

# Bridging Research and Citizenship through Reflection: The B-YOUth Forum Model

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## Abstract

In today's complex global landscape, fostering youth participation in democratic processes is a strategic priority recognized by multiple international policy frameworks. However, research highlights a growing youth disengagement from traditional democratic institutions. This paper offers a theoretical and methodological reflection on the role of scientific research as a tool for citizenship education, emphasizing research as a reflective practice to develop critical and deliberative competencies. Through the pedagogical facilitation model implemented in the B-YOUth Forum – a participatory research lab promoted by the University of Milano-Bicocca within the MUSA project – this study explores the potential of research as an educational process. The model invests in scientific research as a strategy for supporting the development of citizenship competencies, through a specific pedagogical facilitation. Findings highlight how engaging in research processes enhances citizenship competencies, encouraging young people to take an active role in decision-making and future-building.

**Keywords:** research, reflexivity, pedagogical facilitation, model, youth, university.

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\* Le autrici condividono l'impianto complessivo dell'articolo. Il paragrafo *Introduction* è da attribuirsi a tutte le autrici; i paragrafi *Reflective Competencies as a Bridge to Leveraging Academic Research for the Promotion of Democratic Citizenship* e *The B-YOUth Forum model: from scientific research to citizenship education* a Elisabetta Biffi; i paragrafi *The phases of B-YOUth Forum model* e *Reflections and concluding remarks* a Chiara Carla Montà; i paragrafi *Exploring citizenship competencies: the role of reflection* e *The role of pedagogical facilitation and research tools* a Maria Ratotti.

## Introduction

In the complex global landscape of contemporary times (Ceruti, 2018), international initiatives – exemplified by the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) – have catalyzed the development of policies aimed at fostering sustainable progress. One notable instance is the European Commission's NextGenerationEU plan, which has supported the national implementation of Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), still active today. A recurring theme in these policies is the commitment to an interdisciplinary and intergenerational strategy that emphasizes the education and active participation of young people – identified as pivotal agents of change by the GreenComp (2022) framework for instance. Despite these structured efforts, studies by Bárta et al. (2021), Yurttagüler and Pultar (2023) and observations by Sloam and Henn (2019) reveal a decline in youth political engagement and a pervasive skepticism towards conventional democratic institutions.

To address this issue, it is essential to supplement traditional civic education – as highlighted in the report *Our Europe, Our Rights, Our Future* (ChildFund Alliance, Eurochild, Save The Children, UNICEF, World Vision, 2021) – with innovative strategies that promote social activism (Codini & Riniolo, 2018), foster public deliberation (Biesta, 2011), and enhance community engagement (Willems et al., 2012; Milner, 2009). In this context, educational institutions assume a critical role not only in relation to instruction but also in strengthening the capacity of society to involve children and young people in decision-making processes that shape future development.

Within this framework, this contribution proposes a theoretical and methodological reflection on the role of scientific research – understood in a broad sense – as an opportunity for developing transversal competencies necessary to support young generations in understanding reality and actively participating within democratic structures (CoUE, 2018; Eurydice, 2017). In this sense, the university – especially when a public institution – becomes a key interlocutor not only in disseminating the knowledge produced within research laboratories but, above all, in involving citizens in the processes of knowledge construction, to *democratize* the tools and competencies of research itself (Appadurai, 2006) as critical and reflective resources for a conscious understanding of the complexity of the present.

Understanding today's complex challenges requires less technical expertise and more skill in navigating knowledge, identifying reliable sources, and thinking critically. Making the tools of scientific research available to the general public is therefore not enough to support the

construction of the necessary citizenship skills (Appadurai, 2006): specific *pedagogical facilitation* between knowledge, practices and experiences is needed.

Within this framework, the B-YOUth Forum project will be presented as a model for investing in scientific research as a strategy for supporting the development of citizenship competences. The present paper will commence with a definition of the theoretical background related to citizenship competences. Following this, the B-YOUth Forum experience will be introduced, with a description of its pedagogical models and the process that underpins it.

## Exploring citizenship competencies: the role of reflection

The role of education in preparing citizens has been a subject of discussion since the establishment of democracies. Since the *Enlightenment*, an instrumentalist view has framed schools and educational institutions as mechanisms for producing democratic citizens with specific skills and knowledge, focusing on rationality and predefined competencies (Biesta, 2007). This issue remains highly relevant and is the focus of contemporary pedagogical debate (Sant, 2019; Apple, 2011; Corsi & Sani, 2004; Pagano, 2004, Pastori et al., 2024).

As stated by Gert Biesta (2006), education is historically seen as central to preparing individuals for democratic participation, but it risks remaining limited to a narrow, individualistic perspective, with an unrealistic expectation that education alone can sustain democracy (McNeil, 2002; Biesta, 2004, 2007). Within this debate, two dominant approaches to democratic education have emerged. The first, *education for democracy*, emphasizes equipping students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values for democratic engagement (Gutmann, 1987; Carr & Hartnett, 1996). The second, *education through democracy*, argues that participation in democratic processes within schools fosters deeper democratic dispositions (Biesta & Lawy, 2006). Despite their differences, both approaches share an instrumentalist view, treating education as a tool for shaping future democratic citizens. Gert Biesta (2006) critiques this perspective, arguing for a more relational and pluralistic approach, where democracy is cultivated through *engagement with others* rather than solely through institutionalized instruction. He emphasizes that democracy should not be reduced to individual competencies but understood as a broader societal practice requiring active participation and plurality (Biesta, 2004c, 2007; Honig, 1993). In this light, democracy is understood as more than a

governance system; it is a lived experience requiring active participation to shape collective life (Dewey, 1916). Citizenship is not just a legal status but a practice that demands engagement, deliberation, and responsibility. Active participation, therefore, is central to democratic citizenship, where individuals transition from passive subjects to active agents in public affairs.

Today, International frameworks recognize this expanded notion of democratic citizenship. The *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* of the Council of Europe (RFCDC, 2018) defines participation as the ability to engage in collective decision-making, advocate for societal concerns, and act constructively in democratic contexts. Similarly, the *OECD Learning Compass 2030* highlights “student agency” as the capacity to shape rather than merely navigate social structures. The *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* of the European Union (2018) further link civic competence to understanding political systems and engaging critically. UNESCO’s *Global Citizenship Education* (GCED) reinforces this perspective, emphasizing that meaningful participation must be rooted in a global ethical consciousness, particularly when addressing challenges such as climate change and migration. However, participation is meaningful when accompanied by critical engagement with democratic structures. Without reflective competencies – higher-order cognitive and ethical reasoning skills – it risks becoming merely symbolic (Mezirow, 1991). These competencies go beyond procedural knowledge, fostering self-reflection and the ability to assess biases, narratives, and power dynamics. Both the RFCDC and GCED stress the importance of critical thinking for informed participation, ensuring that individuals can analyze sources, engage in debate, and make reasoned decisions.

## **Reflective Competencies as a Bridge to Leveraging Academic Research for the Promotion of Democratic Citizenship**

In the debate on contemporary models of democracy (cf. Di Gregorio, 2020; Mezzetti, 2005; Pegoraro, 2014), this contribution reclaims democracy as not merely a system of governance but a lived experience (Dewey, 1916). Citizenship is an ongoing practice requiring commitment, deliberation, and responsibility, with participation as both its foundation and means. However, for participation to be truly transformative, it must involve critical engagement with democratic structures. Without this, it risks becoming a hollow formality, devoid of substance and impact.

Developing reflective competencies is therefore essential, enabling individuals to analyze, question, and shape the systems they inhabit. This calls for an educational approach that moves beyond transmitting knowledge to fostering experiential learning, encouraging young people to take ownership of their role in democracy. In this regard, we argue that scientific research, when framed as an accessible and participatory practice, becomes a powerful tool for cultivating democratic competencies. However, for research to have a formative impact, it must extend beyond academia and integrate into everyday experiences and critical inquiry. As Dewey (1981) emphasizes, action gains meaning through reflection and its connection to real-world challenges. Similarly, in *The Right to Research*, Appadurai (2006) challenges the traditional view of research as an exclusive domain of experts, instead framing it as a democratic capacity – a right that all individuals should exercise. The research process – questioning reality, formulating strategies for inquiry, and critically reflecting on findings – mirrors the very skills required for active citizenship. As Appadurai (2006) states, “all human beings are, in this sense, researchers, since all human beings make decisions that require them to make systematic forays beyond their current knowledge horizons” (p. 167). As participation gains recognition as a pillar of democracy, some educational policies are beginning to promote reflective and critical competencies alongside civic knowledge. This underscores the need for an inquiry-based educational model that equips individuals not only to understand democratic structures but to actively engage with and shape them.

Within this perspective, *universities* – as institutions of research, training, and public engagement, even in terms of knowledge production and dissemination – play a crucial role in fostering the democratic capacity to research (Ratotti & Biffi, 2024). Referring to Goal 17 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which highlights the value of collaboration in building a sustainable future, universities can serve as fundamental spaces where research and civic participation intersect. As Pierluigi Malavasi (2022) notes, universities are “places for the elaboration of novelties that connect to and nourish from the past, to interpret it and outline the future”<sup>1</sup> (p. 14). However, simply exposing young people to academic research environments is not enough. Without *pedagogical facilitation*, engagement with research remains passive, failing to translate into an active stance toward knowledge and democracy. Research-based learning (Lambert, 2009), especially if extended to high school students’

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by the authors of this contribution.

training, must therefore be structured as a reflective and participatory process, ensuring that students do not merely accumulate knowledge but learn to apply it meaningfully in shaping their life projects and those of the communities they inhabit.

Thus, the challenge of democratic education is not only to teach about democracy but to create experiences that cultivate democratic ways of thinking and acting. By integrating critical reflection, participatory engagement, and research-based inquiry, education can contribute to the formation of citizens capable of navigating, questioning, and transforming the democratic structures they inhabit.

Within these processes, we can see an inherent dimension of reflection. This reflective dimension can be made explicit through the use of specific models that guide and structure the research process. One such model is a pedagogical facilitation model, which emphasizes the role of a facilitator, with pedagogical competencies, in creating an environment conducive to thoughtful inquiry and critical reflection.

In this regard, a long-standing pedagogical tradition adopts the paradigm of reflective practice as a fundamental framework for meaning, including within research processes. Notably, the contributions of Donata Fabbri and Alberto Munari are particularly relevant, especially in the development of the *Laboratori di Epistemologia Operativa* (LEO - Operational Epistemology Laboratories<sup>2</sup>). These laboratories, among other objectives, promote awareness – through active experimentation – of knowledge construction processes and the relationships individuals establish with them. Here, participants adopt a research-oriented stance that is inherently questioning and reflective. Additionally, Loretta Fabbri's work (2007, 2019) advances the use of an epistemology of practice based on reflection-in-action, as well as an epistemology of professional training that supports the reflective processes communities engage in when examining their own practices (Wenger, 2006). From this perspective emerges the theorization of a collaborative research approach, where the connection between research, learning, and action fosters transformation. In this model, change is not merely an outcome but a shared objective within multi-stakeholder research communities. From a different perspective, the analysis proffered by Cath Lambert is of great interest, as it emphasises the role of research-based learning in higher education: “Research-based learning embeds research activity in the undergraduate curriculum. It is based on the principle that all students, whatever their degree subject or ‘level’ of study, benefit from carrying out research; their knowledge and understanding of

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by the authors of this contribution.

their subject is enhanced by their active engagement in learning and their investment in education is enriched by their participation in the research culture of their intellectual disciplines, their departments and their universities” (2009, p. 302).

It is important to note that, in the context of research, the emphasis is not exclusively on the natural sciences but rather on a conception of *scientific* that encompasses an interdisciplinary and integrated perspective. As Martha Nussbaum asserts (2012), access to knowledge and the processes of knowledge production foster imagination and the capacity to envision novel scenarios, which are indispensable for addressing the increasingly intricate challenges of the contemporary era.

It is, however, an educational challenge, which the authors of this contribution addressed by outlining a working model that transforms scientific research into a resource for the formation of citizenship competencies.

## **The B-YOUth Forum model: from scientific research to citizenship education**

This paper presents the B-YOUth Forum model<sup>3</sup>, developed by an interdisciplinary research group from the University of Milano-Bicocca. B-YOUth Forum model is part of the MUSA project (<https://musascarl.it/>), which aims to foster a sustainable and inclusive urban environment by promoting collaboration between academic research and local communities within the city of Milan. Within the MUSA structure, the B-YOUth Forum model is part of the activities aimed at promoting social inclusion and civic engagement to enhance social sustainability.

The B-YOUth Forum model directly addresses the pedagogical challenge of fostering young people’s ability to critically engage with social life in the public sphere, thereby contributing to the formation of reflective and active citizens. The B-YOUth Forum model has been conceived as a scientific initiative to raise awareness among students on the topic of sustainability, in alignment with the overarching aims of the MUSA project. Consequently, participants were presented with the

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<sup>3</sup> The B-YOUth Forum has been active for four years (2021–2025). The 2023–2024 cycle focused on defining the model we are presenting here. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the young people who participated in the B-YOUth Forum activities, without whom this work would not have been possible.

opportunity to explore the diverse research domains pursued by the research groups involved in MUSA during the programme.

B-YOUth Forum is open to young people aged 14 to 25 (from high schools, educational services and university) and invites them to research themes related to sustainability. The primary objective is to equip participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage meaningfully in the co-construction of knowledge that extends beyond the academic domain and has tangible impacts on local communities. By providing a space where young people can explore and practice research methodologies, B-YOUth Forum model functions as a concrete and accessible entry point into academic research inquiry. Participants are encouraged to develop the ability to formulate critical questions, interrogate social contexts from a reflective perspective, share their insights, and engage in dialogue with peers and society at large. In doing so, they not only broaden their individual perspectives but also cultivate competencies associated with sustainable, global, and democratic citizenship. From an educational standpoint, the project is designed to establish conditions that immerse participants in transformative processes of critical reflection and decision-making. Crucial for this purpose, B-YOUth Forum is designed as a pedagogical facilitation model.

*A pedagogical facilitation model* is based on the idea that thinking develops in dynamic, interactive environments that encourage dialogue, questioning, and reflection (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006). In this approach, the facilitator adopts a posture of openness and responsiveness, employing tools and strategies that actively engage participants in critical reflection (Farini & Scollan, 2023). Rather than acting as a mere transmitter of knowledge, the facilitator co-constructs the learning experience (Luguetti et al., 2020), providing scaffolding that enables participants to connect theoretical concepts with real-world issues, ultimately fostering active citizenship.

In order to provide a comprehensive overview of the B-YOUth Forum model, it is first necessary to consider the role of the facilitator and the pedagogical reasons for its existence.

## **The role of pedagogical facilitation and research tools**

Reality is inherently complex, characterized by interwoven dimensions that cannot be fully understood through a single disciplinary lens (Bocchi & Ceruti, 2007). Addressing this complexity requires an interdisciplinary approach capable of integrating diverse perspectives, methodologies, and

epistemological frameworks. In this sense, universities can offer a privileged space for such integration, fostering environments where knowledge from different domains can intersect. However, the mere coexistence of multiple disciplines is not sufficient; there must be an active mediation between knowledge and lived experiences to ensure that learning is not merely theoretical but transformative, allowing individuals to develop competencies that are applicable in real-world contexts.

For this reason, the model – here proposed – places the pedagogical facilitator at its core. This figure plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between young people and the academic community, guiding them in their encounters with scientists and researchers from different disciplines. Beyond merely exposing students to new knowledge, the facilitator fosters reflective engagement with these encounters, encouraging participants to critically interrogate, interpret, and integrate their experiences. Through this process, knowledge is not passively received but actively constructed, facilitating its translation into meaningful competencies that can be applied across various contexts.

To achieve this, the pedagogical facilitator employs a range of reflective tools explicitly designed to nurture critical thinking and agency. These tools draw upon well-established methodologies that support self-inquiry and meaning-making. On one hand, autobiographical and narrative approaches (Biffi, 2010; Demetrio, 1998, 2008, 2012; Gamelli & Formenti, 1998) enable learners to situate their experiences within broader educational and social frameworks, fostering self-awareness and metacognitive reflection. On the other hand, approaches grounded in artistic languages (Biffi & Zuccoli, 2015) leverage the generative power of aesthetic experience, encouraging non-linear and divergent thinking (Guilford, 1967; De Bono, 1968/1969; Corradi Fiumara, 1998). The use of artistic modalities – such as visual storytelling (Addone et al., 2020) and moodboards (Biffi & Zuccoli, 2019; Cassidy, 2008) – enriches the reflective process, allowing for the emergence of insights that might not be accessible through purely discursive means. In this way, the pedagogical facilitator actively co-constructs learning pathways with participants, fostering a space where interdisciplinary knowledge is critically engaged with and translated into competencies that extend beyond the academic sphere.

## **The phases of B-YOuth Forum model**

The proposed model is grounded in the logic of the research process, as theorized by Mortari (2015; 2020), and applies its principles to educational work with young people within the B-YOuth Forum model.

As already discussed, research, understood as a systematic and reflective

inquiry into reality, provides a methodological framework that supports the development of critical thinking and epistemic curiosity.

In this section, the phases of the adopted pedagogical facilitation model will be outlined. The model is structured into the following key phases, where designing of the model and monitoring are transversal to the entire process:

- Implementation:
  1. Raising questions.
  2. Exploring the field (this phase encompasses 1.; 2.; 3.).
  3. Reflection on reality
  4. Sharing knowledge
- Monitoring strategy.

## ***Implementation***

### *1. Raising questions*

The implementation of the project followed a significant and recursive pattern in the conduction of the research activities, made up of *four main phases*, in which specific educational methodologies can be retrieved. Educational research consistently emphasizes the importance of preparatory and relational aspects, which shape the conditions for meaningful learning and active participation. Indeed, at the beginning of the school year, contacts are made with high schools and local educational services to define the modalities for engaging young participants<sup>4</sup>. Before the research activity, the B-YOUTH Forum's facilitator and the researchers involved arrived at the university to organize the physical space and prepare the necessary materials. This preparatory phase played a crucial pedagogical role, as the environment and the materials are not neutral elements but rather constitute an integral part of the learning experience (Massa, 1986, 1991, 1993; Riva, 2016), influencing participants' engagement and the overall climate of the group. A fundamental aspect of this initial phase was the co-construction of a *group agreement* – a shared set of ideas and rules designed to promote the well-being of the group and facilitate effective collaboration. This agreement was not imposed but emerged through dialogue, ensuring that every participant's voice was heard and valued. The rules were intentionally flexible and open to revision throughout the

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<sup>4</sup> Based on the agreed educational project, hourly packages have been established, ranging between approximately twenty and thirty hours. Specifically, programs have been activated for Paths for Transversal Skills and Orientation (Percorsi per le Competenze Trasversali e l'Orientamento - PCTO), Summer Job pathways and citizenship education initiatives.

process, reflecting the evolving needs of the group. Examples of such shared principles might include respecting turn-taking in discussions, ensuring everyone feels safe to express their opinions, and agreeing on how to manage disagreements constructively.

Following this phase, the pedagogical facilitator revisited the content and reflections from previous sessions to establish continuity to bridge between past and present activities, enabling participants to recall key insights and connect them to the new challenges ahead. Creating this connection is crucial as it allows young people to see the relevance of the research activities in relation to their own lives and experiences. For example, the facilitator might ask open-ended questions like, “What do you remember from our last meeting?” or “Has anything happened recently that relates to what we discussed?”. In some cases, participants referred to personal experiences, such as making decisions within their peer groups or reflecting on social issues they encountered in their daily environments, thus enriching the collective reflection with lived examples.

After this brief review, the facilitator introduces the purpose of the day’s research activity, framing it through a problem or a guiding question designed to spark curiosity and foster critical engagement.

## *2. Exploring the fields*

The B-YOUTH Forum was conceived as a scientific initiative to raise students’ awareness of the core concepts of the MUSA project. Participants explored the diverse research areas within MUSA through seminars led by researchers from various disciplines, including biology, sociology, geography, and philosophy. These seminars provided hands-on experience with research tools, highlighting different methodologies and their convergence on sustainability.

The pedagogical facilitator played a crucial role throughout the research process, helping participants grasp research objectives, select appropriate tools, analyze data critically, and develop dissemination strategies. Additionally, they supported the young participants in finding their role within the research group and contributing their perspectives.

For instance, participants were introduced to mobile video interviews through workshops. They first shared prior experiences, then collaboratively developed interview questions, refining them through peer feedback. The pedagogical facilitator used play-based methods (Whitton, 2018) to guide discussions on ethical considerations, such as informed consent and interviewee comfort. Beyond technical skills, the facilitator encouraged critical reflection on research stances and how these skills apply to everyday situations requiring a questioning mindset.

Facilitation becomes particularly significant in this process, acting as a bridge between traditional scientific research and young participants. Through the lens of the humanities – such as pedagogy, with its approaches and tools – it becomes possible to critically develop effective facilitation strategies to engage young people. The pedagogical facilitator mediates this encounter by creating conditions for dialogue between academic and non-academic contexts, fostering the emergence of new, meaningful relationships that challenge conventional epistemological boundaries.

### *3. Reflection on reality*

Following the central research phase, the final stage, led by the pedagogical facilitator, was crucial in consolidating participants' experiences and reflections. The debriefing provided a structured space for them to process their learning, share insights, and explore the significance of their involvement. Rather than merely summarizing activities, this phase fostered metacognitive reflection, prompting participants to consider not just *what* they did, but *how* and *why* they engaged in certain ways. Open-ended questions like “What stood out to you today?” and “How does this relate to your life or community?” encouraged connections between research and everyday realities, deepening critical awareness and reinforcing agency.

The debriefing also served as a collective evaluation, allowing participants to provide feedback on group dynamics, methods, and the learning environment. Creative approaches – such as visual reflections, quick-write exercises, and artistic tools – ensured diverse forms of expression and inclusivity.

### *4. Sharing knowledge*

As in any research process, the dissemination of the carried out work remains a key focal point. Ensuring that young people not only access but also actively contribute to the communication of knowledge fosters a sense of agency, encouraging critical reflection and participatory dialogue. In this sense, this phase concluded with Festival GenerAzioni<sup>5</sup>, a dissemination event where the B-YOUTH Forum members shared its work with peers from high schools across the Lombardy region. During the event, the young participants of the B-YOUTH Forum took on a peer-to-peer role, supporting Festival GenerAzioni participants as they engaged with and experimented in workshops organized by other MUSA researchers. As mentioned earlier in the paper, active participation in one's own community requires the

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<sup>5</sup> For further information please consult: <https://festivalgenerazioni.unimib.it/> and <https://www.instagram.com/byouth.forum/>.

development of specific competencies – the core objective of the pedagogical facilitation model described here. For the young participants to take on a leadership role, it was essential for the facilitator to step back, having previously created the conditions for autonomous practice and emancipation throughout the process.

### ***Monitoring strategy***

Monitoring is a fundamental component of the pedagogical facilitation model. It was conducted throughout the entire project implementation phase to continuously and systematically gather information on the project's progress. The monitoring process consists of three key actions. First, ongoing project reviews were carried out through ad hoc meetings, ensuring continuous reflection on emerging needs, constraints, and available resources. Specifically, the pedagogical facilitator met regularly with senior pedagogical researchers to have an external expert perspective on the ongoing facilitation work. These meetings served as a collaborative space for reflection, allowing the facilitator to share challenges and successes, receive feedback, and ensure that the facilitation approach remained aligned with the pedagogical goals of the project. Second, re-planning was an integral part of the process, as implementation inevitably deviated from the initial plan, requiring adjustments to optimize effectiveness and efficiency. For example, the group refined the debriefing phase – both in terms of space and time – to make it more inclusive, ensuring that everyone could express themselves in a way that suited them. Finally, a structured documentation system was maintained to record results and support both the review and re-planning processes. This monitoring and evaluation framework is multi-perspective, capable of incorporating different viewpoints by assessing educational work as a complex construct through subjective (self-assessment through a research diary), objective (external evaluation through focus groups with the young participants), and intersubjective (context evaluation through meetings among the B-YOUth Forum members) levels.

### **Reflections and concluding remarks**

The B-YOUth Forum model has proven to be an effective model<sup>6</sup> for

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<sup>6</sup> The data presented here refers to the information collected during the 2023-2024 cycle, which led to the definition of the B-YOUth Forum model. Participant feedback was gathered through questionnaires – although it is important to highlight that various tools were used,

engaging young people with the university, fostering research skills, and promoting active citizenship. It supports participants in developing critical inquiry and constructing their own life paths. Notably, 75% of participants had never visited a university before joining B-YOUth Forum and Festival GenerAzioni, highlighting its role in bridging the gap between young people and higher education. The research experience within B-YOUTH Forum effectively cultivates key competencies: 81.3% of participants reported gaining a better understanding of their context, while 75% acquired tools to collect and analyze information. Additionally, 81.3% believe these skills will be useful in the future, particularly for navigating society, staying informed, and discovering new opportunities. Participants also recognized the value of research beyond education, identifying its relevance in the workplace and daily life. The model reinforces the perception of research as a practical, transferable skill essential for critical engagement with reality and democratic participation.

In this sense, the B-YOUTH Forum model fosters civic engagement by creating spaces for dialogue, collaboration, and participatory learning. Rooted in democratic education principles (Biesta, 2007; Starkey, 2005), it integrates formal, non-formal, and informal learning, emphasizing citizenship as both an individual and collective responsibility (Olssen, 2020). Research is made accessible through co-constructed, experiential learning, ensuring that young people actively engage in knowledge production (Biesta, 2010). The model is grounded in continuous reflection and responsiveness to participants' needs, structuring each session with clear objectives, interactive methods, and collaborative inquiry. A key feature is its adaptability through structured feedback mechanisms (McNiff, 2012), allowing participants to shape their learning experiences. Feedback not only enhances individual development but also informs the evolution of the research and educational framework (Montà, Bianchi & Pentucci, 2024; Stringer, 2007). Through this approach, participants are empowered to become active contributors to society, equipped with the competencies necessary for thoughtful and transformative civic engagement.

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including interviews and focus groups, which were essential for monitoring participants' educational journeys and fundamental for the development of the model. For the sake of conciseness, we will not report all the collected results.

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