Barriers to Empowering and Engaging Youth in Sustainable Urban Development Endeavour: Experience Gained from Korydallos Municipality – Greece

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Among the key constituents in the contemporary smart city paradigm lie 'smart people' and 'smart governance', placing at the forefront community engagement and awareness raising with regards to current and emerging cities' challenges; and the necessity for a steady interaction/cooperation between decision-making bodies and societal groups. Within such a context, youngsters, as a specific age group and the 'citizens of tomorrow', seem to be largely overlooked in the prevailing 'for all' urban policy stream. Taking this deficit into account and the need to embrace the young generation in the effort of designing a 'smart and sustainable city strategy for all', the focus of this work is on the identification of barriers to youth participation in local sustainable urban development processes. In fulfilling this goal, global and European evidence on this topic is explored, coupled with experiences gained by an urban environment in a less privileged urban area of Greece, Korydallos Municipality. Barriers to youth engagement identified at the global scene seem to apply to this specific urban environment too, while they are further enriched by city-specific peculiarities, emerging from the elaboration of two distinct participatory exercises and the use of the self-diagnosis CLEAR model.

Keywords: Smart city; Smart people and governance; Sustainable urban development; bottom-up initiatives; youth participation; barriers to youth participation; CLEAR model

INTRODUCTION

The concept of participation has vigorously entered the body of urban and regional planning theory during the 1960s (Friedmann, 1987; Garau, 2012), and is further emphasized during the nineties, as a result of a gradually changing planning para-

digm, introducing a transition from a top-down to a bottom-up approach (Fishkin, 1995; Rhodes, 1997; Bishop, 1998; Norris, 1999; Stratigea, 2009; Ozcevik et al., 2010; Stratigea et al., 2017; 2018; Chaskin et al., 2018). Such a transition has marked the shift from a regulatory governmental approach to a more democratic and inclusive governance model, while going hand in hand with technological evolutions and the emerging smart city paradigm, having as key constituents, among others, the 'smart people' and 'smart governance' dimensions (Stratigea et al., 2015; Berntzen and Johannessen, 2016; Spil et al., 2017; Chaskin et al., 2018; Simonofski et al., 2019; Marava et al., 2019). These two streams, i.e. human resources and governance, are perceived as main ingredients of a smart city, leveraged by a third one, i.e. technology (Lombardi et al. 2012; Zait 2016; Marava et al., 2019), illuminating the value of community empowerment as well as evolving multi-actor and multi-level policy making schemes in streamlining more knowledgeable, ICT-enabled policy decisions in a smart city context.

Speaking of the planning discipline, the increasing importance of participation has been stressed by many researchers (Baycan-Levent and Nijkamp, 2009; Stratigea, 2015), as a means towards more knowledgeable planning outcomes at the urban/regional level, consistent with communities' expectations. The boost of participatory approaches in various planning problems has broadened the scope of participation, demarcating a shift from pure participation to participatory democracy (Allegretti, 2006), which goes beyond the formal representative model (Gangemi, 2009; Stratigea, 2015) and gains ground in the new smart city paradigm. Participation, in this respect, is realized as both an opportunity for consultation and accountability of the various urban actors, and a chance for involvement in more democratic activities (Murgante and Borruso, 2015; Zait, 2016; Marava et al., 2019). Furthermore, it is perceived as the means for awareness raising and motivation of responsible behaviour for reaching glocal (global-local) sustainable development (SD) goals (Parnell, 2016).

The necessity to advance democratic decision-making processes and governance models for dealing with contemporary SD challenges has been largely recognized at a global level (Kiilakoski and Gretschel, 2014). The value of public participation and the *local level* has also been unveiled in this discourse (Rio Declaration, 1992), with local actions and sustainable behavioural patterns being perceived as key drivers for reaching global SD goals ('think global act local' principle) (UN-Habitat, 2012; Parnell, 2016). This has pushed forward participatory urban planning exercises (Baycan-Levent and Nijkamp, 2009) that are grounded on citizens' empowerment and community development (Kasmell and Andersen, 2011; Garau, 2012; Stratigea, 2012; Chaskin et al., 2018), while establishing new principles and a variety of participatory tools facilitating democratic dialogue, sharing and responsibility, commitment and awareness-raising in societies.

Bottom-up urban planning practices and citizens' participation are nowadays largely supported by smart developments and technology-enabled applications, in-

stitutionalization of participation in various policy making fields, grassroots' activism, and the gradual maturing of both decision-making bodies and community in dealing with the current, of global extent, SD challenges. In such a context however, a certain deficit is noticed as far as youth participation is concerned, with needs and peculiarities of this specific target group being largely overlooked in participatory planning endeavours.

Having noticed this shortage, the goal of this paper is to explore the barriers and obstacles that confine youth participation in relevant processes at the urban level. This was accomplished by an attempt to outline barriers to youth engagement at the global/European scenery. This picture is complemented with experience gained from a less privileged urban area, namely Korydallos Municipality in Attica Region-Greece through the outcomes of two bottom-up participatory planning exercises. Part of the scope of these two exercises at the local level was to strengthen youth's sense of belonging and raise awareness on glocal SD challenges, and explore barriers to youth participation in a structured way, following the CLEAR model guidelines (Lowndes et al., 2006a).

The structure of the paper is as follows: first youth participation and its role in pursuing sustainable SD objectives is discussed, sketching also key barriers identified in the European and global scenery; then experience-based results as to barriers to youth engagement at the Korydallos urban locality are illuminated through two participatory case studies; finally, some conclusions are drawn.

ENGAGING YOUTH FOR SERVING SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

Why youth? The great value of youth participation in decision-making processes is, among others, associated with the population share falling into this age group, and the ambiguous position this group has so far occupied in social science research (UN-Habitat, 2013). Indeed, youngsters (12-14 years old) are currently reaching almost a quarter of world's population (23%). Furthermore, they share certain attributes such as dynamism and doubt, flexibility and adjustability, and willingness to change, rendering youth problem solvers, who can bring on board fresh and innovative ideas as to current societal concerns (Merkle, 2003).

Youth is also perceived a main pillar for fulfilling SD objectives at a *glocal level*. Indeed, this has been early enough grasped and articulated in the Brundtland Report (1987), recognized by the United Nations declarations (UN-Habitat, 2013), setting youth high in the policy agenda, acknowledged by international organizations and scientific communities, and appreciated at the local/regional level as well.

However, respective youth engagement efforts have not always been proven successful, bringing to the forefront the question: do youth really grasp the importance and care about SD issues? The answer to this question comes from evidence-based

results produced by various studies (see European Commission [EC], 2013), revealing that SD issues gain youth's interest for a number of reasons. Among them lie youth's realization of being the main victims of inherited environmental and socio-economic challenges, and having the greater stake for reversing undesired trends in a longer run. Studies in the European Union demonstrate a growing interest of youth in SD goals (EC, 2013) and their willingness to contribute through engaging in unconventional participation schemes (e.g. environmental organizations, NGOs), lying at a distance from formal political processes.

Taking into consideration the current policy initiatives for youth engagement on the one hand and the youth's interest for SD on the other, the reverse question is raised, namely 'how successful these initiatives are in meeting youth's interests'? Are there efficient communication bridges, established between policy makers and youth that enable effective and substantial interaction? Response to these questions unveils a certain gap in communication and youth's engagement in articulating SD policy decisions, largely reflecting the domination of old interaction patterns and the lack of attractive/creative youth engagement approaches. This is more evident in the context of Climate Change (CC) policies, where despite the value attached to youth in responding to CC challenges, relative policies are planned 'for' and not 'with' youth (Narksompong and Limjirakan, 2015).

In an effort to fill the aforementioned gap, policy making bodies adopt nowadays a variety of practises, targeting youth engagement in SD endeavours. These, as stated by Gretschel et al. (2014), fall into both conventional, e.g. youth councils at the local level as applied in Finland, Spain, Cyprus, Estonia etc., and innovative, such as the young mayor example, applied in Lewisham, UK. Gretschel et al. (2014) provide some interesting examples of relevant good practices for youth engagement in the EU, falling into these two categories.

Despite some promising results though, youth participation in decision-making for SD seems to be fraught with difficulties, associated with the lack of information and training of youth in respect of the very essence of the SD concept. The vague nature of SD and the feeling that potential interventions at the personal/collective level are rather limited, since important decisions are made at a global scene, discourage youth from engaging and undertaking relevant action.

Furthermore, a recent study of European Commission (EC) and the Council of Europe (CE) on youth participation (EC-CE, 2015) identifies a certain 'paradox' as to the gap of youth engagement. Indeed, while youth engagement is largely recognized and constitutes a challenge for policy makers at the global scenery (UN-Habitat, 2013; EC-CE, 2015), at the same time youth are to a great extent perceived as a 'problematic', a 'trouble' and/or 'troubling' social group (UN-Habitat, 2012 and 2013) in terms of engaging them in decision-making processes. A remarkable aspect of this paradox relates to the *ICT* communication gap between youth and policy makers, where institutions or organizations are less familiar with ICT-enabled participation forms put first by youth, a deficit that entails communication barriers

and often results in misunderstandings between active young citizens and institutions (EC-CE, 2015).

Another quite relevant aspect of the above paradox relates to the lack of legislative framework but also social understanding, presuming youth as equal partners (UN-Habitat, 2013; Gretschel et al., 2014). These weaknesses, coupled with opposing behaviour from older age groups, discourage youth from participating in common affairs. Considering, however, that young people are critical stakeholders but also 'citizens of the future' who need to be trained and brought together into SD efforts by adopting problems' solving behavioural patterns, such barriers constitute a democracy deficit that needs to be dealt with.

The aforementioned paradox seems to be a common ground in various places around the globe (UN-Habitat, 2013). In the EU, as shown by the Euro-barometer study, dealing with youth participation in democratic processes (EC, 2013), there is a noticeable decrease of youth participation in formal political processes (election processes at all three levels); while at the same time a certain increase in youth participation is noticed in informal processes, e.g. local associations, NGOs, informal initiatives or movements. Various studies on the topic (Kiilakoski and Gretschel, 2014) reveal that youth's limited interest to participate is also, to a large extent, the outcome of the trivial context of participatory actions, embedded in the majority of formal political processes. In fact, poor participation of youth is often the product of an overly formalistic definition of political participation, marked by trivial engagement forms, exclusively addressing issues of formal politics. To overcome this, the dialogue on youth participation in planning needs to step forward from the youth's psychological and other capabilities to engage to the creation of an enabling governance environment, promoting youth engagement and empowerment (Frank, 2006).

Interpreting youth's unwillingness to participate as 'apathy' or 'apolitical stand' is a rather superficial reading. This deficit needs to be more deeply explored and the reasons behind it to be further investigated. Smart city developments and the new ICT-enabled interaction forms these introduce, coupled with the interest in promoting cooperative decision-making models at the local level, seems to create a fertile ground for filling the gap and motivating youth to become an essential part of decision-making processes for reaching urban SD objectives.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FOR URBAN SUSTAINABILITY – THE KORYDALLOS MUNICIPALITY EXPERIENCE

In this section, barriers applying to youth engagement in a less privileged urban locality are explored by use of two exercises that fall into the SD realm and address different youth engagement goals. The first exercise is aimed at actively engaging youth in a participatory cultural planning exercise, while the second one at raising youth awareness with respect to SD challenges. Both were carried out in 2016 in

Korydallos Municipality, a lagging behind suburb of the Athens metropolitan area. Past and current trajectory of this locality has been sealed by the semiotics of the largest state prison complex hosted in the area, while the city is confronted with common urban problems. Korydallos municipality has a short experience in participatory endeavours, e.g. participatory budgeting (Alexopoulos et al., 2012). In these endeavours, however, youth engagement is largely ignored by local politicians.

Participatory approaches, utilized in these two exercises, embed creative and mostly unconventional engagement tools, with a specific focus on testing their effectiveness for youth empowerment/engagement, and identifying barriers to youth participation in local decision-making processes. The latter was accomplished by use of the CLEAR model, i.e. a self-diagnosis tool, identifying five – neither hierarchical nor sequential –main factors that can affect attitude towards participation (Lowndes et al., 2006a, 2006b; Council of Europe, 2009) (Table 1).

Table 1: Main factors of the CLEAR model

CAN DO	Capacity to participate, i.e. resources, skills and knowledge.
LIKE TO	Feeling of belonging or being part of a community.
ENABLED TO	Activation through existing civic networks and organizations.
ASKED TO	Being directly asked for your opinion.
RESPONDED TO	The system that participation seeks to influence is responsive.

Case Study 1 - *The Democu Approach for Engaging Youth in Participatory Cultural Planning*

DemoCU project developed an innovative participatory framework for cultural planning at the local level, accommodating offline and on-line participation tools for engaging vulnerable groups in decision-making processes affecting local cultural affairs. The youth exercise was part of the DemoCU endeavour, testing various participatory tools for youth's empowerment and engagement on the one hand, and exploring barriers to this end on the other.

The DemoCU methodological approach and related participatory *tools* – experience-learning laboratory, Charrette workshops and questionnaires – are depicted in Figure 1. More specifically, the first step refers to an experience-learning laboratory, exploring youth's perception as to participation in general and cultural aspects in particular. This preliminary stage engaged 12 young people (students), who were informed about the DemoCU scope and participated in experience-based learning processes. They also had the chance to express their perceptions as to barriers to youth engagement in municipality's decision-making processes in general and cultural planning in particular. Elaboration of this output illuminated factors impeding youth engagement in decision-making processes; and provided useful input

for the effective organization of youth Charrette workshops and the structuring of a questionnaire addressing, among others, barriers to youth engagement in alignment with the CLEAR model.
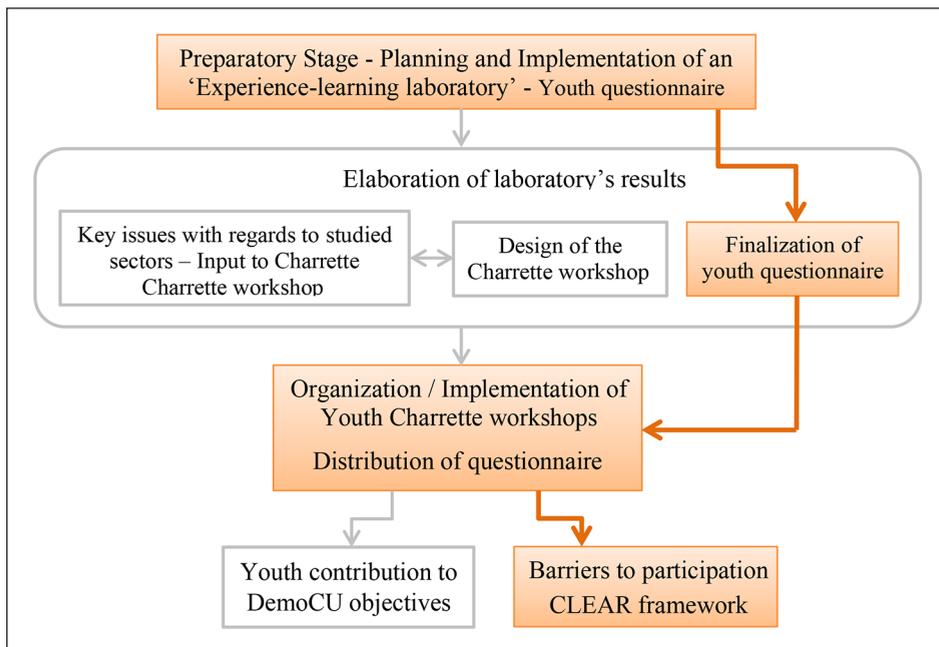
Figure 1: Steps for engaging youth and identifying obstacles and barriers to participation within the DemoCU methodological framework

At a second step, Charrette participatory tool for empowering and motivating youth engagement in DemoCU purposes was implemented in three schools of Korydallos municipality, promoting small groups' work on specific dimensions of DemoCU. This was combined, at a third step, with data collection by use of a questionnaire in order for youth views on both cultural affairs and barriers to youth participation, to be grasped. Barriers to participation, identified by the crop of 115 students' responses along the CLEAR factors, are as follows (Stratigea et al., 2016):

CAN DO - skills / knowledge and resources for youth participation
Lack of youth skills in Korydallos locality constitutes a key feature, delimiting participation potential. This is marked by the following (Stratigea et al., 2016; Stratigea et al., 2017): rising youth population, falling into *Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs)*; lower educational attainments, compared to those noticed at the regional level; rising unemployment rates, altering priorities, enhancing isolation and weakening tendency to engage; and low socio-economic status of either the young people or their parents, impacting participation tendency.

Youth's views and ability to engage depicts rather disappointing results. 20 per cent of respondents identify lack of self-confidence as a barrier to participation; 31 per cent lack knowledge on formal ways to engage to city's affairs; and 49 per cent lack information on participation opportunities, revealing the rather poor communication bridges of local administration with youth.

LIKE TO - do youth feel an integral part of local community?

The very essence of this factor rests on the idea that "…people's sense of community encourages them to engage" (Council of Europe, 2009, 9). However, only 30 per cent of youth participants feel an integral part of Korydallos locality, despite the fact that they largely define their identity based on the city as a whole and their neighbourhood (Figure 2a). More than 50% of youth notice the low level of mutual trust within the community (Figure 2b). Low sense of belonging and mutual trust creates a non-fertile environment for youth participation.

(a) - *Question*: Do you feel an integral part of your neighborhood?

(b) - *Question*: Level of mutual trust at the community level
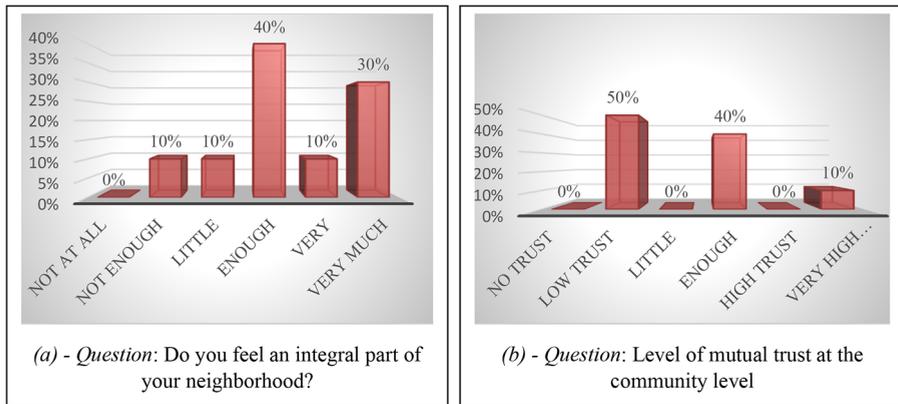
Figure 2: DemoCU project - (a) Sense of youth belonging - (b) Perception of mutual trust at Korydallos community level

ENABLED TO - opportunities / options of youth participation

Participation is easier as a collective rather than an individual action. As Lowndes et al. (2006a, 288) state "… political participation in isolation is more difficult and less sustainable, unless an individual is highly motivated". This implies the need for youth to be activated through existing collective social structures that are missing in Korydallos locality.

ASKED TO - options for youth mobilization to participate

Choice of engagement options can have a significant impact on democratic participatory governance (Lowndes et al., 2006b). Youth usually prefer digital media engagement, as they are more skilled and inclined in such communication forms. Youth perception of the typical forms for influencing decision-making in Korydallos

locality and their potential to impact policy response are shown in Table 2. Protest, clientelism (i.e. informal interaction with local politicians), and students' councils are rated first as the most influential forms of engagement and impact on policy response. Social media, a youth's popular interaction mean, seems to have little resonance among local politicians. The most preferable means for getting informed and engage are neighbourhood forums, focus groups discussions and e-forums (Table 3).

Table 2: Youth perceptions with regards to typical engagement forms and their power to affect political response

Typical forms of interaction in Korydallos locality	Youth perception as to the typical engagement forms (%)	Impact on decision makers' response (%)
Protest	35	33
Contact with a municipal staff	10	2
Contact with local politicians – Clientelism	20	30
Social media	15	5
Student's councils	20	30

Table 3: Preferable ways of youth engagement in local decision-making

Youth engagement options	Preference (%)	Youth engagement options	Preference (%)
Survey/opinion polls	0.0	e-Forums	20.0
Open public meetings	4.0	Consultation events	8.0
Neighbourhood forums	34.0	Other	4.0
Focus Group discussions	30.0		

The divergence between the typical forms of youth interaction at the locality level (Table 2) and those preferable to youth community (Table 3) are evident, confirming the communication lag between youth and political representatives identified in various European and global studies.

RESPONDED TO – evidence that expressed views are taken into consideration

This factor could be interpreted as to 'what is the outcome of youth participation'? Or 'does this make any difference'? Over 60 per cent of youth respondents claimed that municipal leaders do not take into consideration their views. This is a decisive factor for restraining youth participation and goes beyond the various constraints that frame local policy decisions (Brandtzaeg et al., 2012).

Case Study 2 - The 'Gr-RAC Goes to School' Initiative for Increasing Youth Awareness as to Global SD Challenges

As part of the Greek Regional Action Center (Gr-RAC) volunteer work, *'Gr-RAC goes to school'* initiative in Korydallos locality aimed at raising youth awareness with respect to SD challenges and objectives, and engaging them in a creative, experience- and art-based learning process for better grasping these challenges and motivating responsible behavioural patterns. It lasted four months (September-December 2016), engaging approximately 70 students, 15-20 years old, in 3 schools of Korydallos locality.

The methodological approach (Figure 3) was designed to achieve unconventional, one- or two-ways interaction between the Gr-RAC team and the students through proper participation tools, namely: raising awareness workshops, youth empowerment on selected themes; experience-learning and collaborative art work, motivating students' cooperation and creative skills; plenary session for presentation of art work and related narratives/messages, reinforcing students' self-confidence as well as participation and communication skills.
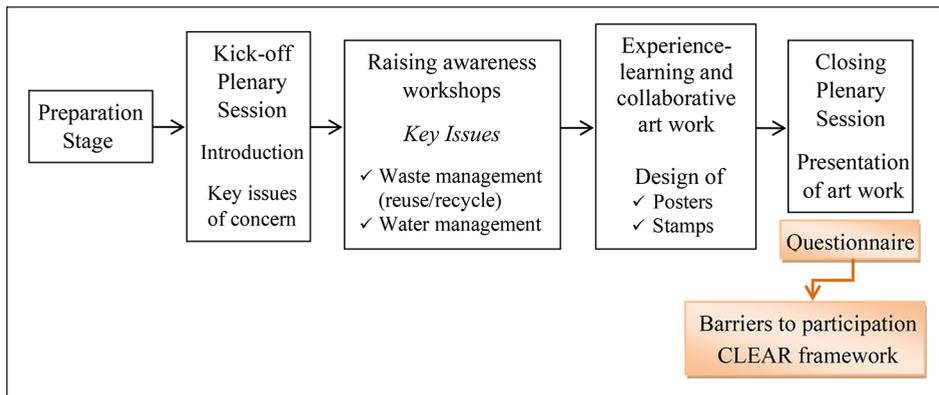
Figure 3: Steps of "Gr-RAC goes to school" initiative

At the preparation stage, a number of organizational issues were arranged, e.g. communication with the local authority, permissions from school directors. At the kick-off plenary session, students were informed about key global SD challenges and expressed their views as to the most challenging ones at the locality level, being waste and water management. At the raising awareness workshops, lectures, relevant to issues of interest, were prepared and delivered by the Gr-RAC team to all three schools engaged. At the experience-learning and collaborative art work stage, a cooperative effort of students, with the support of their teachers and the Gr-RAC team, was carried out. Students explored further the issues of their interest, their downscaling at the locality level and the visioning of potential solutions. They also created some art work on these topics (theme-based posters or stamps), coupled

with a short narrative and a key message. At the closing plenary stage, art work and related narratives/messages were presented by students to a larger municipality's audience (Figure 4). At this stage, a questionnaire was also distributed gathering, among others, students' views as to the barriers to engagement in SD locality efforts. Conclusions, structured along the CLEAR model guidance, are summarized in the following.

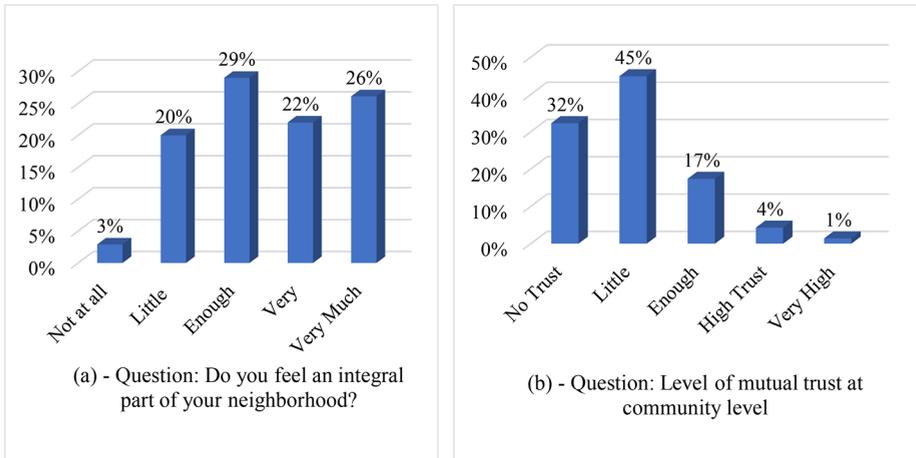**Figure 4:** Plenary session of Gr-RAC initiative and indicative art work produced by students

CAN DO - skills / knowledge and resources for youth participation

According to students' responses, youth skills and access to information about participatory processes, conducted in their locality, constitute the main barriers to participation (23 and 47 per cent respectively). Both seem to be largely associated with own or family's socioeconomic/educational status, an inference largely verified by relative research endeavours, exploring the relationship between skills for civic engagement and educational/economic status (Hillygus, 2005; Hart and Atkins, 2002; Schlozman, 2002). A certain relationship is also revealed between youth civic engagement and parental educational attainment, being in alignment with conclusions drawn in relevant research (e.g. Matthews et al., 2010; White and Mistry, 2016).

Experience also shows that people's engagement is also restricted by time constraints (Lowndes et al., 2006a, 2006b). Such barriers are also highlighted (51 per cent of young respondents) and are associated with heavy education commitments.

LIKE TO - do youth feel an integral part of local community?

Responses gathered in this part show that students of Korydallos locality feel an integral part of the local community (Figure 5a), and are willing to engage and support global SD endeavours through local actions. Sense of belonging is also evident from the way they experience difficulties of local community due to economic recession. These, coupled with their frustration from conventional political processes and the lack of trust (Figure 5b), are barriers to engage in common affairs.

(a) - Question: Do you feel an integral part of your neighborhood?

(b) - Question: Level of mutual trust at community level

Figure 5: Gr-RAC initiative - (a) Sense of youth belonging; and (b) Perception of mutual trust at Korydallos community level

ENABLED TO – opportunities/options of youth participation

Youngster's responses have stressed the lack of specific *social structures* as youth participation enablers in Korydallos locality. Furthermore, they have acknowledged the role of family for awareness raising and motivating to participate in common affairs, an issue that is consistent with the results of a number of studies (Hart and Atkins, 2002; Hillygus, 2005). Family and school seem to be key influential factors for motivating youth to undertake local SD actions (Figure 6), compensating, to a certain extent, for the lack of relevant youth social structures.

ASKED TO – options for youth mobilization to participate

Effective ways for informing and motivating youth participation and establishment of steady communication bridges are critical aspects for more inclusive decision-making processes at the local level. Youngsters in Korydallos locality expressed their preference to non-conventional participation options in such processes. 1/3 of them rated high experience-based and creative participatory approaches. They also evaluated positively the raising of knowledge stock as a means for strengthening confidence and enabling more knowledgeable views. They shared the view that

social media cannot sufficiently influence or provide reliable and scientifically-valid information on current SD challenges. Finally, almost half of them confirmed a lack of information by local bodies or institutions as to how or when they can get involved and for what purpose. Apparently, this reveals that no serious effort has been devoted so far in order for more challenging communication channels for youth engagement to be established.

RESPONDED TO – evidence that expressed views are taken into consideration

Conviction that views expressed by societal groups in a participatory process will be embedded, the one or the other way, in policy outcomes is the bedrock for citizens' engagement (Duraiappah et al., 2005; Stratigea, 2015). In Korydallos locality, however, youngsters were quite sceptical about this statement. More than 58 per cent shared the view that citizens are not really heard by local politicians, thus disputing true local leader's intentions to take into consideration citizen's voices.
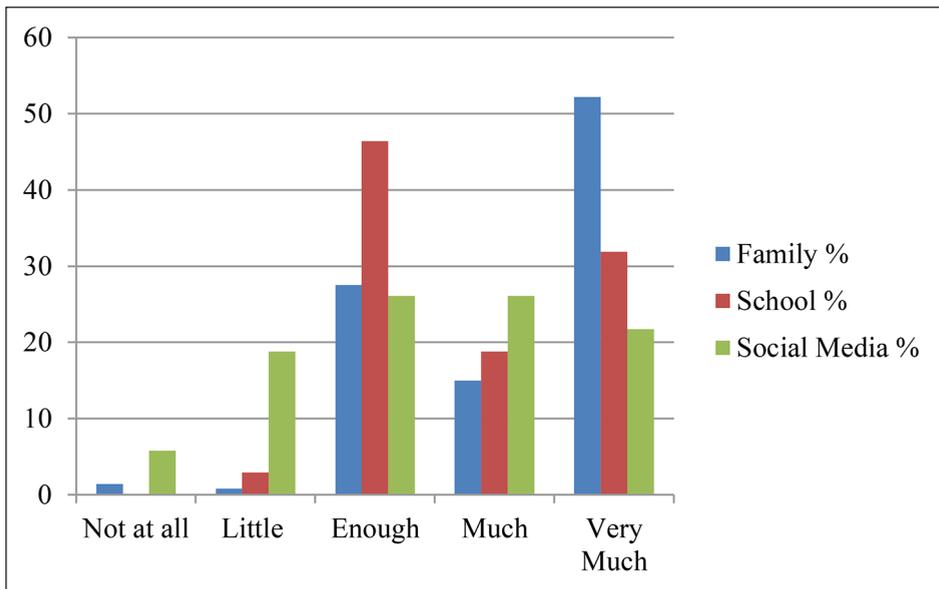
Figure 6: Sources of youth motivation towards environmental concern/action

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Youth participation in pursuing SD challenges is nowadays largely acknowledged by decision makers at the glocal level. Empirical studies, carried out so far, demonstrate a range of good practices. However, they also unveil a certain gap between policy decision mechanisms and youth engagement, while they converge on certain

key issues or preconditions in order for effective youth participation to be reached. As the most important ones currently missing, are inferred the following:

Adoption of ICT-enabled interaction patterns for establishing steady communication bridges with youth and information channels, taking advantage of prevailing youth interaction patterns for bringing them in the socio-political discourse.

Education and training which, coupled with the unimpeded access to environmental and other types of information, can increase youth's knowledge stock and awareness towards SD challenges and motivate action.

Political willingness and openness, going hand in hand with trust established between youth and political leaders; and implying the transition from traditional opaque decision-making procedures to new, transparent and inclusive governance structures.

Use of *non-conventional, experience-based and creative participatory procedures* that motivate and keep vivid youth's interest. Alternative options are nowadays available, such as online campaigns, clicktivism and slacktivism, hacking and dodos attacks, crowdsourcing, liquid democracy (EC-CE, 2015).

Exploration of the international and EU context on the topic reveals certain barriers that are predominantly due to inadequately meeting the above requirements. These barriers were also verified by the two case studies, conducted in Korydallos locality. Additional barriers, however, can be identified, emanating from the specificities of each single urban context. In the case of Korydallos locality, youth participation seems to be further restricted by:

The current adverse socio-economic conditions and austerity stress, further worsening conditions in this underprivileged neighbourhood of the Athens metropolitan area, and strongly affecting interest to engage and youth priorities' setting.

The lack of attractive communication bridges between youth and local administration. The latter does not take leadership neither makes strategic use of available digital means (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) for establishing linkages, spreading information and engaging youth in local affairs. Youth peculiarities are generally not yet firmly addressed in the political agenda.

The absence of youth structures for youngsters' empowerment and motivation to engage, an issue partly compensated for by the family and school environment.

Face-to-face participatory tools used in DemoCU and Gr-RAC initiatives and the focus on youth's creativity and experience-learning have proved powerful tools for unfolding their thoughts, skills and perceptions. Moreover, knowledge stock upgrading and awareness raising as well as creative work on SD issues were acknowledged by students as skills- and confidence-building mechanisms. Highly appreciated was also the stepwise building of trust and collaborative work, resulting in willingness to engage, cooperate, unfold creative skills and publicly defend outcomes produced. An important result of the two exercises was also youth commitment to join efforts and undertake a leading role to local SD activities, while acting as ambassadors of SD messages in the family, the school and the local community environment. The value of CLEAR model should also be noticed, being a useful

tool for structuring and systematically interpreting barriers to youth participation in the two case studies. Finally, it should be mentioned that barriers identified in the specific locality largely reflect general inadequacies with regards to smart governance constituents of this specific area – i.e. governance, assets and management as decisive layers; and the interplay among technology, people and governance, as shown in a previous work of the authors (Marava et al., 2019). In fact, Korydallos administration, i.e. a typical medium-scale city in Greece, although having already undertaken certain steps towards the smart city in general and smart governance directions in particular, it bears the deficit noticed in the global/EU environment with regards to youth engagement. Participatory efforts, already carried out at the local level, face local community as a whole, overlooking specificities and potential role of youth community. Insight gained in the two case studies, presented in this work, has provided well-documented results on barriers to youth participation that can guide local administration towards more targeted youth engagement initiatives.

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