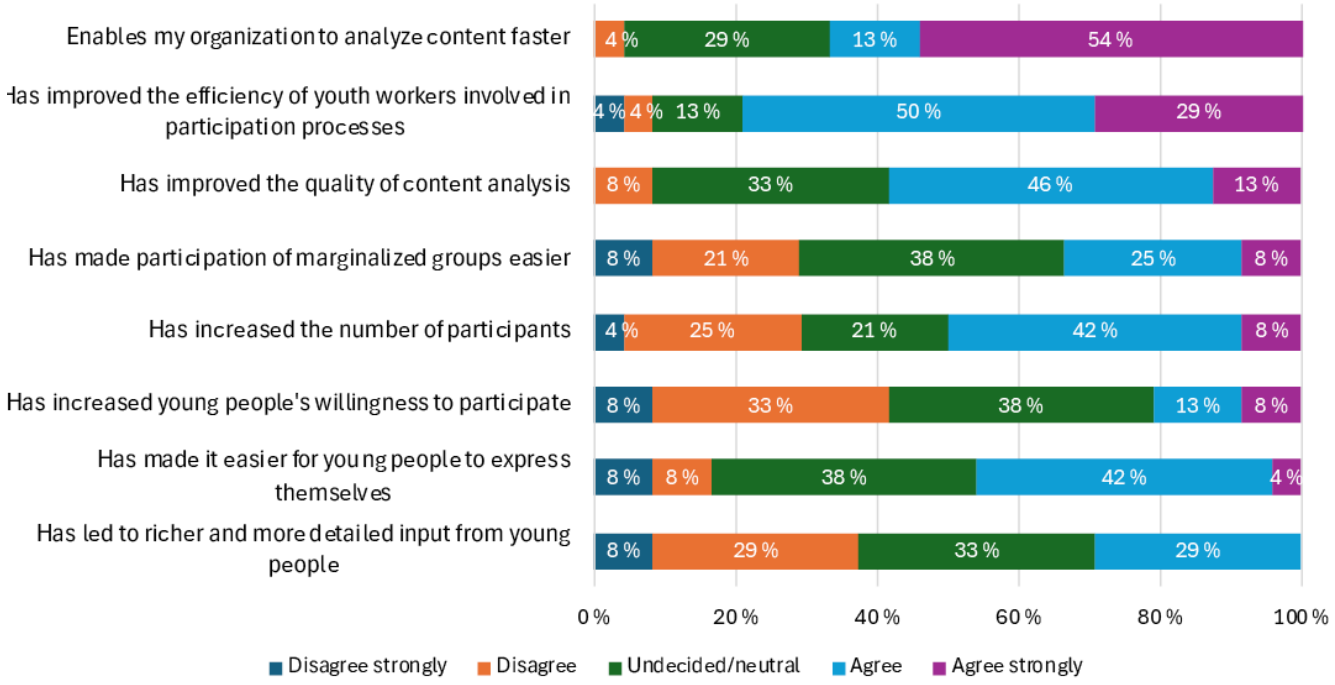


Figure 9: The perceived benefits of using AI in participation processes (n=24)
Note: 24 out of 33 respondents said that they use AI, therefore not all 33 respondents answered this question.

The responses to statements on perceived benefits are generally positive, especially regarding the efficiency gains linked to AI use. Respondents most strongly agreed that AI helps youth workers analyse content faster and improves the efficiency of participation work, while views were somewhat more cautious on whether it increases participation numbers or leads to richer youth input.

The interview findings broadly support the pattern shown in Figure 9, particularly the strong perceived benefits related to faster content analysis (67 % agree), improved efficiency (79 % agree), and improvement of quality analysis (59 %). Interviewees described using AI for summarising, thematising, translating, transcribing, and structuring feedback, while also reporting that tools such as ChatGPT and Canva helped some young people organise and communicate their ideas more clearly. These accounts are consistent with the high levels of agreement in Figure 9 concerning faster analysis, improved efficiency, and easier self-expression.

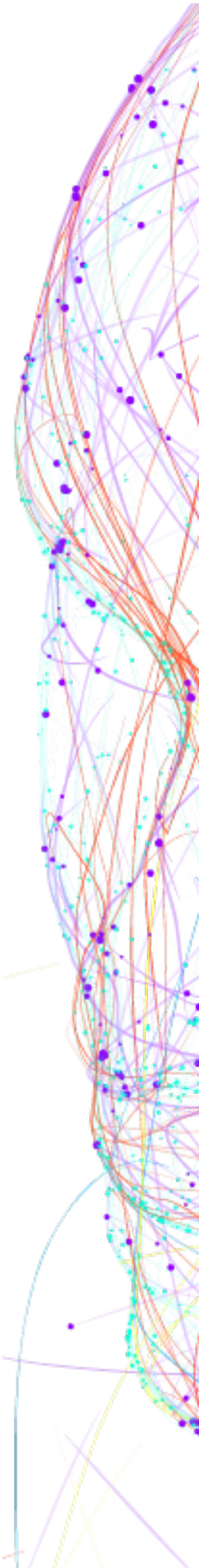
The interviews provide more qualified support for the claims that AI increases participation among marginalised groups or raises young people's willingness to participate. Translation, anonymity, flexible online formats, and creative tools were beneficial in some contexts, but young people's reactions were mixed: some appreciated the tools, while others were neutral or opposed to using AI. The interviews therefore suggest that AI-supported formats may

help organisations reach or engage certain groups more effectively when they reduce language, accessibility, or confidence-related barriers, but they do not demonstrate a consistent increase in participation across contexts.

The same caution applies to participant numbers and the richness of input. Although the survey results indicate that respondents perceived some positive effects in these areas, the interviews provide no consistent evidence that AI increases the overall number of participants or produces richer and more detailed contributions. In Serbia, AI helped some young people structure their ideas more concretely, but this use had not yet been fully tested in participation or activism. In Portugal, AI was described mainly as a way to automate organisational processes and enable staff to involve young people more effectively, rather than as a tool that directly supports participation.

Overall, the interviews suggest that AI most reliably improves the organisation, accessibility, and presentation of participation, while its direct effects on the scale, depth, and inclusiveness of participation remain conditional on trust, facilitation, transparency, human support, and the needs of the group.

> *"For young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, some AI tools could strengthen writing and interpretation skills, helping to bridge the gap between the language they use and the language of decision-makers."*
>
> *(Edited interview quotation, Portugal)*



Concerns and Challenges Related to AI

This section examines the main concerns the youth workers have about the use of AI in youth work and youth participation. Drawing on both the survey responses and the interviews, it focuses on three interconnected areas: ethical and societal concerns, practical and technical challenges, and environmental impacts. The section describes how these concerns relate to the use of AI by youth workers and young people, as well as the safeguards and forms of support needed for responsible implementation.

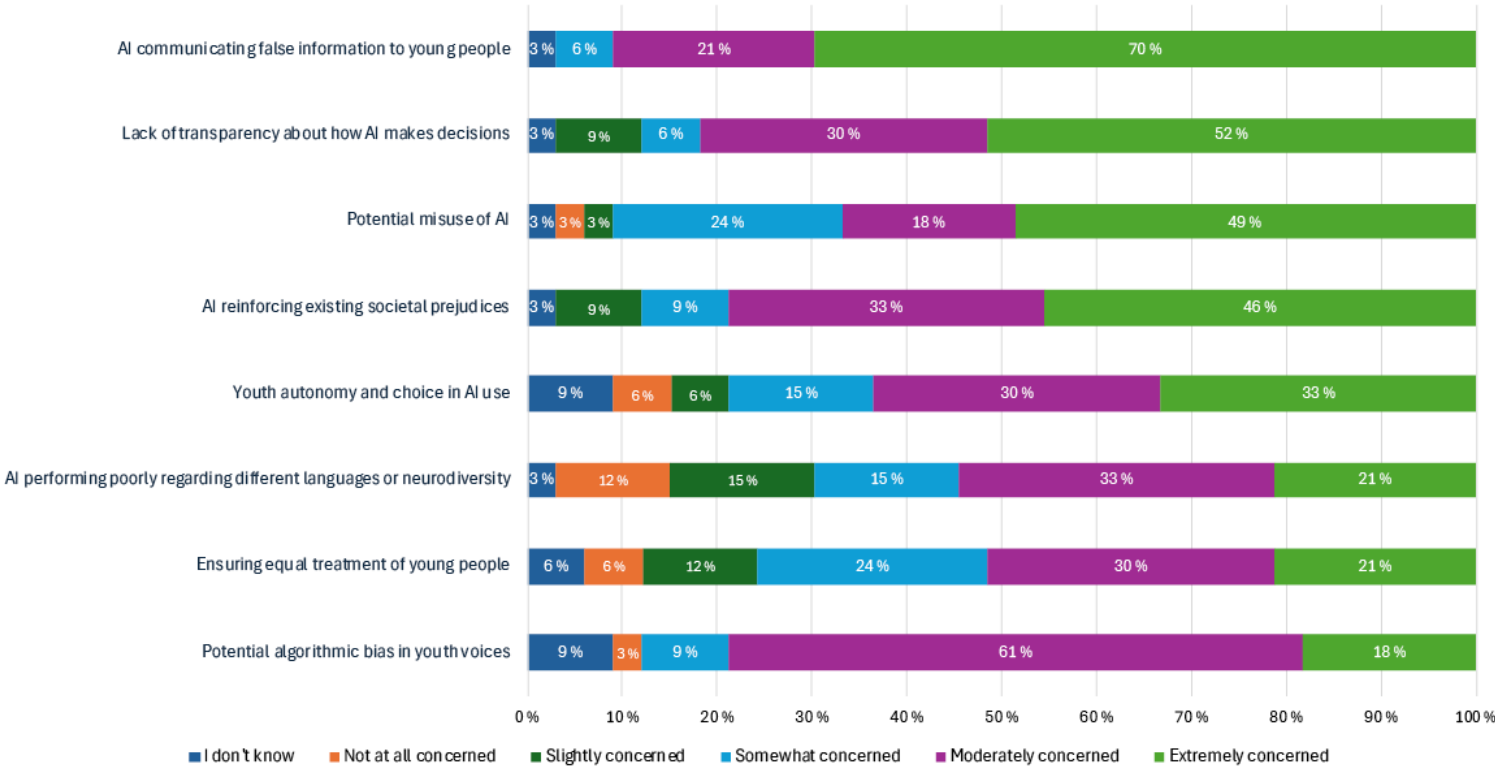


Figure 10: Are you concerned about the following AI-related factors regarding algorithmic bias and representation?

The results seen in figure 10 show substantial concern across all issues, although the intensity varies. AI communicating false information to young people generated the strongest concern: 70 % of respondents were extremely concerned and a further 21 % moderately concerned. Concern was also high regarding AI reinforcing existing societal prejudices, with 33% moderately concerned and 46% extremely concerned. Lack of equal treatment produced a more divided pattern, with 30% moderately concerned and 21% extremely concerned, while AI performing poorly across different languages or neurodiversity received 33% moderate and 21% extreme concern.

The survey results show substantial concern about algorithmic bias and representation, particularly in relation to transparency, misinformation, misuse, unequal treatment, youth autonomy, and the possibility that AI may reinforce existing prejudices or perform poorly across languages and forms of neurodiversity. The three interviews broadly support these concerns, although they provide stronger evidence on trust, transparency, and human oversight than on algorithmic bias itself. In Serbia, young people's mixed reactions to AI, including opposition from some participants, highlighted the importance of choice, dialogue, and respectful introduction of digital tools. The interview also stressed that AI should support rather than replace human relationships and professional judgement. In Portugal, AI was described mainly as automating organisational processes and enabling organisations to involve young people more effectively, rather than directly supporting participation.

At the same time, the interviews qualify the survey's concerns by showing that AI can reduce some participation barriers: in Serbia, ChatGPT helped young people structure their ideas, while in Albania, translation tools and anonymous polling supported language accessibility and the participation of quieter or less confident young people. Overall, the interviews suggest that the survey concerns are justified, but that the effects of AI depend strongly on whether young people retain agency, whether the use of AI is transparent, and whether human judgement remains central.

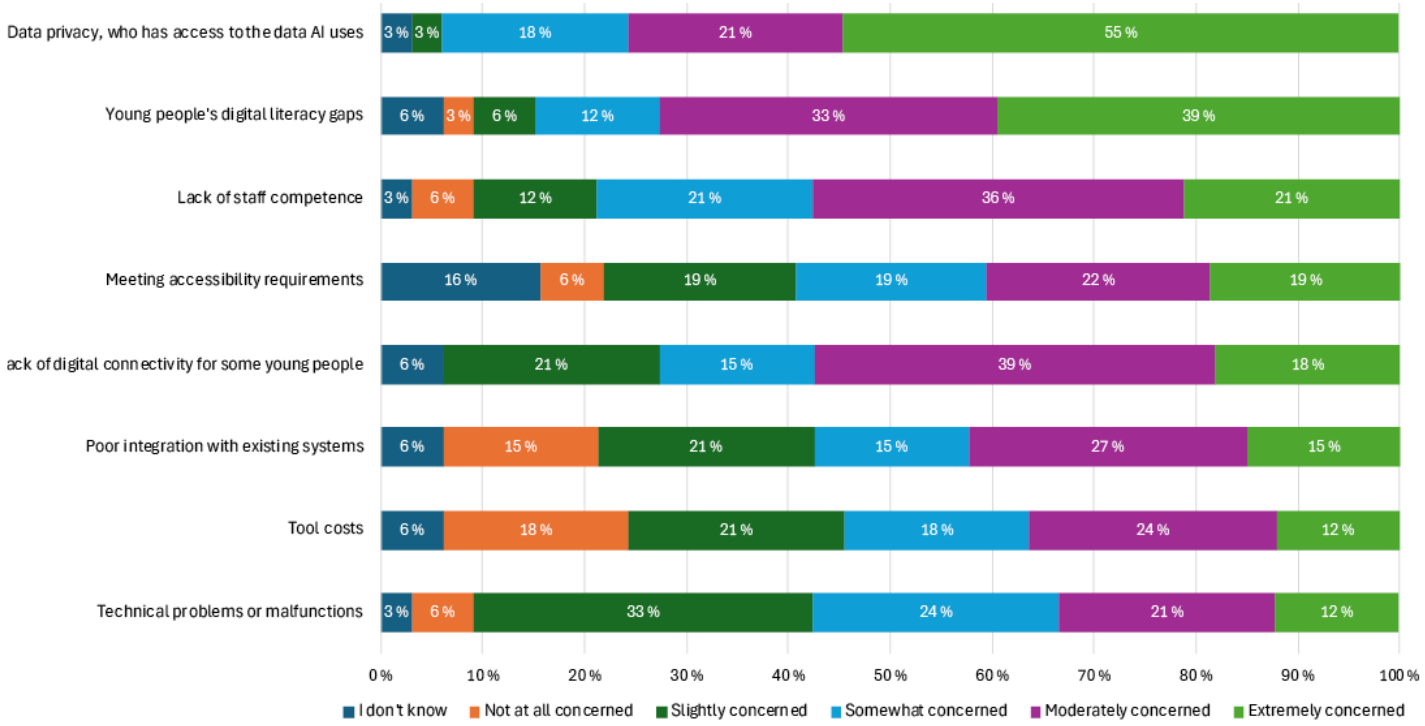


Figure 11: Are you concerned about the following AI-related factors regarding practical and technical challenges?

The technical concerns shown in Figure 11 tell us that respondents were worried about the practical conditions required for using AI, including data privacy (55 % extremely concerned), digital literacy (39 %), lack of staff competence (21 %), technical reliability, costs, integration with existing systems, connectivity, and accessibility. The interviews provide partial support for these concerns. The Serbian interview showed that AI could help young people organise their ideas and create clearer presentations, but also indicated that its use depends on human judgement and appropriate guidance. The Albanian interview demonstrated that digital tools can support accessibility by reducing language barriers and enabling anonymous or flexible participation, although this depends on the tools being suitable for the group's needs. The Portuguese interview further qualified the findings by showing that AI may function effectively for administrative and organisational tasks without directly increasing participation.

Overall, the interviews suggest that the technical concerns identified in the graph are relevant, but that the practical value of AI depends not only on whether the technology works, but also on staff competence, accessibility, and how well the tool is integrated into the participation process.

Figure 12: Are you concerned about the following factors regarding the environmental aspect of using AI?

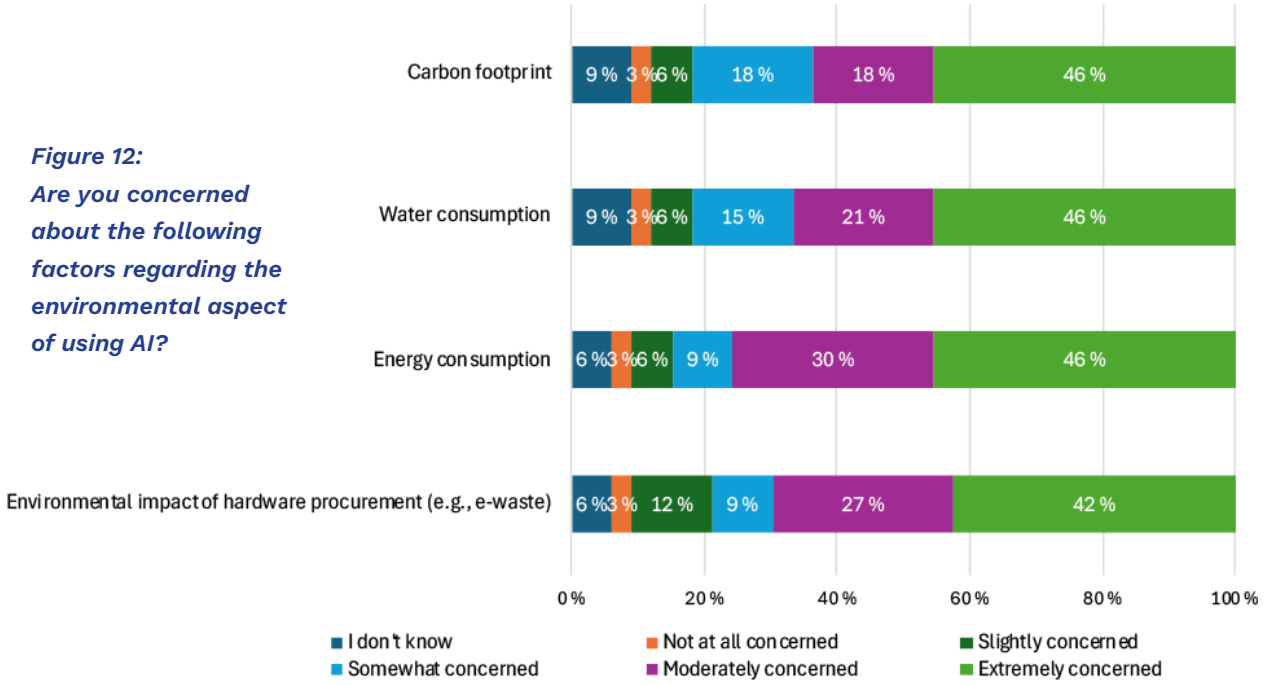


Figure 12 shows that respondents expressed considerable concern about the environmental effects of using AI. Energy consumption generated the highest level of moderate or extreme concern, with 30 % moderately concerned and 46 % extremely concerned, representing 76 % of respondents in total. Concern was also high regarding the environmental impact of hardware procurement, including electronic waste, where 27 % were moderately concerned and 42 % extremely concerned. Water consumption and carbon footprint followed similar patterns: 67 % expressed moderate or extreme concern about water consumption, while 64 % did so about carbon footprint. Overall, the results indicate that respondents viewed the environmental impact of AI as a significant concern, particularly in relation to the energy and material infrastructure required to operate AI systems.

Environmental concerns were discussed differently across the interviews. In Albania, the interviewee described feeling strongly concerned after reading about the environmental costs of AI, particularly because pollution and environmental problems are already visible in everyday life in urban Albania. However, they also noted that young people generally did not yet understand the issue well, linking this partly to limited environmental education. In Serbia, the interviewee acknowledged the water required to cool AI systems and recognised this as an

important issue but explained that AI's ecological impact received less attention because Serbia currently faces more urgent environmental problems. In Portugal, the interviewee said that environmental impact, including water use, was actively addressed in sessions with young people and that many young people were aware that using AI carries environmental costs. Taken together, these accounts suggest that environmental awareness exists across the contexts, but its salience depends on local environmental conditions, educational practices, and the priorities of youth workers and young people.

Overall, the findings show that concerns about AI are wide-ranging and context dependent. Survey responses indicate that participants are concerned about issues such as algorithmic bias, transparency, privacy, misinformation, staff competence, digital inequality, and environmental impacts, while the interviews illustrate how these concerns are experienced and prioritised in different national and organisational contexts. At the same time, participants generally do not view these risks as a reason to reject AI entirely; rather, they emphasise the importance of human oversight, ethical guidance, data protection, critical digital literacy, and environmentally responsible use.

Overall, the findings indicate that respondents were especially alert to AI's potential to distort or misrepresent youth voices, rather than treating algorithmic bias as only a technical problem. Even with this level of concern, 61 percent of respondents are planning to expand their use of AI in their organisations. In an open question on the role of AI in youth work in the next 2 to 5 years, respondents expected AI to become more integrated into youth work, especially as a tool for efficiency and support. They saw the strongest value in reducing routine workload, improving accessibility, and helping process large amounts of information, but repeatedly emphasised that AI should not replace the relational and participatory core of youth work.

Several responses also pointed to the need for clearer rules, better training, and a more critical and ethical approach to using AI in practice. At policy level, respondents saw a strong need for future action around ethical guidelines, data protection, competence development, standards, stronger involvement of young people in AI development, digital inclusion, and environmentally friendly AI solutions.

Conclusions

Looking at the survey and interview findings, it makes sense that the prototypes developed in this project explored functions beyond the uses most commonly reported by respondents, such as analysing and summarising input, translation, content creation, data processing, and administrative support. These findings show that AI is currently used mainly to support youth workers' work around participation. It helps them collect, process, clarify, and communicate young people's views, while the direct interaction with young people and the relational aspects of participation generally remain human-led. Hence, in this study the use of AI to promote youth participation remained in the first stages of participation ladder, namely consulting young people and encouraging young people to have their say.

At the same time, the findings point to several areas that deserve further exploration through the prototypes. One is more direct interaction with young people and the gathering of their input through accessible digital formats. Respondents and interviewees mentioned chatbots, anonymous polling, translation, flexible online participation, and creative tools as ways of making participation easier or less intimidating for some young people. However, the findings do not show that AI consistently increases participation, reaches marginalised groups, or produces richer input. Rather, its effects appear to depend on the design of the activity, the needs of the group, the quality of facilitation, and the level of trust and transparency involved.

Another relevant area is what happens after young people's input has been collected and analysed. Respondents described using AI to structure and summarise contributions and to make them more understandable and useful for decision-makers. This suggests potential for further exploring how youth perspectives can be communicated, presented, and followed up in participation processes. The survey and interviews do not, however, allow us to conclude that AI itself creates greater policy impact or bridges the gap with policymakers.

Finally, the findings suggest that lowering participation barriers should be understood more broadly than translation alone. Language support was an

important use of AI, but respondents and interviewees also referred to barriers related to writing, confidence, formal language, anonymity, accessibility, rural location, and the pressure of group participation. The prototypes therefore provide an opportunity to explore whether AI-supported formats can make it easier for a wider range of young people to understand issues, express their views, and take part. These findings should be treated as exploratory, given the limited number of survey responses and interviews, but they may offer a useful basis for the next stage of prototype development and evaluation.

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About the partners

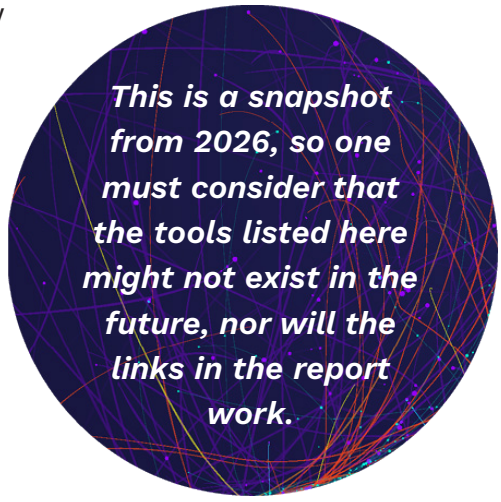
Dypall is a European platform of civil society organisations, local authorities and research institutions focusing on youth participation in decision-making processes at the local level. We stand for active and meaningful involvement of young people in local democracies through cooperation with local authorities and we provide the space and the resources for capacity building and exchange of good practices among our members.

The Finnish Youth Research Society is a non-profit organization founded in 1987, for the purpose of promoting multidisciplinary youth research in Finland. The aim of the Youth Research Society is to develop youth research and to provide information and expertise on matters relating to young people – studies, perspectives, interpretations and political stands. Finnish Youth Research Society carries out a wide range of research on both social divisions that shape young people's lives and everyday experiences and practices of young people and adults who work with them. Research activities are based on multidisciplinarity, ethics and the combination of basic academic research and applied, youth policy-relevant research approaches.

Tree company is an innovation agency for online democracy. Combining expertise in political science and citizen participation with technological know-how, Tree company develops digital tools that strengthen democratic processes. It supports organizations, governments, media and businesses with digital solutions that help inform, involve, and engage citizens and other stakeholders in policymaking and in addressing societal challenges.

AI-driven tools in youth participation processes

Prior to the development of the pilot tools, existing AI-driven tools that are used in digital participation processes were mapped. As only a limited number of tools were found that were explicitly designed for youth participation, the scope of the mapping was broadened to include related tools with potential relevance for youth work and participation. The tools are grouped below into three categories according to how they may support youth participation in practice: tools that improve reach, tools that improve quality, and tools that improve efficiency. This categorisation is not absolute, since many of the tools have overlapping functions and could reasonably fit more than one category.



Tools that increase reach

The tools in this category are relevant because they help widen participation by lowering barriers that often prevent young people from taking part. In youth participation, reach is not only a question of scale, but also of accessibility: whether young people can understand the information, use the format, and feel able to contribute in the first place. Survey and interview findings in this study also suggest that AI is seen as especially useful when it helps reduce language barriers, improve accessibility, and make participation easier to organise and join.

U-Report

U-Report is a youth engagement platform developed by UNICEF and implemented with local partners, including governments, civil-society organisations, and young people. It enables young people to share their opinions through short polls, messaging, and other low-threshold digital interactions. The platform can be accessed through several mobile and messaging channels, including SMS and, in some contexts, basic mobile phones.

U-Report is primarily intended for rapid consultation and communication rather than extended deliberation. It can be used to gather young people's views on issues that affect them, share information, and communicate results or follow-up messages. The platform has been implemented through national and regional programmes and has reached young people in numerous countries.

Link: https://ureport.in/

Developer / organisation: UNICEF, in collaboration with local government, civil-society, and youth partners.

Model of engagement: Rapid polling, consultation, information-sharing, and messaging.



Figure 13 U-Report mobile interface enabling young people to access polls and chatbots.
Source: UNICEF.

Level of operation: National to global. U-Report originated as an SMS-based initiative in Uganda and has since been implemented through country and regional platforms in many countries.

Target group: Young people, including adolescents and groups that may be less likely to participate through formal consultation processes. The specific age range varies between implementations.

AI use / relevance: U-Report is not primarily an AI tool. Its main functions are mobile polling, messaging, and information-sharing. In some implementations,

AI or machine-learning systems have been used to support automated responses or the classification and processing of large volumes of incoming messages. AI is therefore best understood as an additional or implementation-specific layer rather than as the defining feature of U-Report. Where AI is used to analyse or respond to contributions, human oversight remains necessary to avoid errors or misinterpretation.

Relevance for youth participation: U-Report is particularly relevant when the objective is to hear from a broad group of young people through a quick and familiar communication format. Short questions and mobile-based interaction can reduce barriers related to time, travel, literacy, and confidence, enabling young people to contribute without attending a meeting or preparing a detailed submission.

The platform can also support communication after feedback has been collected by sharing information, results, or follow-up messages with participants. However, its short-form interactions generally capture opinions or reactions rather than detailed reasoning, collective discussion, or co-created proposals. Its contribution to meaningful participation therefore depends on how questions are designed, which groups are reached, how responses are interpreted, and whether participants are informed about subsequent action.

Strengths:

- Free, anonymous, and accessible through multiple mobile and messaging channels.
- Enables rapid collection of youth opinions at national and international scale.
- Combines feedback collection with information-sharing and communication with participants.

Limitations:

- Short polls are less suitable for deliberation, collective reasoning, or co-creation.
- Responses may not represent all young people, since access, outreach, and willingness to participate vary between groups.
- Automated responses or AI-supported analysis may introduce errors and require human oversight.

Girls Meet Up app

Girls Meet Up is a web-based platform developed by One2One.Run to encourage teenage girls to participate in sports and physical activities. The pilot was implemented in Amsterdam-Zuidoost and focused on girls aged 12–14. The platform enables girls to discover, create, and share local activities, while also supporting participation in organised sports and short exercises at home.

The tool was developed through a co-creation process involving girls, local coaches, youth workers, and community organisations. Four co-creation sessions with 30 participants explored what motivates girls to take part in sports and how a digital platform could make participation more accessible and engaging. The resulting platform included activity descriptions, short videos, preparatory exercises, and features intended to help coaches follow participation and adapt their support.

Developer / organisation: One2One.Run B.V., in cooperation with local coaches, youth workers, and community organisations.

Model of engagement: Co-creation and activity-based engagement.
Level of operation: Local. The pilot focused on Amsterdam-Zuidoost.

Target group: Teenage girls, particularly girls aged 12–14, as well as coaches, youth workers, sports providers, and community organisations.

AI use / relevance: The platform describes AI as supporting the discovery, creation, and sharing of activities. However, the available pilot information does not provide sufficient detail to assess how these functions work or how extensively they were used. AI should therefore be understood as a supplementary feature rather than the main focus of the case.

Relevance for youth participation: Girls Meet Up is relevant mainly as an example of co-creation and targeted engagement. The development process involved members of the target group in shaping a tool intended to reflect their interests, motivations, and everyday experiences. This illustrates the importance of involving young people in the design of digital services aimed at them.

The app itself does not primarily support participation in public decision-making. Rather, it creates opportunities for girls to organise and join activities connected to sports and community life. It is therefore relevant to youth participation in a broader sense, particularly where participation is understood as active involvement in community activities, but it should not be presented as a consultation, deliberation, or civic decision-making platform.



Strengths:

- Involves the target group in the design of the tool.
- Responds to the specific interests and participation barriers of teenage girls.
- Connects digital engagement with local activities and support from coaches and youth workers.

Limitations:

- The app is not primarily designed for participation in public decision-making.
- Its relevance to youth participation is indirect and depends mainly on the co-creation process.
- The available information does not sufficiently document the practical role or impact of its AI features.

Video Avatar Translation Widget

Video Avatar Translation Widget is a digital communication tool developed to make written public information more accessible to people with limited literacy or diverse language backgrounds. It converts written content into video presentations using an avatar, allowing information to be delivered through speech and visual communication rather than text alone.

The tool was developed in Amsterdam to support the communication of public information and services. It was intended to make content easier to understand, reduce the time and resources required to produce accessible communication materials, and support distribution through websites, widgets, and social media channels.

Developer / organisation: Amsterdam-based public-sector and technology partners.

Model of engagement: Accessible information-sharing and communication support.

Level of operation: Local and municipal.

Target group: Residents with low literacy, limited proficiency in the language used by public institutions, or a preference for audio-visual communication.

AI use / relevance: The tool uses AI-supported avatar and language technologies to transform written information into video-based communication. Its role is

primarily to improve the accessibility and efficiency of public communication rather than to collect, analyse, or deliberate on participants' contributions.

Relevance for youth participation: The tool is relevant to youth participation because access to understandable information is a prerequisite for meaningful participation. Young people may be excluded from consultations if invitations, background information, or explanations of the process are too complex, text-heavy, or available only in one language.

By presenting information in a more accessible audio-visual format, the tool may help more young people understand an issue and decide whether they want to participate. It should therefore be understood as a participation-enabling communication tool rather than as a participation platform.

Strengths:

- Makes public information available in a more accessible audio-visual format.
- Can help reduce literacy and language-related barriers to participation.
- Supports the efficient production and distribution of accessible communication materials.

Limitations:

- Provides access to information but does not itself enable dialogue, consultation, or decision-making.
- The quality and accessibility of the output depend on the accuracy of the translation, simplification, avatar presentation, and audio.
- It may not meet the needs of all users, particularly those who require additional accessibility features or prefer direct human communication.

Audio-To-Audio Translation for Status Holders

Audio-to-Audio Translation for Status Holders is an AI-supported speech-to-speech translation service developed to help municipal staff and status holders communicate when they do not share the same language. The pilot was developed for Amsterdam's participation and integration process, where municipal client managers mainly speak Dutch and many status holders speak Arabic or Tigrinya.

Link: https://mokin.nl/

Developer / organisation: Switch AI / Mokin, in cooperation with the Municipality of Amsterdam.



Model of engagement: Public-service communication and translation support.

Level of operation: Municipal.

Target group: Status holders, including refugees with a residence permit, and municipal client managers involved in participation and integration processes.

AI use / relevance: The service uses speech recognition, translation, and personalised speech-generation models. It is intended for two-way use during conversations: municipal employees can speak Dutch, while status holders can speak their own language, such as Arabic or Tigrinya, and both sides receive the translated speech in a language they understand. The tool is therefore not purely an employee-facing system, although the available information does not indicate that status holders use it independently outside their conversations with municipal staff.

Relevance for youth participation: The tool is not a youth participation platform and does not collect young people's views, facilitate deliberation, or enable decision-making. Its relevance is indirect: it can reduce language barriers that may prevent young people with migrant or refugee backgrounds from communicating with public authorities and accessing institutional processes.

The tool is therefore best understood as an accessibility and inclusion layer around participation and public services. It can help make communication more immediate and understandable, but meaningful participation still depends on the wider process, the role of municipal staff, and whether participants have genuine opportunities to express their views and influence outcomes.

Strengths:

- Enables two-way spoken communication when participants and public officials do not share a language.
- Allows status holders to communicate in their own language during conversations with municipal staff.
- Uses context-specific public-service terminology rather than relying only on generic translation.

Limitations:

- The tool supports communication but does not itself create opportunities for participation or influence.
- Translation accuracy may vary across languages, accents, dialects, and complex situations.
- The available information does not show that status holders can use the tool independently outside interactions with municipal employees.

Empowering Low-Literate Citizens With AI

Empowering Low-Literate Citizens With AI is an AI-supported reading-assistance tool developed to make written information easier to understand for people with low literacy. The tool can simplify an entire text rather than only explaining individual difficult words.

Link: https://tolkie.nl/

Developer / organisation: Tolkie, in cooperation with the Municipality of Amsterdam.

Model of engagement: Text simplification and accessible communication.

Level of operation: Public information and service access.

Target group: Low-literate citizens and other users who find institutional or complex written information difficult to understand.

AI use / relevance: With one press of a button, the tool converts text into accessible language below language level B1 and presents the content in bullet-point form. It functions as a reading-support layer that helps users move from complex institutional language to a version that is easier to follow, without requiring organisations to rewrite their materials manually.

Relevance for youth participation: The tool is not a youth participation platform and does not collect young people's views, facilitate discussion, or support decision-making. Its relevance is indirect: it can make invitations, background information, surveys, policy texts, and other participation-related materials more understandable for young people who may be excluded by text-heavy or complex communication.

By reducing literacy-related barriers, the tool may help more young people understand what is being discussed and decide whether and how they want to participate. It should therefore be understood as an accessibility tool that enables participation rather than as a participatory tool.

Strengths:

- Simplifies complete texts into more accessible language rather than explaining only individual words.
- Presents information in bullet-point form, making complex content easier to follow.
- Can improve access to written information without requiring organisations to rewrite texts manually.

Limitations:

- The tool supports understanding but does not itself enable dialogue, consultation, or influence.
- Simplification may remove nuance or alter meaning if the output is not checked carefully.
- It is most useful for written information and may not address other participation barriers, such as language, disability, lack of internet access, or limited trust in institutions.

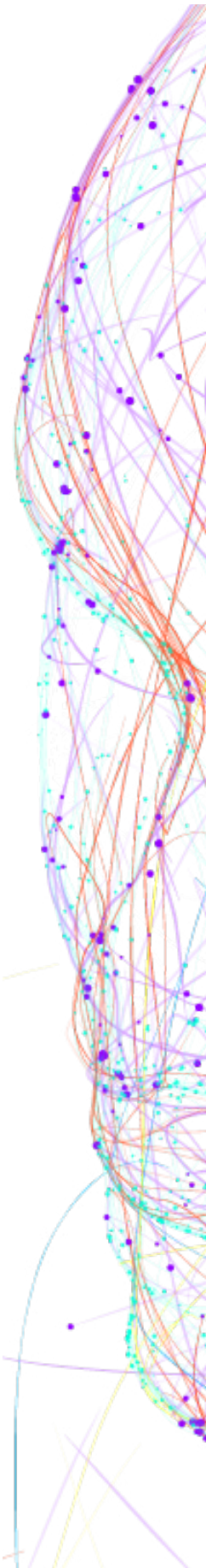
Conclusion on reach

The tools in this category show that increasing reach in youth participation is not only about attracting larger numbers of participants. It also involves reducing barriers that prevent young people from understanding information, communicating with public authorities, or feeling able to take part.

The examples illustrate three main approaches. U-Report lowers the effort required to provide feedback through short and accessible interactions. Girls Meet Up demonstrates how co-designed, activity-based formats can make engagement more relevant to a specific group of girls, although the app is not primarily a civic participation tool. The Video Avatar Translation Widget and Empowering Low-Literate Citizens With AI improve access to information by making public content easier to understand, while Audio-to-Audio Translation for Status Holders supports two-way communication between status holders and municipal employees when they do not share a language.

Taken together, these cases suggest that AI is currently most useful for widening the entry points to participation. It can help people understand information, communicate across language barriers, and engage through formats that better reflect their circumstances. However, most of the tools do not collect opinions, support deliberation, or give participants direct influence over decisions. Their contribution is therefore mainly indirect: they create the conditions in which participation becomes more accessible, while the participatory quality of the wider process still depends on human facilitation, institutional openness, and whether participants' contributions can affect outcomes.

The category should consequently be understood as including both participation-enabling tools and targeted engagement tools, rather than only platforms designed specifically for youth participation. This distinction is important for interpreting the examples accurately and for avoiding the assumption that improving access automatically produces meaningful participation.



Tools that improve quality

The tools in this category are relevant because they improve the quality of youth participation rather than simply increasing the number of participants. In this context, quality refers to whether participation allows young people to express views in a meaningful way, whether those views are captured accurately, and whether discussion can be turned into usable insight without losing nuance. The survey and interview material in this study suggests that AI is seen as especially valuable when it helps structure discussion, analyse input, and make youth perspectives more visible to decision-makers, while still leaving the relational and human-centred core of youth work intact.

Your Priorities

Your Priorities is an AI-enabled digital participation platform developed by the Citizens Foundation, an Icelandic nonprofit organisation. It combines idea generation, discussion, deliberation, prioritisation, and AI-supported analysis to help communities participate in their own language and to make large volumes of contributions more manageable.

Link: https://citizens.is/your-priorities/

Developer / organisation: Citizens Foundation

Model of engagement: Idea generation, online discussion, deliberation, and prioritisation.

Level of operation: Local, municipal, regional, national, and international.

Target group: Citizens, communities, public authorities, and groups involved in consultative or deliberative processes, including youth groups when the process is designed for them.

AI use / relevance: Your Priorities includes several built-in AI functions. These include real-time translation, speech-to-text, AI-assisted moderation for flagging toxic content, AI image generation, a built-in agent workflow engine, and AI analytics for clustering ideas, identifying topics, and generating dashboards. In this tool, AI supports both participation itself and the interpretation of large amounts of input.

Relevance for youth participation: Your Priorities is relevant for youth participation because it allows young people to do more than answer a survey or cast a vote. They can propose ideas, discuss issues, respond to each other,

and help identify shared priorities. Its multilingual and moderation features may be especially useful in youth participation processes that involve diverse groups, large volumes of input, or the need to lower language barriers. At the same time, meaningful youth participation still depends on facilitation, outreach, accessibility, and whether decision-makers respond to the results.

Strengths:

- Combines idea collection, discussion, and prioritisation in one platform.
- Uses AI translation, speech-to-text, and moderation to support accessibility and safer participation.
- AI analytics can help make large-scale youth input more interpretable for facilitators and decision-makers.

Limitations:

- AI moderation and analysis may misread context, tone, slang, or culturally specific expression.
- Text-based digital participation can still exclude some young people without additional support or alternative formats.
- The platform supports participation, but it does not by itself guarantee youth influence on decision-making.

Pol.is

Pol.is is an open-source digital participation tool developed by the Computational Democracy Project. It is designed for large-scale online deliberation and helps groups explore opinions through short statements, participant voting, and automated clustering of response patterns.

Link: https://pol.is/home2

Developer / organisation: Computational Democracy Project

Model of engagement: Consensus mapping and statement clustering.

Level of operation: Local, municipal, regional, national, and other large-scale deliberative contexts.

Target group: General public and diverse large groups participating in public deliberation or consultation processes.

AI use / relevance: Pol.is uses machine learning and statistical modelling to identify clusters of opinion, map areas of agreement and disagreement, and make

collective patterns visible. Its AI-related value lies mainly in analysing responses at scale and supporting transparency in how opinions are grouped rather than in generative features or conversational assistance.

Relevance for youth participation: Pol.is can be relevant for youth participation when the goal is to understand patterns across many viewpoints without forcing discussion into simple yes or no positions. Young people can react to statements, identify areas of shared concern, and see where views converge or divide. This can be useful in large youth consultations, assemblies, or policy discussions, although the format is less suited to creative co-design or longer collaborative dialogue.

Strengths:

- Makes patterns of agreement and disagreement visible across large groups.
- Supports large-scale participation without requiring long written contributions from every participant.
- Helps facilitators identify areas of emerging consensus and contested issues.

Limitations:

- The interaction format is relatively narrow because participation centres on reacting to short statements.
- The clustering process may be difficult for some participants to fully understand without explanation or facilitation.
- It is less suitable for collaborative drafting, project planning, or deeper co-creation processes.

Dembrane

Dembrane is an AI-supported participation and deliberation platform that helps organisations make sense of large, complex conversations. It records spoken or written contributions, transcribes them, identifies themes and points of disagreement, and produces traceable outputs that participants can review and refine.

Link: https://www.dembrane.com

Developer / organisation: Dembrane B.V., Netherlands.

Model of engagement: Facilitated group dialogue, citizen deliberation, stakeholder consultation, conversation recording, AI-supported analysis, and outcome development.

Level of operation: Local, municipal, regional, national, and multi-stakeholder settings.



Target group: Citizens, young people, public authorities, stakeholder groups, facilitators, and organisations conducting consultations, citizens' assemblies, or structured dialogues.

AI use / relevance: Dembrane uses AI for real-time transcription, topic identification, summarisation, synthesis, sentiment and pattern analysis, and the creation of traceable links between conclusions and the original contributions. Its ECHO tool can capture conversations from multiple groups simultaneously and turn them into searchable text and structured insights. The resulting summaries are treated as provisional and can be checked and corrected by participants, which keeps human validation in the process.

Relevance for youth participation: Dembrane is particularly relevant when youth participation involves small-group conversations, workshops, citizens' assemblies, or hybrid events rather than only online voting. It can reduce the need for young people or facilitators to take notes and can ensure that insights from multiple tables or discussion groups are not lost. Its value is strongest when young people need to see how their spoken contributions are reflected in the final outcomes.

Strengths:

- Captures and analyses spoken contributions, making deliberative and face-to-face participation easier to document.
- Produces traceable summaries and insights that can be reviewed and corrected by participants.
- Supports large or multi-group discussions by identifying common themes, differences, priorities, and areas of consensus.

Limitations:

- Recording conversations raises privacy, consent, data protection, and data-retention concerns.
- AI transcription and summarisation may misinterpret speech, accents, background noise, informal language, or sensitive context.
- The platform depends on skilled facilitation and participant validation to ensure that AI-generated outputs do not replace the participants' own meaning.

Cortico

Cortico is a nonprofit civic participation and community-listening platform that uses recorded small-group conversations to help communities share experiences and influence decisions. Its approach combines human-led dialogue with AI-supported transcription, analysis, and storytelling.

Link: https://cortico.ai

Developer / organisation: Cortico, a US-based nonprofit organisation working with the MIT Center for Constructive Communication.

Model of engagement: Small-group dialogue, recorded conversations, community listening, AI-supported sense-making, and sharing of stories and insights.

Level of operation: Local, community, educational, organisational, and national initiatives.

Target group: Communities, young people, educators, public authorities, civic organisations, journalists, and other groups seeking to understand lived experiences and underheard perspectives.

AI use / relevance: Cortico automatically transcribes recorded conversations and uses AI-assisted tools to support the identification of themes, connections, and patterns across multiple discussions. Its sensemaking process includes AI-assisted thematic tagging and codebook creation, but the analysis remains human-led rather than fully automated. Cortico also supports media outputs that preserve participants' voices alongside broader findings.

Relevance for youth participation:
Cortico is well suited to youth participation based on small-group dialogue, storytelling, and lived experience. Its youth initiatives enable young people to lead conversations, contribute to the design of discussion guides, and take part in interpreting what they and their peers have said. AI-supported transcription and sense-making can help transform recorded dialogue into themes, conversation maps, and other shared outputs, while young people and facilitators retain responsibility for contextual interpretation and for deciding how findings are used. This makes the approach useful for exploring complex issues such as education, belonging, civic identity, mental health, public services, and the future of work.

Cortico has been used in the Newark Youth Voices initiative, where young people lead recorded small-group conversations about issues affecting their lives

and communities. The platform supports the analysis of these conversations by identifying recurring themes, patterns, and insights, while youth leaders remain involved in the design of the dialogues and the sense-making process. The resulting material can support youth advocacy, inform decision-makers, and contribute to responses grounded in young people's lived experience.

Cortico has also supported youth-led and student-focused dialogue formats, including the Teen Dialogue Accelerator and student assemblies. These examples indicate that the platform can be used not only to gather youth perspectives, but also to support young people's roles as dialogue facilitators, interpreters of shared experience, and contributors to civic discussion. The specific outcomes of each initiative nevertheless depend on facilitation, safeguarding, participants' influence over the process, and whether institutions act on the resulting insights.

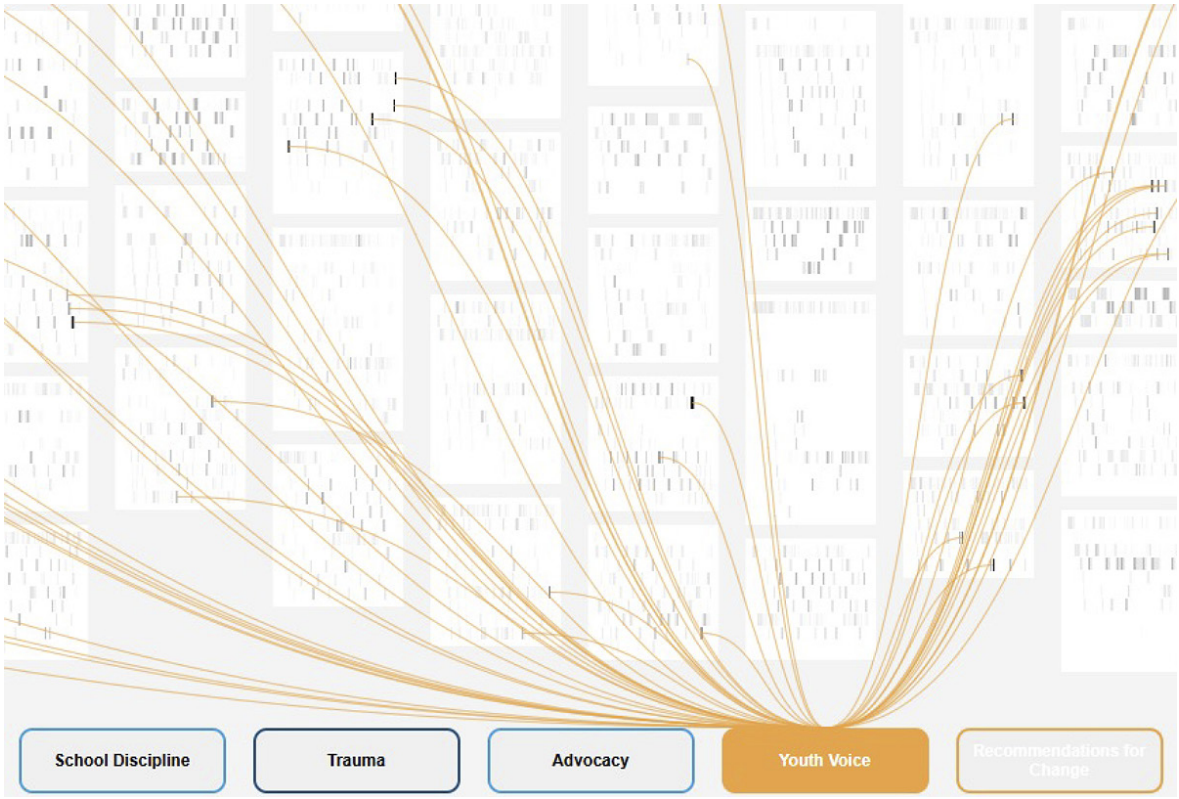


Figure 14: Cortico conversation map showing how youth contributions are connected to themes and recommendations for change. Source: Cortico.

Strengths:

- Centres personal experiences and underheard voices rather than only measuring opinions through predefined questions.
- Combines recorded audio, transcripts, AI-assisted analysis, and human interpretation to preserve context and participant voice.
- Supports youth-led dialogue and can help young people develop civic, communication, and technology-related skills.

Limitations:

- Recording conversations creates privacy, consent, safeguarding, and data-management responsibilities.
- AI transcription and analysis may misunderstand accents, background noise, informal speech, or culturally specific expressions.
- Small-group dialogue requires trained facilitators, time, and careful participant recruitment, so it may be less efficient than a large on line survey.

deliberAIde

deliberAIde is an AI-supported platform for planning, documenting, analysing, and reporting on structured dialogue and deliberative participation. It is designed to help public authorities, organisations, and communities turn complex group discussions into transparent, traceable insights without replacing human facilitation.

Link: https://www.deliberaide.com

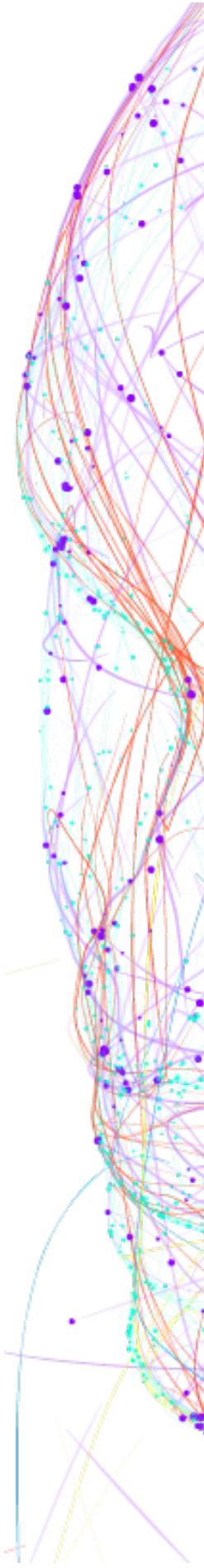
Developer / organisation: deliberAIde, a Germany-based social-impact startup.

Model of engagement: Structured dialogue, citizens' assemblies, workshops, stakeholder consultations, participatory budgeting, and hybrid deliberative processes.

Level of operation: Local, municipal, regional, national, and international.

Target group: Citizens, young people, public authorities, governments, parliaments, facilitators, participation professionals, and organisations working with stakeholder dialogue.

AI use / relevance: deliberAIde uses AI to transcribe and anonymise conversations, extract ideas, summarise discussions, cluster similar contributions, identify themes and areas of agreement or disagreement, and generate reports with supporting quotes and visualisations. The platform allows organisers to adjust and refine the analysis interactively, while its stated approach is to use human-centred AI that supports rather than replaces human dialogue and decision-making.



Relevance for youth participation: deliberAIde is relevant for youth councils, citizens' assemblies, participatory workshops, and other processes where young people discuss complex issues in groups. It can document contributions from several sessions, reduce the burden of note-taking, and show young people how their ideas appear in the final analysis. Features such as anonymisation, translation, and language simplification may also help make participation more inclusive, although these functions should be checked carefully in each specific process.

Strengths:

- Captures and analyses spoken contributions, helping ensure that ideas from group discussions are not lost.
- Produces traceable reports in which conclusions can be connected back to participants' original contributions.
- Supports facilitators by reducing administrative work and enabling analysis across multiple dialogue sessions.

Limitations:

- AI transcription, clustering, and summarisation can misinterpret speech, context, disagreement, or minority viewpoints.
- Recording and anonymising discussions still requires clear consent procedures, strong data protection, and careful communication with participants.
- The platform supports deliberative processes but cannot replace skilled facilitation, human judgement, or participant review of the results.

YET – Youth Environment Engagement Tool

YET, the Youth Environment Engagement Tool, is an AI-supported youth participation tool developed to involve young people in the improvement of public spaces and neighbourhoods. It enables young participants to communicate ideas about their local environment through images, natural-language prompts, and creative visualisations, making urban planning more accessible and engaging.

Link: https://www.vitalcities.be/en/projects/yet

Developer / organisation: Howest University of Applied Sciences and Vital Cities.

Model of engagement: Youth participation, creative co-design, neighbourhood improvement, and public-space planning.

Level of operation: Local and municipal.

Target group: Young people, youth organisations, local communities, urban planners, and public authorities.

AI use / relevance: YET uses generative AI to help young people transform images of public spaces according to their ideas and preferences. By entering natural-language prompts, participants can visualise changes to streets, parks, squares, and other local environments. The AI therefore functions as a creative support tool that helps translate young people's experiences and suggestions into visual material that can be discussed with planners and decision-makers.

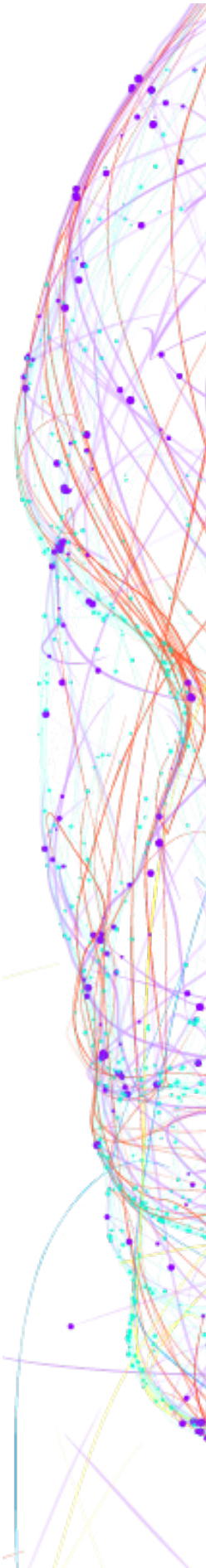
Relevance for youth participation: YET is particularly relevant because it connects youth participation with concrete improvements in young people's everyday surroundings. Instead of asking young people to respond to technical planning documents or describe proposals only in writing, the tool allows them to show how they would like their neighbourhood to look and function. This can make participation more accessible to young people who may find formal consultation processes difficult or unappealing. The approach also positions young people as co-designers of their environment rather than merely as respondents in a consultation.

Strengths:

- Makes neighbourhood and public-space planning more visual, creative, and accessible for young people.
- Allows young participants to express ideas through natural-language prompts and AI-generated images.
- Creates a bridge between young people's experiences and the work of urban planners and local decision-makers.

Limitations:

- AI-generated images may present attractive ideas without showing their technical, financial, or practical feasibility.
- The quality of the results depends on facilitation, clear prompts, and young people's access to suitable digital tools.
- The tool cannot guarantee real influence unless authorities consider the proposals and provide feedback on how they are used.



Conclusion on quality

Taken together, these tools show that improving the quality of youth participation is not only about collecting more responses, but also about helping young people express themselves, engage with different perspectives, develop ideas, and communicate their views in ways that decision-makers can understand. Tools such as Your Priorities and Pol.is support discussion, deliberation, and the identification of shared or differing opinions, while Dembrane, Cortico, and deliberAIde help facilitators capture, organise, and make sense of spoken and written contributions. YET adds a more creative and place-based approach by enabling young people to visualise ideas for improving their neighbourhoods and public spaces.

The main value of AI in this group lies in supporting expression, dialogue, synthesis, and co-design rather than replacing human facilitation or decision-making. These tools can make participation more accessible and meaningful, but their impact depends on how well they are adapted to young people's needs, whether participants understand how AI is being used, and whether their contributions lead to a visible response. Without facilitation, accessibility support, and a clear connection to actual decisions, AI may simply make participation outputs easier to process without substantially increasing young people's influence.

Tools that improve efficiency

The tools in this category are relevant because they help make youth participation processes more manageable for the organisations that plan, facilitate, and follow up on them. In this context, efficiency should not be understood simply as speed or automation. Rather, it refers to reducing routine workload, handling larger volumes of communication or input more effectively, and supporting youth workers or public institutions in turning participation into something that can realistically be organised, analysed, and acted upon. This framing is strongly supported by the survey and interview material in this study, where respondents most clearly associated AI with drafting, summarising, analysis, translation, and administrative support, while also stressing that efficiency gains should not come at the expense of trust, transparency, or the relational core of youth work.

CitizenLab / Go Vocal

CitizenLab and Go Vocal refer to the same digital participation platform at different stages of its development and branding. Originally developed as CitizenLab, the platform now operates as Go Vocal. It helps public authorities and

organisations collect, organise, and use residents' ideas and feedback through consultations, surveys, idea collection, discussions, participatory budgeting, proposals, prioritisation, voting, and online workshops. The platform is relevant for youth participation processes that aim to connect young people's views with local planning and public decision-making.

Link: https://www.govocal.com

Developer / organisation: Go Vocal, formerly CitizenLab.

Model of engagement: Online consultation, idea collection, discussion, feedback, surveys, participatory budgeting, proposal development, prioritisation, voting, and online workshops.

Level of operation: Local, municipal, regional, national, international, and organisational.

Target group: Public authorities, municipalities, organisations, residents, local communities, and young people participating in civic consultations and decision-making processes.

AI use / relevance:
The platform includes AI-supported Sensemaking functions that help organisations process large volumes of participation input. These functions can group contributions into themes, identify recurring topics and trends, summarise qualitative feedback, analyse quantitative and textual input, answer questions about selected contributions, and support report creation. Related features include automatic translation, voice-to-insight processing, optical character recognition for handwritten contributions, and moderation support. In this context, AI primarily supports the organisation, interpretation, and communication of participation data; it does not replace direct interaction between young people, youth workers, facilitators, and decision-makers.

Relevance for youth participation:
CitizenLab / Go Vocal is relevant for youth participation because it can offer a structured connection between young people's ideas and institutional decision-making. Young people can submit proposals, respond to consultations, discuss issues, prioritise ideas, take part in participatory budgeting, and vote on proposals. The platform can be used for both low-threshold participation, such as short surveys or idea submission, and more sustained processes involving dialogue, co-creation, and prioritisation.

Two documented cases illustrate this potential. In Chile, the National Youth Institute (INJUV) used CitizenLab in its Creamos Programme for young people aged 15–29. The platform supported online workshops in which more than 300 young participants could work simultaneously in facilitated groups to develop ideas for community challenges. The available material does not, however, clearly establish the specific role of AI functions in that youth process.



Figure 15: Go Vocal case study of INJUV's Creamos programme in Chile, where young people submitted, discussed and voted on community-development ideas. Source: Go Vocal.

A second example comes from Youth for Climate Belgium, which used Go Vocal to structure ideas emerging from a large youth-led climate movement. Participants submitted 1,700 ideas, added 2,600 comments, and voted more than 32,000 times. AI-supported analysis helped organisers identify 15 main priorities, which were subsequently prioritised and forwarded to policymakers. This case illustrates how AI can help turn a large volume of youth input into a more manageable and policy-oriented set of priorities.

The platform's value for youth participation ultimately depends on whether the process is actively promoted to young people, designed in an accessible and youth-friendly way, facilitated appropriately, and followed by clear communication about how contributions are considered in decision-making.

Strengths:

- Combines a broad range of participation methods, including surveys, ideas, discussions, proposals, participatory budgeting, prioritisation, and voting.
- AI-supported Sensemaking can help organise, summarise, and interpret large volumes of youth input.
- Supports the transition from online contributions to more actionable information for public authorities and decision-makers.

Limitations:

- The platform is designed for broad community engagement rather than specifically for young people, so youth participation requires tailored outreach, communication, and facilitation.
- AI-generated summaries, clusters, and insights may overlook context, minority opinions, humour, disagreement, or differences between groups, and therefore require human review.
- The platform cannot guarantee meaningful influence: young people's participation affects decision-making only when public authorities provide transparent follow-up and explain how contributions were used.

CONSUL with AI features

CONSUL Democracy is a free, open-source digital participation platform that enables public authorities and organisations to organise debates, collect proposals, run consultations, support participatory budgeting, conduct votes, and collaboratively draft policies. New AI-supported features are being developed to make these processes more accessible and inclusive, particularly for underrepresented groups such as young people.

Link: https://consuldemocracy.org

Developer / organisation: CONSUL Democracy community and its partner organisations.

Model of engagement: Online debate, consultation, proposal development, voting, participatory budgeting, and collaborative policy-making.

Level of operation: Local, municipal, regional, national, and international.

Target group: Public authorities, municipalities, civic organisations, communities, residents, and young people participating in democratic processes.

AI use / relevance:

The AI-supported Civic Assistant project is intended to add features such as voice input, real-time translation, and AI-generated proposals to the CONSUL platform. Earlier work on integrating machine-learning functions with CONSUL has also explored proposal categorisation, clustering, comment summarisation, and grouping participants according to shared interests. These functions can help both participants navigate complex information and public authorities process large amounts of input more efficiently.



Relevance for youth participation:
CONSUL is relevant for youth participation because it can support a complete participation pathway, from identifying an issue and discussing it to developing proposals, voting, and monitoring decisions. Its planned AI features may lower barriers for young people who find text-heavy or formal participation difficult by enabling voice-based contributions and real-time translation. The platform can also help local authorities organise and respond to youth proposals, but its usefulness depends on active outreach, youth-friendly facilitation, and a clear commitment to acting on the results.

CONSUL Democracy is currently developing an open-source Civic Assistant aimed at making participation more accessible to underrepresented groups, including young people. The planned functions include voice input, real-time translation, and AI-generated proposals. The project will include research, development, testing, and pilot implementation in European cities using CONSUL. At this stage, it should be described as an emerging pilot initiative rather than as evidence of an already evaluated AI-supported youth participation process.

Strengths:

- Supports several stages of participation, including debate, proposals, voting, participatory budgeting, and collaborative policy-making.
- Open-source AI development can allow public authorities and communities to adapt the platform to local needs.
- Voice input, translation, categorisation, and summarisation may make participation more accessible and easier to manage.

Limitations:

- Some AI-supported features are still under development and are not necessarily available in every CONSUL implementation.
- The platform can feel formal or complex for young people unless it is introduced through clear guidance and youth-friendly facilitation.
- AI-generated proposals, summaries, or categories may distort participants' meaning if they are not reviewed by people familiar with the local context

Zencity

Zencity is an AI-supported community intelligence and engagement platform for local governments and public authorities. It helps organisations collect, combine, and analyse information about community needs, concerns, priorities, and experiences to support more informed decision-making.

Link: https://zencity.io

Developer / organisation: Zencity.

Model of engagement: Community listening, surveys, online engagement, public feedback analysis, and decision-support.

Level of operation: Local, municipal, regional, and public-sector level.

Target group: Municipalities, local governments, public authorities, communication teams, residents, and communities.

AI use / relevance: Zencity uses AI-supported analysis to process large amounts of community input from sources such as surveys, digital engagement activities, service requests, social media, local news, and other public feedback channels. Its functions can help identify recurring themes, trends, sentiment, emerging concerns, and differences between groups. The platform can also support dashboards, alerts, summaries, reports, and natural-language queries, helping public authorities interpret community input more efficiently.

In Milton Keynes, the Zencity-supported New City Plan engagement process specifically sought to involve young people whose views were often underrepresented in planning consultations. The city worked with students and its 11–18 youth council, and youth council members acted as local ambassadors. Of the 2,094 people who engaged with the project, 54% were connected to the youth council. The case demonstrates how digital engagement, targeted outreach, and existing youth structures can be combined, but the available description does not isolate the specific effect of Zencity's AI functions.

Relevance for youth participation:
Zencity is not specifically designed for young people, but it can support youth participation when municipalities use it to analyse targeted youth surveys, consultations, or engagement activities. It can help authorities identify young people's priorities and compare their views with wider community input. Its main contribution is therefore indirect: it strengthens the institutional capacity to understand and act on youth input, while the actual participation process still needs to be designed around young people's interests, accessibility, and preferred ways of communicating.

Strengths:

- Can combine and analyse large amounts of feedback from different sources.
- AI-supported themes, trends, sentiment analysis, and summaries can reduce administrative workload.
- Dashboards and reports can help public authorities connect community input with planning and decision-making.

Limitations:

- It is primarily an institutional analysis and decision-support tool rather than a youth-facing participation platform.
- The quality of its insights depends on the amount, diversity, and representativeness of the data collected.
- AI-generated themes, sentiment analysis, and summaries require human review, particularly when interpreting youth language, irony, minority views, or context.

Tree company / Bpart

Bpart is a digital participation platform developed by Tree Company for local and municipal participation processes. It supports idea submission, information-sharing, feedback, discussion, and voting, making it suitable for simple consultations with residents and young people.

Link: https://international.treecompany.be/bpart-participatieplatform/

Developer / organisation: Tree Company.

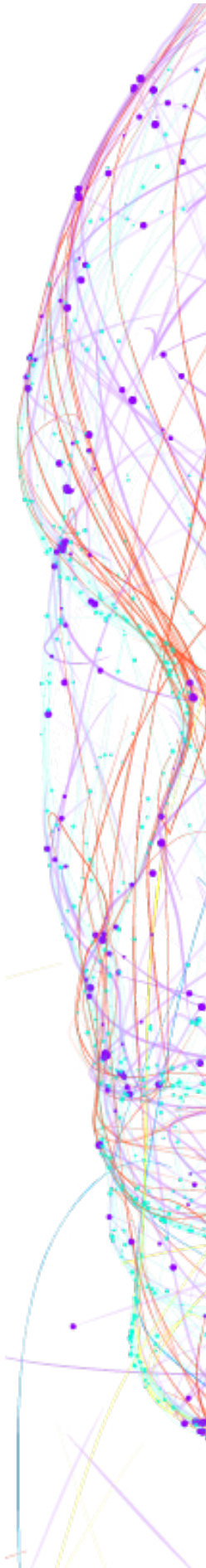
Model of engagement: Consultation, idea collection, information-sharing, feedback, discussion, and voting.

Level of operation: Local and municipal.

Target group: Municipalities, residents, local communities, and young people involved in local participation processes.

AI use / relevance:

Bpart can be combined with AI-supported functions such as comment classification, summarisation, moderation support, and the identification of recurring themes. These functions can help public authorities process contributions more efficiently, particularly when a consultation receives many comments or proposals. In this context, AI operates mainly as a support layer around the participation platform rather than as the primary way in which young people interact with the process.



Relevance for youth participation:
Bpart is relevant because it offers a relatively simple way for young people to submit ideas, respond to local questions, and vote on proposals connected to their everyday environment. Its low-threshold participation model can be useful for municipal youth consultations, neighbourhood improvement projects, and discussions about local services or public spaces. The platform is especially relevant when the aim is to connect youth input to local decision-making without requiring young people to participate in a complex or highly formal deliberation process.

Strengths:

- Supports simple and accessible forms of local participation, including ideas, feedback, and voting.
- Can be combined with AI-supported classification, summarisation, and moderation of contributions.
- Has potential relevance for youth participation in local governance and neighbourhood-related decision-making.

Limitations:

- AI-supported functions may depend on the specific implementation and configuration of the platform.
- Effective youth participation still requires outreach, facilitation, and a process designed around young people's needs.
- The platform is particularly well suited to low-threshold feedback and voting, while deeper deliberation may require complementary methods.

Conclusion on efficiency

Taken together, these tools show that improving efficiency in youth participation is not mainly about making participation faster, but about making it more manageable for the people and organisations who need to organise, support, analyse, and follow up on it. In this context, AI is most useful when it helps reduce routine workload, handle larger volumes of input, support translation and summarisation, and turn scattered contributions into material that can be communicated to decision-makers.

At the same time, efficiency should not be confused with meaningful participation. These tools can help youth workers and public authorities save time and process input more effectively, but they do not by themselves guarantee trust, inclusion, or influence. If automation replaces explanation, facilitation, or human

judgement, efficiency gains may come at the expense of transparency and youth ownership. In this sense, the value of AI in this category lies in freeing up time and capacity for the relational and democratic aspects of participation rather than replacing them.

Closing synthesis

The findings from the survey, interviews, and mapping of AI-supported tools point to a field that is developing quickly but remains strongly shaped by uncertainty. AI is already present in youth work, but mainly as a supportive layer around existing activities rather than as a stand-alone participation method. Youth workers use or anticipate using AI to draft and translate materials, transcribe conversations, summarise and analyse feedback, prepare visual content, and reduce routine administrative work. Its most immediate value is therefore practical: AI can make participation processes easier to organise, process, communicate, and follow up.

The survey and interviews also show that youth workers do not primarily hope for technology that replaces human interaction. Rather, they hope for tools that create more time and capacity for it. AI is seen as potentially useful when it helps youth workers understand large amounts of input, lower language and communication barriers, support young people in expressing their ideas, and turn diverse contributions into material that decision-makers can use. In this sense, the desired role of AI is not to speak on behalf of young people, but to help their voices travel further without losing their meaning.

At the same time, the evidence suggests that the strongest benefits of current AI use are often located around participation rather than inside it. Existing tools are relatively good at helping professionals prepare activities, collect information, process contributions, identify themes, and produce summaries or reports. Some platforms also support translation, moderation, accessibility, and large-scale engagement. However, the direct interaction between young people and AI remains less developed. Few tools are designed specifically around young people's everyday ways of communicating, their expectations of transparency, or the different forms of confidence, literacy, language, and access that shape whether they participate at all.

There is also a gap between collecting youth input and creating influence. Many tools make it easier to gather opinions, ideas, and feedback, but fewer help

young people understand how their contributions are interpreted, respond to the synthesis, develop proposals collectively, or follow what happens after a consultation. The mapping therefore reveals an important empty space: tools that do not only collect or analyse youth voice, but help young people move from expression to dialogue, from dialogue to shared priorities, and from shared priorities to visible change. This includes tools that can support feedback loops between young people and decision-makers, make institutional responses easier to understand, and help young people participate in shaping the solutions themselves.

The categories used in the mapping illustrate these different needs. Tools that increase reach can lower barriers through accessible formats, translation, rapid feedback, or mobile participation, but reach alone does not guarantee meaningful involvement. Tools that improve quality can help structure deliberation, identify patterns of agreement and disagreement, and turn discussion into clearer outputs, but they may require facilitation and can become difficult to use if the process feels too formal. Tools that improve efficiency can reduce administrative workload and help professionals process large amounts of information, but their main contribution is indirect unless the time saved is reinvested in dialogue, follow-up, and relationship-building.

This is where the pilot tools could make an important contribution. Rather than reproducing existing consultation platforms or adding AI only to the back-office processing of participation, the pilots can explore the spaces that are currently less well served:

- **Direct interaction with young people:** AI could support more conversational, accessible, and engaging ways for young people to ex press themselves, ask questions, explore issues, and contribute outside formal consultation formats.
- **Lowering participation barriers:** Tools could address language, literacy, confidence, disability, geography, time constraints, and unfamiliarity with institutional language through flexible and multimodal participation.
- **From input to action:** AI could help young people develop ideas, compare alternatives, test proposals, prepare questions for decision-makers, and identify practical next steps.
- **Feedback and accountability:** Tools could make it easier for authorities to explain what they heard, what they will do, what they cannot do, and why.

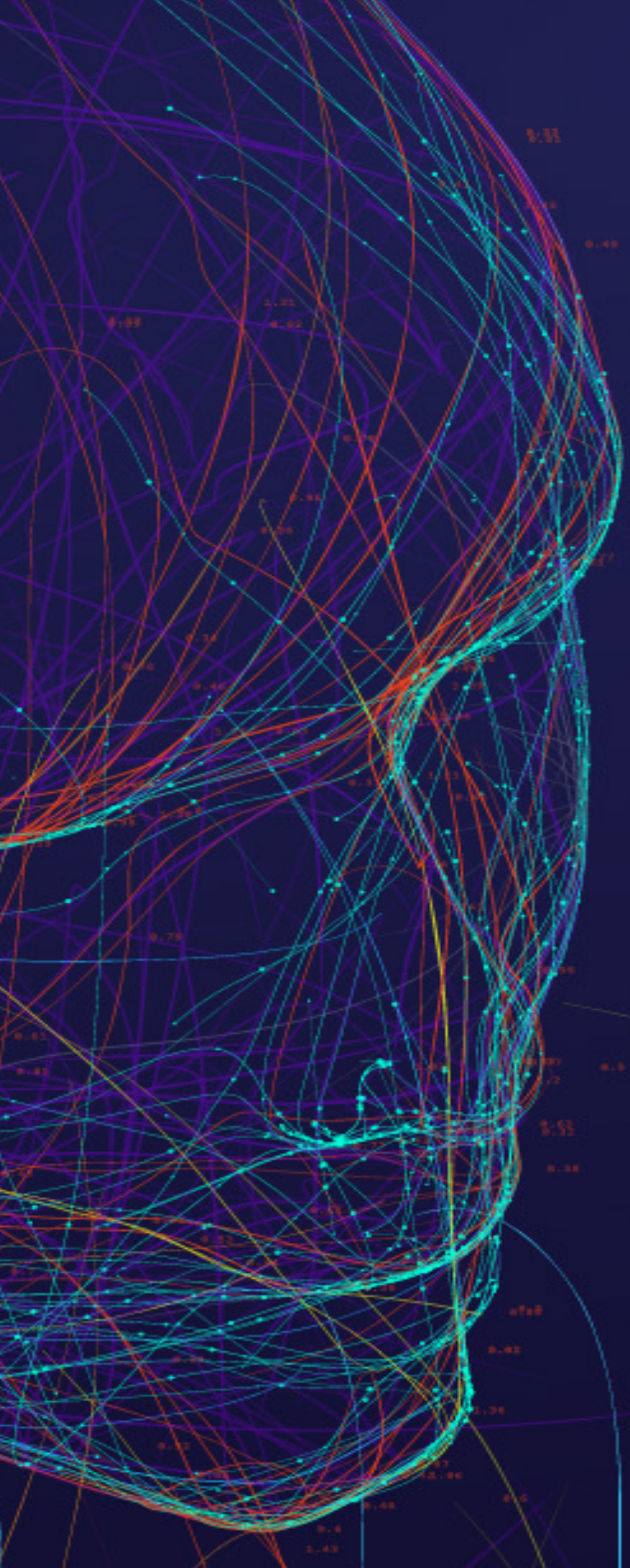
- **Youth agency in AI use:** Young people could be involved in deciding when AI is used, what it is allowed to do, how outputs are checked, and how their data and contributions are protected.
- **Human-centred facilitation:** AI could support youth workers with preparation, documentation, and analysis while leaving trust, interpretation, ethical judgement, and relationships in human hands.

The findings also make clear that these opportunities are conditional. Survey respondents and interviewees raised concerns about privacy, misinformation, bias, unequal treatment, lack of transparency, technical reliability, staff competence, digital exclusion, and environmental impact. Some young people welcomed anonymity, accessibility, and flexible formats, while others were neutral or critical, particularly when AI use was not explained or when it appeared to replace genuine human communication. This suggests that the success of an AI-supported participation tool cannot be assessed only by speed, number of participants, or volume of data. It must also be assessed by whether young people understand the process, retain agency, recognise their contributions in the outputs, and can see how participation affects decisions.

Overall, the evidence supports a careful but constructive approach. AI can strengthen youth participation when it reduces barriers, supports expression, helps make complex input understandable, and creates more capacity for youth workers to listen and respond. It is less convincing when it is used simply to automate participation, produce polished summaries without accountability, or give institutions the appearance of listening without a clear route to influence. The most promising direction for the pilot tools is therefore not to make participation merely more efficient, but to make it more accessible, interactive, responsive, and connected to action.

The central question for future development is consequently not only **what can AI do with young people's input**, but also **what can AI help young people do with their own ideas and collective voice.** That shift—from processing youth participation to enabling youth agency—marks the clearest opportunity for the pilot tools in this project - and future projects in AI-driven participation as well - to contribute something that is currently missing from many existing tools.





Youth participation or youth agency?

Desk study on the use of AI in youth participation and in youth work

DYPALL
DEVELOPING YOUTH PARTICIPATION AT LOCAL LEVEL

Finnish Youth Research Society

JINT

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