

# Towards scaling up, out and deep: Debriefing youth experiences of youth participatory action research and citizen social science

Aina Landsverk Hagen and Hilde Rønnaug Kitterød

**Abstract:** Youth encounter specific forms of *epistemic injustice* when they are invited to decision making and participatory processes. Our empirical outset is debriefing sessions with youth co-researchers based in Norway who have participated in numerous national and international Youth Participatory Action Research projects and Citizen Social Science projects over the past decade. Here the youth reflect on their role, purpose and competencies built, but also on the perceived lack of societal influence that their knowledge production has. Building on critical and post-colonial theory, we argue that these practice-based reflections open a space of *epistemic diversity*, and that a novel combination of Action Research, Citizen Science traditions and arts-based methods offer new strategies for scaling: up, out and deep. The youths' positioning ventures from participating to partnering roles, provoking a re-thinking of the scaffolding needed to provide for epistemic partner growth and care.

**Keywords:** youth, epistemic injustice, scaling, participatory action research, citizen social science, scaffolding

## **Escalar hacia arriba, fuera y en profundo: una introspección en las experiencias de las personas jóvenes en la investigación-acción y en la ciencia social ciudadana**

**Resumen:** Los jóvenes se enfrentan a formas específicas de *injusticia epistémica* cuando se les invita a la toma de decisiones y a los procesos participativos. Nuestro punto de partida empírico son sesiones informativas con jóvenes coinvestigadores radicados en Noruega que han participado en numerosos proyectos nacionales e internacionales de investigación-acción participativa juvenil y en proyectos de ciencia social ciudadana durante la última década. En dichas sesiones, los jóvenes reflexionan sobre su rol, propósito y competencias desarrolladas, pero también sobre su percepción de la falta de influencia social que tiene su producción de conocimiento. Basándonos en la teoría crítica y poscolonial, argumentamos que estas reflexiones prácticas abren un espacio de *diversidad epistémica*, y que una combinación novedosa de investigación-acción, tradiciones de la ciencia ciudadana y métodos artísticos ofrece nuevas estrategias para un escalamiento: hacia arriba, hacia afuera y en profundidad. El posicionamiento de los jóvenes incluye desde roles de participación hasta roles de asociación, lo que provoca un replanteamiento del andamiaje necesario para propiciar el crecimiento y el cuidado de la asociación epistémica.

**Palabras clave:** juventud, injusticia epistémica, escalamiento, investigación acción participativa, ciencia social ciudadana, andamiaje

“Youth participation must be included in all decision-making processes to ensure the needs of young people and the youth perspective”.

*Young co-researcher, Norway*

## Introduction

Youth have the right to *active participation* in matters that are relevant to them, according to international and national laws (Hagen, 2021). It is not enough to listen to young people’s opinions; their ideas and input must also be given due weight. This is becoming a more acknowledged view, also among youth themselves – as the above quote shows. The empirical backbone of this article is debriefing sessions conducted with young people aged 13–25 years based in Norway, involved as co-researchers in numerous national and international participatory action research and citizen social science projects over the past decade.

*Table 1.* Overview of the main YPAR and YCSS projects (2016 – 2025) that form the empirical base of this analysis.

| Project titles                                                                                                                      | Research objectives and context                                                                                                                                                    | Main findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Period      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| <i>Alternative Spaces: Youth Stories of the Future</i>                                                                              | Pilot project on Youth Participatory Action Research in urban planning in two municipalities in Norway, in collaboration with junior high and high schools, and municipal workers. | Collaboration with artists provided meaningful interaction with the youth, both for idea development on local neighbourhood improvements and for artistic co-creation and dissemination of results. Initial testing of the co-research approach resulted in high youth engagement. | 2016 – 2018 |
| <i>A Place to be Young</i>                                                                                                          | Pilot project testing co-research with youth in a YPAR project, on the co-creation of youth places in local neighbourhoods in eight districts and municipalities in Norway         | Developed training processes for the co-researchers based on tools and methods from Action Research in Organisations.                                                                                                                                                              | 2018 – 2021 |
| <i>YouCount (Empowering youth and co-creating social innovations and policymaking through youth-focused citizen social science)</i> | Co-creative youth citizen social science project in eight European countries. Aimed to produce new knowledge of positive drivers for social inclusion of youth at risk of ex-      | The need for developing a YCSS framework for training the youth emerged early in the project. “The House of Training” framework was developed as a response to this need. To                                                                                                       | 2021 – 2024 |