

The Importance of Engaging Youth to Participate in Planning and Decision-making

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Executive Summary

Youth perspectives impact local-level government decision-making, particularly regarding the public realm. When thinking about youth, their physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development hinges on their ability to enjoy public spaces freely and to develop a sense of belonging and attachment to their environments.¹ As planning typically looks at spaces and places and how they may support communities now and in the future, considering youth perspectives on planning projects is incredibly important. The research question this paper aims to answer is:

What is the significance of youth perspectives on city-wide planning and decision-making and how can their views be embedded within the planning process?

The purpose of this MRP is threefold. First, to connect theory to practice by consolidating existing literature on youth perspectives and engagement relative to municipal decision-making. Second, to apply a conceptual framework to understand how municipal governments engage and incorporate youth perspectives into city-wide decision-making. Finally, to provide recommendations that municipal governments and planners may adopt to strengthen the relationship between youth and decision-making. This research utilizes four prominent youth participation frameworks through an Evolutionary Governance Theory (EGT) lens to understand how youth perspectives can be embedded into the planning and decision-making process.

Through this research, it becomes apparent that utilizing one youth participation framework is not sufficient. Each of the four frameworks provides a different perspective and focuses on different components within youth participation. Utilizing all four frameworks provides a holistic understanding to engage youth perspectives in city-wide planning and decision-making.

¹ Janet Loebach, Sarah Little, Adina Cox, and Patsy Eubanks Owens *The Routledge Handbook of Designing Public Spaces for Young People: Processes, Practices and Policies for Youth Inclusion*. (Routledge Handbooks. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), iii, <https://doi-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.4324/9780429505614>