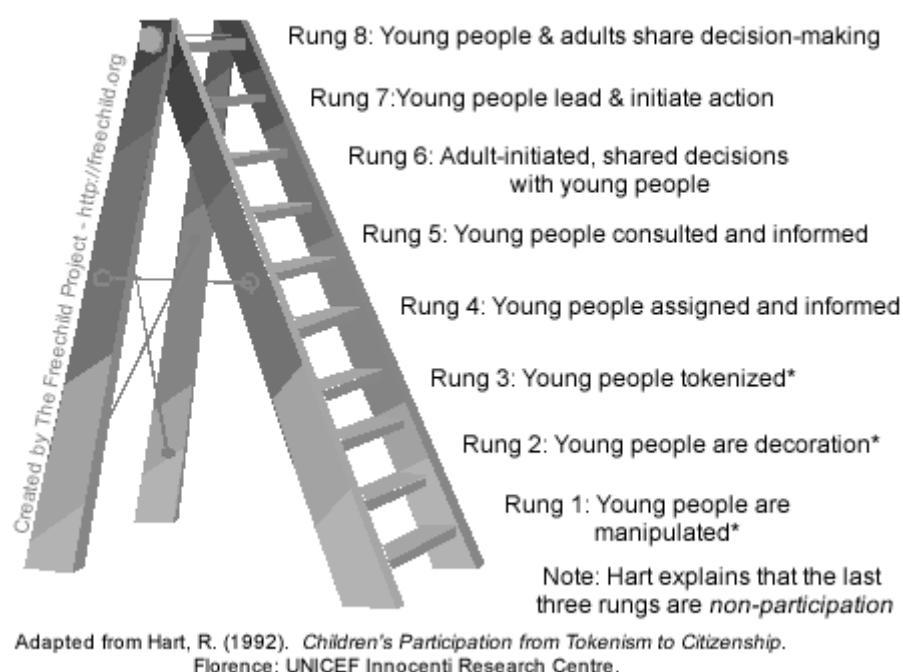


Ladder of Participation

About the Ladder

Sociologist Roger Hart wrote a book called *Children's Participation: The Theory And Practice Of Involving Young Citizens In Community Development And Environmental Care* for UNICEF in 1997. This groundbreaking work put the work of young people and adult allies around the world in the context of a global movement for participation, offering needed guidance and criticism of many efforts. The "Ladder of Children's Participation," also called the "Ladder of Youth Participation," is one of many significant tools from the book.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Degrees of Participation

8) Young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults. This happens when projects or programs are initiated by young people and decision-making is shared between young people and adults. These projects empower young people while at the same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experience and expertise of adults. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by [youth/adult partnerships](#).*

7) Young people-initiated and directed. This step is when young people initiate and direct a project or program. Adults are involved only in a supportive role. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by [youth-led activism](#).*

6) Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people. Occurs when projects or programs are initiated by adults but the decision-making is shared with the young people. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by [participatory action research](#).*

5) Consulted and informed. Happens when young people give advice on projects or programs designed and run by adults. The young people are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by [youth advisory councils](#).*

4) Assigned but informed. This is where young people are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are being involved. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by [community youth boards](#).*

3) Tokenism. When young people appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate. *This rung of the ladder reflects [adulthood](#).*

2) Decoration. Happens when young people are used to help or "bolster" a cause in a relatively indirect way, although adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by young people. *This rung of the ladder reflects [adulthood](#).*

1) Manipulation. Happens where adults use young people to support causes and pretend that the causes are inspired by young people. *This rung of the ladder reflects [adulthood](#).*

The 7/8 Debate

Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation shows young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults as the top form of young people's participation, followed immediately by young people-initiated and directed. This is somewhat controversial an issue for many people working with and around young people. Essentially, the debate is which of these levels of participation is actually the most meaningful?

Many believe that shared decision making is most beneficial to both young people and adults. Others believe that young people are most empowered when they are making decisions without the influence of adults. Most often, this doesn't exclude adults but reduces their role to that of support.

Both arguments have merit; ultimately, it is up to each group to determine which form of decision-making best fits with the groups' needs.

Adapted from [here](#).

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