

# Critical Youth Participatory Spatial Planning

Amerissa Giannouli & Angelos Varvarousis / Autonomous University of Barcelona

amerissa.giannouli@gmail.com

## Abstract

Our research addresses the misrecognition, misrepresentation, and marginalisation of young people, defined as individuals who lack legal rights of participation in official decision-making processes, typically those below 18 years old, in public spaces and spatial planning. Our starting premise is that public space inherently accommodates counter-hegemonic processes leading to socio-spatial transformations. Therefore, we scrutinise the role of youth participatory spatial planning in fostering such transformative changes and youth empowerment in the production of public space. To do so, we introduce a novel framework we call **“Critical Youth Participatory Spatial Planning”** to counter tokenism and promote meaningful youth participation. Our framework has been tested in the city of Kalamata, Greece, through a specific case study involving 12-year-old school students. We employed Action Research to facilitate active involvement and collaboration with the young people, aligning with our critical framework. The paper ends with policy recommendations relevant to similar cities that lack the mechanisms to involve young people in spatial planning.

## Theoretical framework

This research is centered around political character of public space and the emergence of antagonistic forces, such as youth counterpublics (Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2002; Kjaran, 2016) and alternative *commoning* practices (Stavrvides, 2018; Pikner et al., 2020) as responses to youth misrecognition, misrepresentation, and marginalisation in public spaces and spatial planning. These antagonistic forces are not viewed in isolation from the existing institutions (Mouffe, 2013). In particular, youth participatory spatial planning is seen as a crucial step towards including youth people’s ideas and perspectives about the public space, as well as a source for building their power and agency to participate in the society more broadly (Frank, 2006). With our research we aimed at exploring the potentials of mobilising transformations through youth participatory spatial planning. For this reason, we developed and tested an approach that actively tries to challenge tokenism and promote meaningful participation. It is called Critical Youth Participatory Spatial Planning and uses Jennings et al. (2006)’s conceptual framework of *critical youth empowerment*, the work of Freire (2006) in the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, and *critical youth engagement* developed by Fox et al. (2010) adjusting them in the case of youth urban spatial planning.

## Policy Recommendations

1. Collaboration with formal youth institutions, such as schools.
2. Municipal youth center and/or youth council.
3. Directly involve young people in the already existing local committees.
4. Mapping, mobilising and involving networks of public, private and social entities.
5. Provision of accessible and understandable technical information; use diverse, creative and informal methods; promote critical reflection and reveal spatial politics; and involve supporting activities beyond the formal setting of youth participatory spatial planning.
6. Revitalisation of digital tools for youth consultation and spatial planning.

## Conclusion and future research

Critical Youth Participatory Spatial Planning reaffirms the importance of youth participatory spatial planning, complements and advances other relevant to spatial planning critical youth participation perspectives. It mobilises critical personal and collective socio-political processes that could challenge the status quo, and offer alternative discourses related to the use of public space. Future research could investigate how a similar critical youth participation framework can be applied to other sectors and topics in policy and decision making, broadening the scope of participatory practices.

## References

- Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. *Social Text*, 25 (26), 56–80.
- Warner, M. (2002). *Publics and Counterpublics*. Zone Books, New York.
- Kjaran, J. I. (2016). Queer counterpublic spatialities. In *Critical Concepts in Queer Studies and Education* (pp. 249-257). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Stavrides, S. (2018). Urban porosity and the right to a shared city. *Porous city: from metaphor to urban agenda*, 32-38.
- Pikner, T., Willman, K., & Jokinen, A. (2020). Urban commoning as a vehicle between government institutions and informality: Collective gardening practices in Tampere and Narva. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 44(4), 711-729.
- Mouffe, C. (2013). Space, hegemony and radical critique. *Spatial politics: Essays for doreen massey*, 19-31.
- Frank, K. I. (2006). The Potential of Youth Participation in Planning. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 20(4), 351–371. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412205286016>
- Jennings, L. B., Parra-Medina, D. M., Hilfinger-Messias, D. K., & McLoughlin, K. (2006). Toward a critical social theory of youth empowerment. *Journal of Community Practice*, 14(1-2), 31-55.
- Freire, P. (2006). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary ed. New York: Continuum.
- Fox, M., Mediratta, K., Ruglis, J., Stoudt, B., Shah, S., & Fine, M. (2010). Critical youth engagement: Participatory action research and organizing. *Handbook of research on civic engagement in youth*, 621-649.

## Materials and methods

**Critical Youth Participatory Spatial Planning** involves:

- a) encompassing critical reflections on social, political, cultural, ecological and economic systems;
- b) inspiring reflection that is connected to the direct action of the participants as agents of change (*praxis*);
- c) expanding the role of the planner to a critical educator who invites participants into a *dialogue*;
- d) encouraging creativity and imagination;
- e) designing a dynamic and flexible process; and
- f) following a relational and intersectional approach.

## Pilot testing in Kalamata



Involve young people in the implementation of the proposals!