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# FROM PARTICIPATION TO CO-GOVERNANCE: COVE AS UNIVERSITY-TERRITORY INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS

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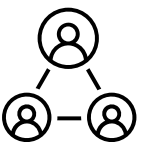
CONCLUSION



- ✓ European policy frameworks increasingly promote learner participation and stakeholder engagement;
- ✓ Youth participation is a central theme in European education and innovation policies → emphasis on democratic engagement, social innovation, and stakeholder involvement → **young people** not merely beneficiaries of educational systems but **active contributors** to their **design** and **development**;
- ✓ Participation often limited to consultation processes, surveys, or representative functions with little impact on actual decision-making → **gap** between participation and influence → how governance structures can evolve towards more meaningful forms of co-decision and shared responsibility?



CoVEs are conceived as ecosystem-based structures connecting vocational education providers, universities, enterprises, public authorities, and civil society organisations. Their territorial dimension makes them potentially suitable environments for experimenting with innovative forms of youth participation and co-governance.



## Paper objective:

The extent to which CoVEs can support the institutionalisation of youth co-governance and discusses the role universities may play in strengthening these processes.

The analysis identifies **four key analytical dimensions**:

1. **Formal Recognition:** youth participation embedded in formal governance arrangements through advisory boards, steering committees, and decision-making structures that clearly define roles and responsibilities;
2. **Capacity Building:** young participants need opportunities to develop governance competences, including data literacy, deliberation skills, and understanding of institutional processes;
3. **Access to Evidence:** participation becomes meaningful when young people can access and interpret information relevant to strategic decisions;
4. **Feedback and Accountability:** co-governance requires visible feedback loops showing how contributions influence decisions and what outcomes result from participation.



## **Main Challenge to the survey**

→ the evaluation of youth participation outcomes

- Current approaches often focus on participation rates or satisfaction indicators → BUT: these measures provide limited information about actual governance influence.

*A more comprehensive assessment framework should consider:*

- ✓ *changes in decision-making processes;*
- ✓ *influence on policy and strategic priorities;*
- ✓ *development of civic and governance competences;*
- ✓ *innovation outcomes;*
- ✓ *contributions to social inclusion and territorial development.*



→ Such indicators can help move beyond symbolic participation and support evidence-based governance innovation.



## Research questions:

- **RQ1:** To what extent can Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) facilitate the transition from consultative student participation to institutionalized forms of youth co-governance?
- **RQ2:** What features of CoVEs' governance structures enable the effective involvement of young people in decision-making processes at the educational and local levels?
- **RQ3:** What role do universities within local ecosystems to support youth co-governance processes?
- **RQ4:** What criteria and indicators can be used to assess the impact of youth co-governance on improving educational quality, social innovation, and regional development?

## Research methodology:

The research used **qualitative methods** such as:

- case studies and comparative analyses of European and national contexts that allowed to answer the above questions;
- document and policy analysis that further supported understanding of governance and implementation frameworks.



## CoVEs definition and overview

- ✓ Centres of Vocational Excellence emerged within European vocational education and training policies as a response to the need for stronger connections between skills development, innovation, and regional development.
- ✓ CoVEs differ from conventional educational institutions because they operate through ecosystem logics;
- ✓ CoVEs's mission extends beyond training provision to include innovation support, territorial development, knowledge transfer, and stakeholder coordination.

**Three characteristics** make CoVEs particularly relevant for youth co-governance:

1. multi-stakeholder governance structures;
2. strong territorial embeddedness;
3. continuous interaction between education, employment, and innovation systems.



These characteristics create opportunities for involving learners not only as recipients of educational services but also as contributors to ecosystem development.



## Universities strategic position in CoVE ecosystems

Through their educational, research, and third-mission functions, they connect local actors, generate knowledge, and support innovation processes.

In the context of youth co-governance, universities can contribute in at least three ways:

1. they can provide governance expertise and methodological support for participatory processes;
2. universities can facilitate capacity-building initiatives that prepare students and young people to participate effectively in decision-making;
3. they can act as institutional bridges linking VET learners, university students, local communities, enterprises, and policy-makers.







CoVEs offer favourable conditions for experimenting with youth co-governance because they combine educational, economic, and territorial dimensions within a single ecosystem framework.



CoVEs operate through collaborative networks that require continuous negotiation among multiple stakeholders. This creates opportunities for integrating youth voice into governance processes in ways that are more difficult to achieve within isolated institutional settings.



the success of these initiatives depends on their ability to avoid tokenistic participation and to create genuine opportunities for influence.



- ✓ The growing emphasis on participation within European education policies calls for a transition from consultation-based approaches towards more substantive forms of youth involvement.
- ✓ The institutionalisation of youth co-governance requires governance architectures, digital infrastructures, and evaluation mechanisms that support meaningful participation and visible influence on decisions.
- ✓ Universities play a crucial role as knowledge brokers, capacity builders, and connectors across educational and territorial systems.

Future research should investigate how different CoVE governance models operationalise youth participation and which institutional conditions most effectively support the development of sustainable co-governance practices.



# THANK YOU FOR YOU ATTENTION

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