

Citizen participation of childhood and adolescence in local government: A systematic review

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, the right of children and adolescents to participate has gained increasing prominence in democratic societies. This is partly due to developments in political, social, and cultural spheres, along with evolving concepts of childhood, adolescence, participation, and citizenship. To assess the current state of civic participation among children and adolescents in local government, a systematic review was conducted to examine peer-reviewed empirical studies. The review followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines and used the CADIMA online tool to support the process. The Scopus and Web of Science databases were selected as sources, and a PO (Population and Outcomes) question framework was used to establish eligibility criteria, alongside a search string strategy. The Kappa index was employed to assess the internal consistency among reviewers. As a result, thirty-four articles were identified for bibliometric, methodological, and thematic analysis. The key findings show a growth in scientific publications since 2012, with several universities in Spain leading this research area through interuniversity collaborations, alongside the efforts of international and non-governmental organizations. The literature highlights the predominantly qualitative nature of this socio-educational research, focusing on seven key thematic categories identified in the selected studies. Opportunities for advancing this field include broadening the geographical scope through international studies and conducting longitudinal or evaluative research. Such research could expand knowledge in three areas: (1) the impacts on governance, public policies, and social and power relations between children, adolescents, and adults; (2) the inclusivity of children and adolescents in participatory processes and practices; and (3) a deeper exploration of the levels and contexts of children's and adolescents' participation in local government.

1. Introduction

Childhood participation has been one of the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) since 1989. This is an international treaty that provides a legal framework for the signatory States and governments, committing them to make efforts to guarantee rights identified for children. For the first time, children and adolescents are recognised as subjects of civil, political, social and cultural rights, just like adults. Since then, changes have become evident in the socio-cultural representations of these groups. Among the new perspectives that have emerged, those that consider children and adolescents (CA) as active subjects and social actors with capacities and a sense of agency should be mentioned; that is, considering them as active citizens of the present day (Liebel, 2015; Lister, 2007; Moosa-Mitha,

2005; Ramiro & Alemán, 2016; Varpanen, 2019). A commitment —of encouraging the participation of young citizens— which is manifested in the intentions of the various reports and agreements of international organisations, such as the General Comments number 12 and 20 of the United Nations (UNESCO 2009, 2016), article 16.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2015) or the pedagogical-transformational nature of child and youth participation recommended by UNESCO (2019).

The driving force to promote child and adolescent participation by these international bodies, has boosted the rise in scientific literature in clear consonance with the academic and research interest in the subject, especially over the last two decades. These scientific contributions reveal the diversity of epistemological and methodological approaches to CA participation, as well as the different spaces, contexts and spheres

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in which this participation takes place, such as the family, school, community, political, social or cultural spheres, among others (Apud, 2001; Cho et al., 2020; De la Garza et al., 2019; Gairín y Galdames, 2023; UNICEF, 2003). The same is true of typologies relating to participation, represented by models such as Roger Hart's ladder (1992), Shier's model (2001) or the proposal for levels of participation formulated by Trilla & Novella (2001). In this sense, the complex and multi-dimensional nature of participation makes it necessary to define and delimit the focus of interest when addressing the research topic of child and adolescent participation.

This review study focuses its attention on analysing a particular form of citizen participation: that of children and adolescents at municipal level; in example, their participation in the local governance structures of their immediate contexts. Specifically, with regard to the decision-making process related to:

- the design of local public policies,
- coexistence in the territories they inhabit, and
- co-responsibility in the configuration and transformation of their daily environments.

For this reason, the main objective of this review is to identify research that explores the organic structures or initiatives (forums, representative organizations of children...) responsible for promoting participation processes that promote, articulate and energize child and adolescent citizenship at the local government level. The aim is to analyze the different forms or mechanisms that make it possible to include children and adolescents in local social and political life. (UNICEF, 2019). At the same time, this study refers to structures or mechanisms made up of children and adolescents between 8 and 17 years of age. The term *child(ren)* or CA is prioritised to refer to children and adolescents throughout this document.

As has already been indicated, participation is a multi-faceted construct, both because of the diversity of forms and contexts in which children exercise and enjoy their right, and because of the typologies which allow them to be categorised (Wong et al., 2010). Therefore, in order to ascertain the state of the art of the participation-infancy binomial, an initial search was carried out in journals specialising in bibliographic reviews in the socio-educational field, using the search engines of the *Scopus* and *Web of Science (WoS)* databases, and limiting the results to the thematic area of *Social Sciences* and by type of *Review* document. The following search combinations were used for this: participation AND children; child* OR youth AND participation; child* AND participation AND citizen; Child* OR youth OR adolescent* AND participant*.

Eighteen review papers were identified in this first approach, most of them focusing on the study of participation in an educational context and its influence on learning methods, CA diversity or social inclusion (Baley, 2005; Consalvo, 2015; Corcoran et al., 2020; Geboers et al., 2013; Gordon et al., 2022; Hadjichambi et al., 2023; Kaye, 2020; Lewis-Dagnell et al., 2023; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Rouse & Gillespie, 2022; Stroet et al., 2013; Willemsen et al., 2023). However, there are also reviews that investigate the construct of digital citizenship (Lu Chen et al., 2021), the effects of civic citizenship through the political participation of young people, limited to the exercise of voting rights in electoral processes (Manning & Edwards, 2014), as well as the relationship between interactive media and youth culture (Van den Beemt et al., 2011). In addition, there are studies that combine child participation and its influence on both leisure and their practices (Love & Hamston, 2003; McLean et al., 2022), or those that analyse the participatory methods used in research with CA (Sevon et al., 2023). Underlying all of them are the four forms of participation identified by Trilla and Novella (2001): simple, consultative, projective and meta-participation; levels that Lansdown (2005) synthesized into consultative, participative and autonomous, in order to explain the involvement of the younger generations in the development of projects and the

execution of the actions they entail.

Taking into account the findings of current international reports and treaties and having identified the lack of reviews exploring the socio-educational implications of organisational structures or child and youth participation initiatives at the local level (Augsberger et al., 2024), the interest in conducting a systematic literature review is justified by the study presented below.

1.1. Objectives

The main objective of this review is to explore and identify scientific literature on peer-reviewed empirical research that focuses on the participation of children and adolescents in organized structures or initiatives in their localities, with the intention of answering the following questions:

What trends does this field of research offer (gender, authorship, affiliation, country, journal and publisher, reference bodies)?

What are the methodological characteristics of this field of research (methodological design, methods and techniques used, recording instruments, number, characteristics and origin of participants, etc.)?

What are the main themes analysed in the empirical research?

At the same time, it aims to provide information to guide new research proposals and praxis in relation to child and youth participation in local governments. In this way, it is hoped that the bibliometric, methodological and thematic results presented here will help to understand and strengthen CA citizen participation in the face of the problems and challenges of today's societies.

2. Materials and methods

The development of this study was based on a systematic literature review following the recommendations of the 2020 PRISMA Declaration (Page et al., 2021; Pigott, 2019) and the adaptations offered by Tricco et al. (2018). Despite the fact that the origin of the PRISMA2020 protocol lies in the field of Health Sciences, it is being widely used in the field of Social Sciences and in particular in educational research (Sánchez-Serrano et al., 2022). The different nature –referring to the objectives and research methods of medical studies, compared to studies in education- requires emphasizing that the PRISMA statement offers a series of relative recommendations for conducting a systematic review. Therefore, the application of this protocol in the field of social sciences requires adaptation due to the specificity and characteristics of this disciplinary field; hence, following the recommendations of Gutiérrez-Bucheli et al. (2022) and Tricco et al. (2018) for scoping reviews from a systematic approach, item 12 (effect measures) has been omitted since we assume that a large part of the identified studies will have a qualitative and mixed methodological basis, so it would not be feasible to calculate this statistic. In this sense, this adequacy adequately responds to the object of this review study that aims to “summarize findings from a body of knowledge that is heterogeneous in methods or discipline” (Tricco et al., 2018, 467).

The processes and decisions adopted for conducting this systematic review are described below.

2.1. Eligibility criteria

A PO (Population and Outcomes) type question was used in order to establish the eligibility criteria. In this case, the study population is made up of heterogeneous groups in which CA are the main actors, but there are also other socio-educational agents such as municipal technical staff, elected officials or families, among others. Therefore, the population is defined based on organised structures or initiatives, taking into account studies that offer results on child and adolescent citizen

participation in the municipality. Furthermore, two additional criteria have been included relating to the type of document and language of the publication, which are presented together with their definition and operability (Table 1). As for the year of publication of the studies, no initial temporal limitation was made, since the search focused on the subject of study and not so much on the temporality, so it could cover any date; however, October 2023 was established as the search deadline, coinciding with the time of the review.

2.2. Information sources and search strategy

Two databases were used in order to identify the studies of interest: Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), as two of the most widely-reaching and widely-recognized academic databases worldwide. Both include a wide range of disciplines, including education, which ensures that relevant publications in the educational field are adequately represented. In addition, they apply strict quality criteria to index publications, ensuring that research has been evaluated by peer review and meets high academic standards, providing reliability and quality to the selection of studies.

For the selection of the key terms that would be used in the search strings we have followed the suggestions of Aromataris and Pearson (2014). Scientific contributions were manually identified according to

Table 1 Eligibility Criteria.

Criteria	Key element	Selection process
Structure/ Municipal children's initiative	P	INCLUDED: The summary identifies those children or adolescents or agents involved in children's participation at the municipal level participated in the study. Children and adolescents between 8—17 years of age are considered.EXCLUDED: The summary identifies that the study population is other than children (0—6 years or 18 years or older). If there is no study population (reviews, theoretical studies, trials, etc.). UNCLAIR: The abstract does not explicitly state that they are children or adolescents. E.g. Youth, young students, general public, etc.
Municipal citizen participation	O	INCLUDED: The summary identifies that the study offers results on organized groups (forums, councils, assemblies, etc.) of children to participate in the political, social or community life of their context (municipal, local, urban, etc.).EXCLUDED: The summary provides results on participation in other restricted contexts such as school or family, or on any other different topic (health, work, etc.) UNCLAIR: The summary does not identify that the results come from exploring municipal participation contexts, but addresses issues of political, social or community participation (e.g. virtual participation, voting trends, volunteering, community projects and proposals, etc.)
Type of document		INCLUDED: The document is an article indexed in JCR or SJR within the area of Social Sciences. EXCLUDED: The document is a book, book chapter, proceedings publication, review article or any other type of document that is not an article.
Language		INCLUDED: The article is written in Spanish, Catalan, Galician, English, Italian, French, Portuguese, or Spanish. EXCLUDED: The article is written in a language other than the above.

the degree of specialisation in CA rights in general, and specifically in the social and political participation of these groups (Corney et al., 2021; Novella et al., 2023; Shier et al., 2014; Wyness, 2009b, among others) to select the key terms to be used in the search strings. Thus, the key terms used to define the study population were *children*, *youth* and *adolescent*, while *participation*, *participatory*, *voice*, *council* and *citizen* served to delimit the object of the study.

The list of references of the reviews previously identified in the justification of the study was used to complete the selection of sources, as well as academics with experience in the field of child and adolescent participation.

A testing exercise was then carried out to check the suitability of different combinations of terms in order to determine the search string to be used. Four reference studies were selected to assess the efficacy of the possible combinations, which met the established criteria (Corney et al., 2021; Novella et al., 2023; Shier et al., 2014; Wyness, 2009b) and the results of each tested search string were analysed to ensure the inclusion of these articles to check the efficacy and appropriateness of the formulation of each search equation. The final review was conducted on 27 October 2023 using the following algorithms:

Scopus: (TITLE-ABS-KEY (child* OR teen* OR adolescent*) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (participation OR participatory OR voice*) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (council* OR citizen*))

WoS: child* OR teen* OR adolescent* (Topic) AND participation OR participatory OR voice* (Topic) AND council* OR citizen* (Topic)

The results of the different searches were filtered using the filters available in the engines of both databases, equivalent to *Article* and *Language* criteria.

2.3. Study selection, extraction and data collection processes

The database was prepared prior to the selection process by exporting the results of the Scopus and WoS searches and importing them into CADIMA, an online application designed for systematic reviews, which facilitates the simultaneous, independent preparation of data and assessment of records by reviewers (Kohl et al., 2018). Here, records were combined, and an analysis was performed (first automatically and then manually) to eliminate duplicates, making the resulting database definitive (N = 1880).

The selection of the studies was carried out in two stages:

- *1st Stage.* Reading of abstracts. The three authors of the study acted as reviewers for the selection of documents independently by reading the abstracts and applying the PO criteria: population (P) and outcomes (O). A consistency analysis (calculation of the kappa index) was previously performed with a sample of 40 documents randomly selected by the CADIMA application. Three rounds were needed to reach a satisfactory index, which allowed the eligibility criteria to be redefined. Finally, in the third round, a value of $k = 0.82$ was obtained, considered "excellent". Once the consistency of the eligibility criteria was ensured, these were applied, and the first stage of document selection was carried out.
- *2nd Stage.* In-depth reading of the records included. This stage included the entries resulting from the first stage and those entries, which after reading the summary, it was not possible to conclude a clear assessment that would allow their inclusion or exclusion. An access request was made through the academic Researchgate network for those records for which the full text was not available.

Although CADIMA offers data extraction tools, Excel was used for this particular step and three macro-categories of analysis were established:

- Bibliometric data: gender, authorship, institutional affiliation, year of publication, country, bibliographic references, journal and publisher (quantitative data, frequency analysis and percentages).
- Methodological data: design, methods and techniques used, recording instruments, number, characteristics and origin of participants (quantitative data, frequency analysis and percentages).
- Thematic analysis or issues addressed in the research (qualitative data, content analysis).

For the analysis of the third macro-category, we opted for the qualitative inductive analytical method, with the intention of identifying patterns and key themes from a descriptive approach. The process was developed by adapting the Braun & Clarke (2006) guide detailed in Table 2:

3. Results

Fig. 1 illustrates the flowchart of the selection process. In the initial phase, 1,880 records were screened against the eligibility criteria based on titles and abstracts, resulting in the exclusion of 1,635 records. Subsequently, in the second phase, the full texts of the remaining 245 documents were thoroughly assessed for eligibility according to the pre-established inclusion criteria (Table 1). As a result, 211 studies were excluded: 146 for not meeting criterion O, 62 for failing to meet either of the two criteria (PO), and 3 due to inaccessible full texts. Ultimately, 34 articles were included in the sample for the present study.

3.1. Characterisation of the field of study

In the period 2003–2023, more than 200 documents belonging to 72 authors affiliated to 30 institutions that geographically represent 13 countries have been referenced, in the field of research on the participation of CA in the municipal sphere. A total of 34 research papers published in 21 scientific journals have been identified, which demonstrate the multidimensionality and interdisciplinarity of the right to public participation of CA mentioned previously. Within the field of social sciences, these journals cover various thematic categories, including primarily education, sociology and political science, as well as social work, life-span, and life-course studies, cultural studies, and anthropology, among others (Table 3).

3.2. Publication Years, Journals, and publishers

Fig. 2 shows the publication trend in the field of research on child and youth participation in their reference contexts for the period 2003–2023. The first study was published in the UK in 2003 by Hugh Matthews and Melanie Limb, and no new studies were found until 2009. This time span was repeated until 2012, when an upward trend in the number of publications on this topic became evident, with more than half of the studies identified being concentrated in a four-year interval

Table 2
Phases of qualitative thematic analysis.

Phases	Description of the process
1	Familiarization with the data (articles) through repeated readings to achieve greater analytical depth and breadth.
2	First coding by identifying interesting features of the data (articles) in a systematic way.
3	The codes are classified for the extraction of potential themes (categories), as well as the relevant data for each of them.
4	Review and refinement of the themes proposed in phase 3, resulting in: 1) objectives and/or research questions; 2) variables of analysis; 3) main results and conclusions.
5	Themes are defined and named (see results section “Thematic analysis”).

Note: Consult complementary material of the process followed for thematic analysis.

(2020–2023).

The 34 studies identified have been published in 21 journals from 15 publishers, with the journal *Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria*—published by the Sociedad Iberoamericana de Pedagogía Social (SIPS)—having the largest number of contributions, with a total of six studies (Fig. 3). This is followed with three publications from the journals *Bordón*, *Children & Society* and *Social Inclusion*, belonging to Sociedad Española de Pedagogía, Cogitatio Press and Wiley, respectively.

Among the top three publishers with the most publications, the publisher SIPS stands out with the six publications mentioned above, followed by Wiley and Routledge with four publications each (Table 3 and Fig. 3).

3.3. Institutional landscape of the research context

Most of the studies identified, 28 out of 34, have been carried out in Spain (15), the United States (7) and the United Kingdom (6), most of them being university institutions and with only three non-university institutions: World Vision International, the NGO CESESMA and Keio Senior High School (Table 3). A total of 18 research projects were carried out by a single institution, with 16 inter-university collaborations, most of them from the same territory and four with international participation.

As noted, higher education institutions in Spain have significantly contributed to the development of the field of research on child and adolescent participation at municipal level. Specifically, 15 of the 34 studies registered were carried out in this country, with the Universities of Barcelona (11), the Spanish National University of Distance Education (UNED, 7), Seville (6) and A Coruña (4) leading the way in this type of publications. It should be noted that researchers belonging to these four universities have established inter-university collaborations in nine of these studies in the period 2021–2023.

Another 23 universities complete the list, with the University of Santiago de Compostela (Spain) and the University of Warwick (England), with another two studies. Finally, researchers from the remaining 21 universities participated with a study from the sample of this review.

3.4. Authorship and bibliographic references

Fig. 4 provides an overview of the most relevant authors in the field of educational research on municipal child and adolescent participation. The frequency bars on the left show—from among those analysed in this review—the 11 researchers with more than one study, while the frequency bars on the right of Fig. 4 show the authors who have received the highest number of citations in the selected studies. It is of particular note that Ana Novella-Cámara (University of Barcelona) is the researcher who has signed the most studies in this review (5), being the most cited author in this compilation of studies, referenced on 40 occasions. Among the authors with the most citations are the researcher E. Kay L. Tisdall (University of Edinburgh), with 23 citations and Roger Hart (University of New York) with 21.

To conclude this bibliometric section, the following analysis aims to identify the key documents that would characterise the educational field of municipal child and adolescent participation. To this end, the bibliographic references in this study are re-examined to identify the ten most cited documents according to two categories: 1) journal articles or books; 2) documents from governmental and non-governmental organizations (reports and legislation).

Regarding the first category, Fig. 5 shows the results by providing information on authorship, the title of the document and—if applicable—the name of the journal in which it was published.

The second analysis category sought to identify the main reference bodies in the field of study; in which reports, guides and conventions from various organisations and institutions should be highlighted. From a governmental point of view, documents from the United Nations and

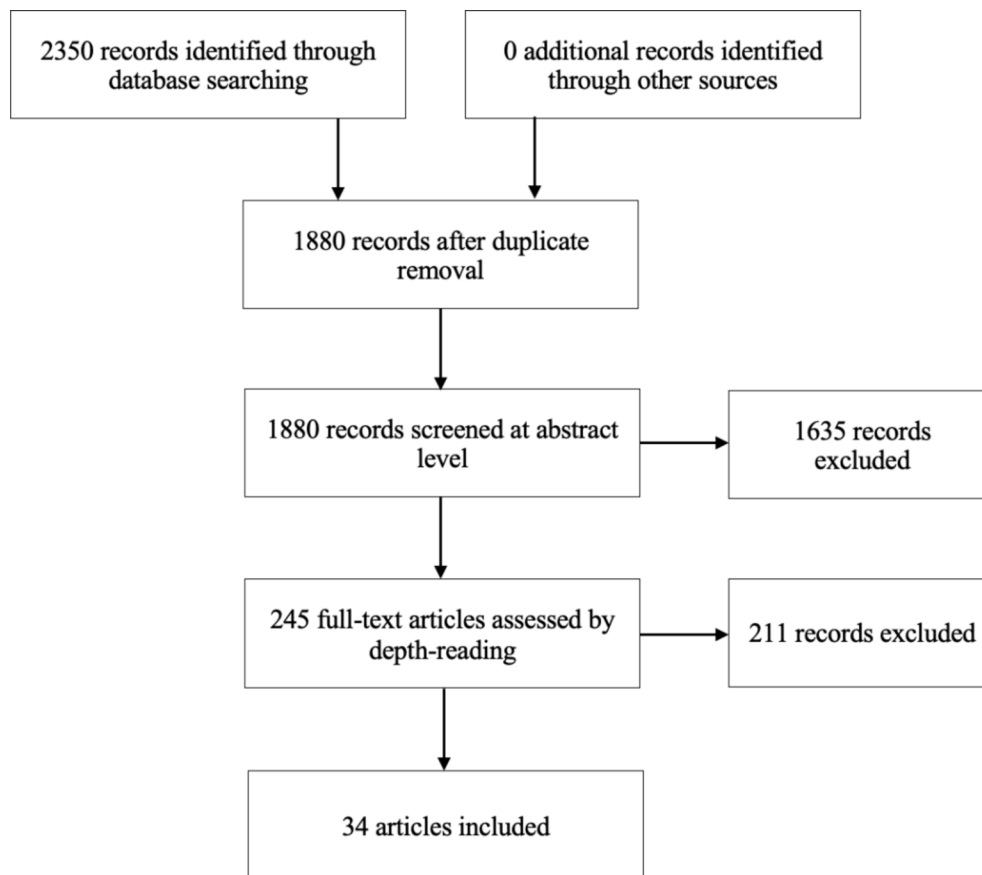


Fig. 1. Selection Process. Flow Diagram in Accordance with PRISMA 2020.

its main agency for addressing the needs and rights of children worldwide, UNICEF, predominate. An expected outcome considering that the Convention on the Rights of the Child emanates from this organisation. Of the 109 documents referenced and included in this category, 38 of them correspond to conventions, treaties and reports by the United Nations and its agencies, complemented by another 57 documents from different organisations such as the Council of Europe, departments and/or ministries of education in different countries. In addition, 14 studies derived from NGOs, including Save the Children and World Vision International, are also documented.

3.5. Methodological characterisation

Table 4 provides data on the methodological designs of the studies which made up the final review sample, and which allow us to characterise the methodological overview of the field of research on child participation in the municipal sphere. The research carried out in Spain (16), the United States (4), Ireland (2) and Israel (2) is highlighted. It shows that more than 4600 people participated in the 34 studies, including CA and adult facilitators and mediators in child participation from 17 countries; however, it is not possible to determine the exact number of participants, as three studies (Table 4) only indicate ranges of participation and not how many people made up their focus groups, as they state that “Each group comprised between about 6 and 12 young people,” (Chaskin et al., 2021, p.11).

The participants in the studies include the various agents that interact in municipal child participation: children and adolescents, young people who participate or participated in children’s councils, and adults such as elected politicians, municipal technical staff, family members or teachers who act —or have acted— as facilitators or enablers of CA participation.

The field of educational research on children’s participation in the municipality is eminently qualitative since out of a total of 34 studies, 27 presented qualitative methodological designs, five relied on a mixed methods design and only two presented an exclusively quantitative design. Consequently, most of the techniques and instruments used (Figs. 6 and 7) allow mainly qualitative data to be recorded, with case studies (on 23 occasions), interviews (structured, semi-structured and group interviews) and focus groups being of particular mention. On the other hand, most of the studies are exploratory, descriptive or diagnostic in nature; another aspect linked to the qualitative nature that characterises this field of study.

3.6. Thematic analysis

This section presents the seven thematic categories extracted from the content analysis of the 34 studies (Table 5). It should be noted that some papers address one or more thematic categories.

3.6.1. Referential frameworks

The referential frameworks from which children and their participation are understood and represented can condition progress towards more democratic, inclusive, and just societies. Recognizing the agentic capacity of children and adolescents (CA) is a *sine qua non* condition for them to exercise substantive, critical, and active citizenship. This analysis identifies two types of referential frameworks that influence the participatory practices of CA:

- *Personal and professional frameworks:*

Interpretations of childhood, adolescence, participation and citizenship are shaped by personal and professional frameworks, which

Table 3
 Characterization of the Research Field in Municipal Citizen Participation among Children and Adolescents.

Study	Gender	Auth	Affiliation	Country	Journal	Category*	Publisher
Sabariego et al., 2023	W, M, W, W	4	U. of Barcelona; U. of Coruña, U. of Sevilla	Spain	Bordón	Education	Sociedad Española de Pedagogía
Riádigos & Gradaille, 2023	M, W	2	U. of Santiago de Compostela	Spain	Children and Youth Services Review	Education, Social Work, Sociology and Political Science	Elsevier
Novella et al., 2023	W, W, W, W	4	U. of Barcelona; U. of Sevilla, U. of Coruña; UNED	Spain	Bordón	Education	Sociedad Española de Pedagogía
Formoso-Silva et al., 2023	W, W, M	3	U. of Santiago de Compostela	Spain	Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria	Education, Sociology and Political Science	SIPS
Esteban, 2023	W	1	U. of Barcelona	Spain	Bordón	Education	Sociedad Española de Pedagogía
Novella et al., 2022	W, M, M	3	U. of Barcelona; U. of Coruña	Spain	Social Inclusion	Sociology and Political Science	Cogitatio Press
Morentin-Encina et al., 2022	M, W, W	3	UNED; U. of Barcelona; U. of Coruña	Spain	Social Inclusion	Sociology and Political Science	Cogitatio Press
Laforge et al., 2022	W, W, M, W	4	UNED; U. of Barcelona	Spain	Social Inclusion	Sociology and Political Science	Cogitatio Press
Corrales-Soto et al., 2022	W, W, W	3	U. Arturo Prat	Chile	Cuhso	Cultural studies, Anthropology	Universidad Católica de Temuco
Novella, Romero-Pérez, et al., 2021	W, W, M, W	4	U. of Barcelona; U. of Sevilla; UNED	Spain	Comunicar	Communication, Cultural studies, Education	Grupo Comunicar Ediciones
O'Kane et al., 2021	W, W, M, W	4	World Vision International	UK, USA	Journal of Youth Development	Life-span and life-course studies	University of Pittsburgh
Novella, Mateos-Blanco, et al., 2021	W, M, M, M	4	U. of Barcelona; U. of Sevilla, UNED	Spain	Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria	Education, Sociology and Political Science	SIPS
Munyede et al., 2021	M, W, M	3	Africa U., KU Leuven U.	Zimbabwe, Belgium	Policy and Practice	Education	UTS ePress
Melero et al., 2021	M, W, W, M	4	UNED; U. of Sevilla; U. of Barcelona	Spain	Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria	Education, Sociology and Political Science	SIPS
Akiko, 2021	W	1	Keio Senior High School	Japan	Compare	Education	Routledge (T&F)
Chaskin et al., 2021	M, M, W	3	U. of Galway	USA	Social Services Review	Sociology and Political Science	University of Chicago Press
Cano-Hila et al., 2021	W, M, W	3	U. of Barcelona; U. of Coruña; UNED	Spain	Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria	Education, Sociology and Political Science	SIPS
Pinson et al., 2020	W, M, M	3	U. of the Negev	Israel	Teaching and Teacher Education	Education	Elsevier
Del Barrio & Picornell, 2020	M, W	2	U. of Salamanca	Spain	Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria	Education, Sociology and Political Science	SIPS
Palmy & Buchanan, 2019	W, W	2	U. of Delaware; Fair Housing Ctr of Washington	USA	Planning Theory & Practice	Geography, Planning and Developing	Routledge (T&F)
Sant & Davies, 2018	W, M	2	Manchester Metropolitan U., U. of New York	UK, USA	Cambridge Journal of Education	Education	Routledge (T&F)
Auhsberger et al., 2018	W, W, W	3	Boston U. School of Social Work	USA	Journal of Community Psychology	Social Work	Wiley
Fonseca & Maiztegui-Oñate, 2017	W, W	2	U. de Deusto	Spain	Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria	Education, Sociology and Political Science	SIPS
Nir & Perry-Hazan, 2016	M, W	2	U. of Haifa	Israel	Children and Youth Services Review	Education, Social Work, Sociology and Political Science	Elsevier
Forde & Martin, 2016	W, W	2	U. College Cork	Ireland	International Journal of Children's Rights	Political Science and International Relations	Brill
Flanders & Vliet, 2016	W, M	2	Queensland U. of Tech, U. of Colorado	Australia, USA	Children's Geographies	Sociology and Political Science	Routledge (T&F)
Crowley, 2015	W	1	Cardiff U.	UK	International Journal of Children's Rights	Political Science and International Relations	Brill
Shier & Hernández, 2014	M, W	2	CESESMA, U. of North of Nicaragua	Nicaragua	Children & Society	Education, Social Work, Life-span and life-course studies	Wiley
Agud et al., 2014	W, W, W	3	U. of Barcelona	Spain	Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala	Sociology and Political Science	Expert Projects Publishing House
Taft & Gordon, 2013	W, W	2	Davidson College, U. of Denver	USA	Education, Citizenship and Social Justice	Education	Sage

(continued on next page)

Table 3 (continued)

Study	Gender	Auth	Affiliation	Country	Journal	Category*	Publisher
Wyness, 2009	M	1	U. of Warwick	UK	Childhood	Sociology and Political Science, Anthropology, Cultural studies, Life-span and life-course studies	Sage
Wyness, 2009a	M	1	U. of Warwick	UK	Children & Society	Education, Social Work, Life-span and life-course studies	Wiley
Rossi & Baraldi, 2009	W, M	2	U. of Modena and Reggio	Italy	Children & Society	Education, Social Work, Life-span and life-course studies	Wiley
Matthews & Limb, 2003	M, W	2	U. College Northampton	UK	Space and Polity	Political Science and International Relations	Carfax Publishing

Note. W = Woman, M = Man; U. = University; UNED = Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (National Distance Education University).

* Category in the Scopus classification within the Social Sciences subject area.

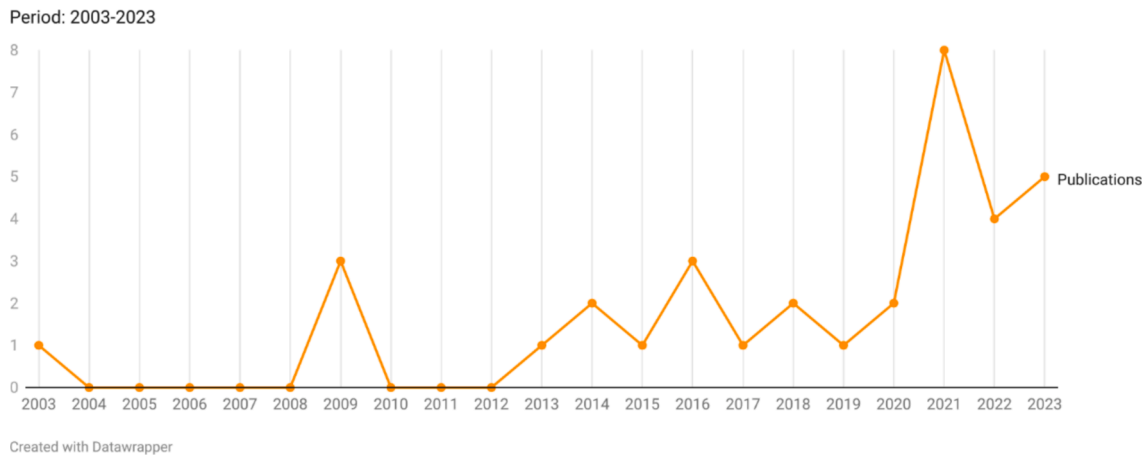


Fig. 2. Temporal Evolution of Publications in the Research Field of Child Participation in Municipal.



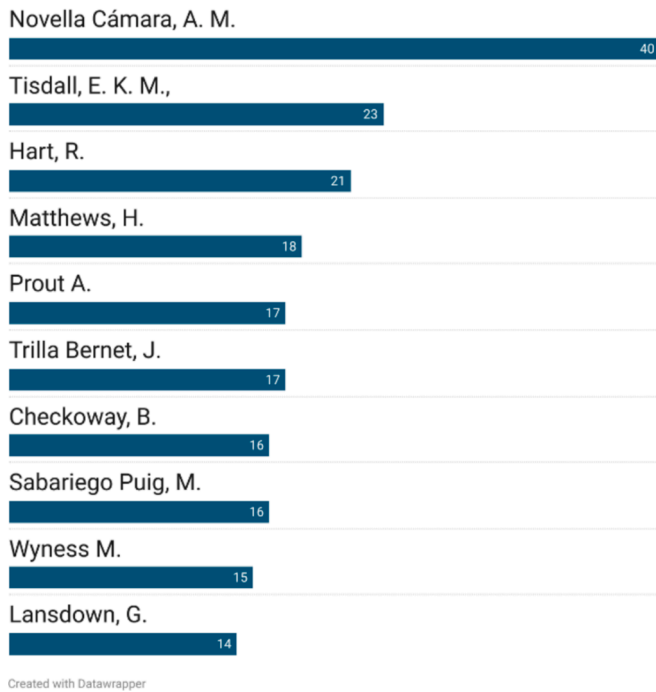
Fig. 3. Journals / Publishers that Addressed Child and Adolescent Participation in Municipal.

influence perceptions of children’s and adolescents’ capacity to participate and exercise their rights. These perspectives vary according to social and cultural contexts, with coexisting opposing visions, identifying them as vulnerable or as competent actors (Riádigos & Gradafille,

2023; Rossi & Baraldi, 2009).

The concept of child and youth participation is multidimensional. In some contexts, such as Italy and Scotland, it is viewed as a right and a tool for decision-making (Rossi & Baraldi, 2009). In Spain, consensus

Top-cited authors in the literature review



Author contribution overview

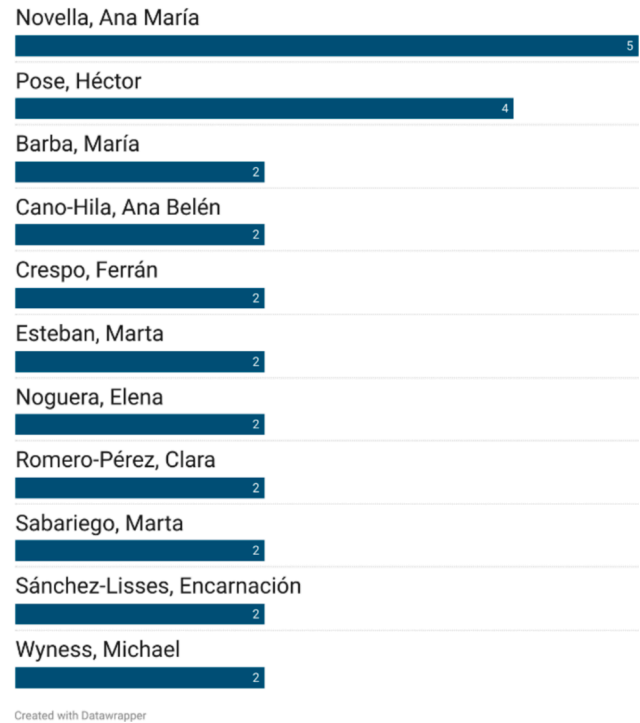


Fig. 4. Author Contribution to the Reviewed Studies & Most Cited Authors in the Compilation.

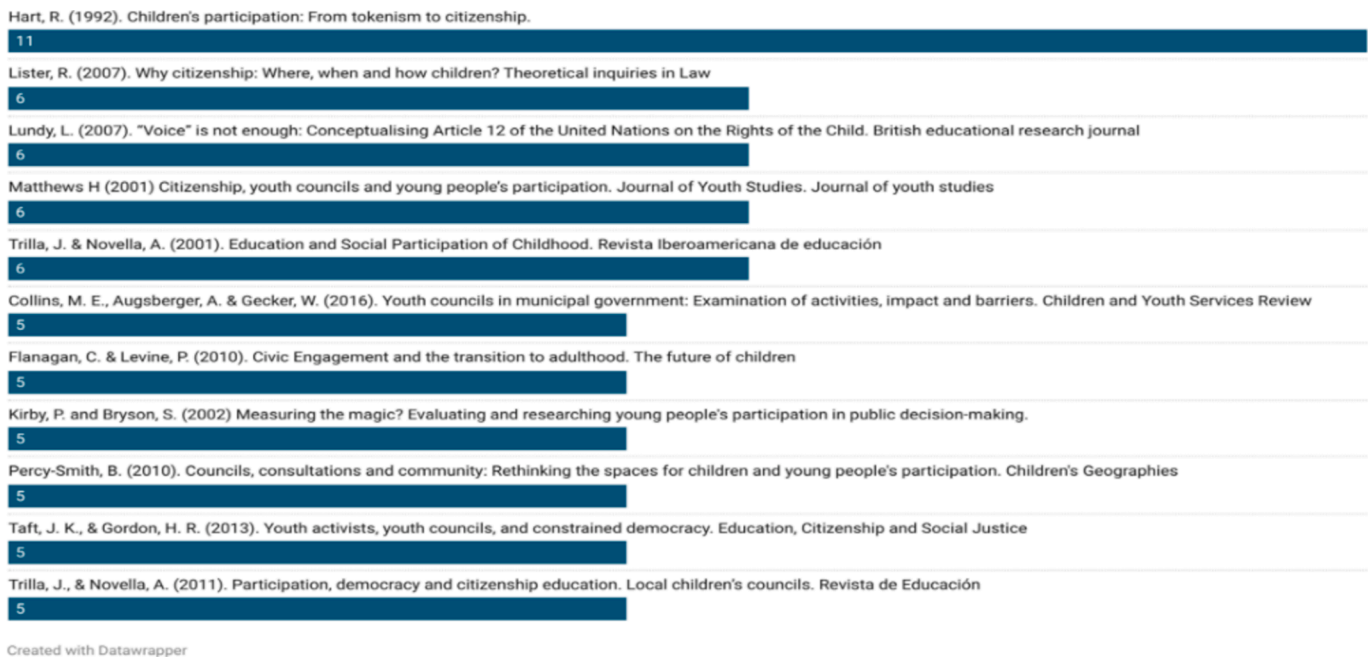


Fig. 5. Most Cited Articles and Books in the Review Sample.

among local practitioners and CA highlights personal, social, and educational benefits, although barriers related to adult-centric dynamics and intergenerational inequalities still persist (Riádigos & Gradañlle, 2023). This shift towards recognising children's citizenship in the present is also reflected in municipal agendas, where participation is key to adapting cities to the needs of CA and acknowledging their citizenship as a fundamental right (Sabariego et al., 2023).

Conceptual differences regarding participation emerge according to professional profiles. Thus, while local officials treat CA as adults,

educators adopt a protectionist perspective (Pinson et al., 2020). Local practitioners prioritise the educational dimension of participation, whereas elected representatives emphasise its political and inclusive value (Melero et al., 2021). In this sense, and despite recognising participation as a right, educational and protectionist perspectives still limit CA autonomy, reflecting tensions between inclusive approaches and adult-led frameworks (Rossi & Baraldi, 2009).

From the perspective of CA, participation is associated with belonging, identity, and the exercise of an inherent right (Chaskin et al.,

Table 4
Research Overview: Methodological Insights into Municipal Citizen Participation among Children and Adolescents.

Study	N	Participants' Country	Participants	Method	Research type	Technic/instrument
Sabariego et al., 2023	30	Spain	Elected officials & technical staff	QUALI	Descriptive	Case study/Semi-structured interview
Riádigos & Gradaille, 2023	5	Spain	Social educator & adolescents	QUALI	Exploratory	Case study/Interview & Focus group
Novella et al., 2023	415	Spain	Local government officers & elected officials	MM	Descriptive	Survey/Online self-administered questionnaire
Formoso-Silva et al., 2023	573	Spain	Children & adolescents	QUANTI	Descriptive	Survey/Questionnaire
Esteban, 2023	173	Spain	Children & adolescents	QUALI	Critical-Reflexive	Meta-synthesis
Novella et al., 2022	270	Spain	Elected officials & municipal technicians	QUALI	Descriptive	Systematization of experiences/Questionnaire
Morentin-Encina et al., 2022	279	Spain	Elected officials & technical staff	QUALI	Exploratory-Diagnostic	Survey/ Online self-administered questionnaire
Laforge et al., 2022	279	Spain	Elected officials & technical staff	QUALI	Exploratory-Diagnostic	Survey/ Online self-administered questionnaire
Corrales-Soto et al., 2022	3	Chile	Adolescents (youth council)	QUALI	Exploratory	Case study/Semi-structured interview
Novella, Romero-Pérez, et al., 2021	279	Spain	Elected officials & technical staff	QUALI	Exploratory-Diagnostic	Survey/ Online self-administered questionnaire
O'Kane et al., 2021	82	DR, GH, PL; RO	Young people	QUALI	Exploratory	Case study/Focus group discussion/Interview
Novella, Mateos-Blanco, et al., 2021	164	Spain	Technical staff	MM	Exploratory-Descriptive	Survey/ Online self-administered questionnaire
Munyede et al., 2021	22*	Zimbaue	Elected officials	QUALI	Exploratory	Case study/Interview & Focus group
Melero et al., 2021	279	Spain	Elected officials & technical staff	QUALI	Exploratory-Diagnostic	Survey/ Online self-administered questionnaire
Akiko, 2021	18	Denmark	Local authority staff & young people	QUALI	Descriptive	Multiple case study/Semi-structured interview
Chaskin et al., 2021	66*	Rep. of Ireland and North Ireland	Adolescents & youth	QUALI	Descriptive	Case study/Focus group
Cano-Hila et al., 2021	191	Spain	Technical staff	QUALI	Exploratory-Diagnostic	Survey/ Online self-administered questionnaire
Pinson et al., 2020	13	Israel	Facilitators (adults)	QUALI	Exploratory	Case study/Semi-structured interview
Del Barrio & Picornell, 2020	22	Spain	Children & Adolescents	QUALI	Descriptive	Case study/Focus group discussion
Palmy & Buchanan, 2019	104	USA	Planning directors & Chief elected officials	QUANTI	Descriptive	Survey/ Online questionnaire
Sant & Davies, 2018	141	Spain	Adolescents (students), adults (teachers & EPS managers)	MM	Longitudinal	Case study/Questionnaire, Focus group & interviews
Auhsberger et al., 2018	85	USA	Adolescents	QUALI	Ethnographic	Case study/Interview, Focus group & Observation
Fonseca & Maiztegui-Oñate, 2017	24	Spain	Adolescents (10), relatives (8) & educators (6)	QUALI	Descriptive	Case study/ Focus group & Observation
Nir & Perry-Hazan, 2016	37	Israel	Children (32) & Youth adults (5)	QUALI	Descriptive	Case study/Semi-structured interview & Focus group
Forde & Martin, 2016	300	Ireland	Children & young people	MM	Exploratory	Participatory/Questionnaire, Focus group & Interview
Flanders & Vliet, 2016	139	USA	Youth councils	MM	Descriptive	Survey/Questionnaire
Crowley, 2015	82	UK ^{Wales} & India	Children (61) & Adults (21)	QUALI	Longitudinal	Case study/Interview & Focus group
Shier & Hernández, 2014	*	Nicaragua	Children & Young people & Adults (facilitators)	QUALI	Descriptive	Case study/Focus group
Agud et al., 2014	47	Spain	Children	QUALI	Descriptive-Diagnostic	Case study/Focus group
Taft & Gordon, 2013	115	USA, Colombia, Mexico & Canada	Children & Adolescents	QUALI	Comparative	Semi-structured interview & Observation
Wyness, 2009	134	UK	Young concillors (110) & Adult coordinators (24)	QUALI	Descriptive	Case study/Semi-structured interview & Group and individual interview & non-participating observation
Wyness, 2009a	134	UK	Young concillors (110) & Adult coordinators (24)	QUALI	Descriptive	Case study/Observation
Rossi & Baraldi, 2009	52	UK ^{Scotland} & Italy	Politicians & professionals	QUALI	Comparative	Case study/Interview
Matthews & Limb, 2003	63	UK	Children & Adolescents	QUALI	Comparative	Case study/Interviewers & Focus group

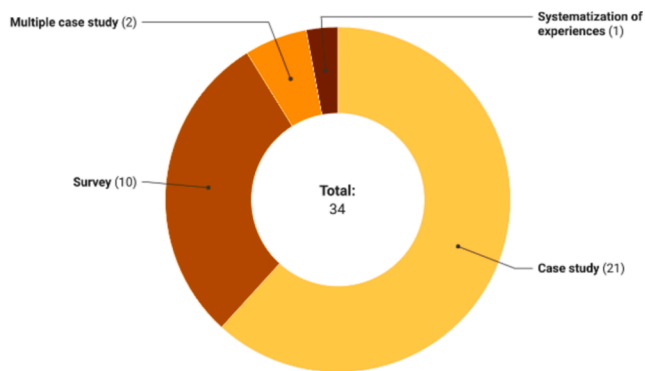
*The studies do not specify the number of participants in the focus groups.

Note. Auth. = Authors; DR = Dominican Republic; GH = Ghana; PL = Palestine; RO = Romania; QUALI = qualitative; QUANTI = quantitative; MM = Mixed Methods; EPS = Evaluation of an educational project.

2021). However, barriers linked to stereotypes, adult-centric visions, and socioeconomic or residential factors condition their opportunities and perspectives (Corrales-Soto et al., 2022; Del Barrio & Picornell, 2020).

Youth activists criticise youth councils, perceiving them as elitist and

as tools of social control. They advocate for a democracy focused on collective impact and meaningful community change, rejecting symbolic practices and emphasising a more conflictual and transformative politics (Taft & Gordon, 2013).



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Fig. 6. Research methods established by authors in the study sample.

• **Official and regulatory frameworks:**

These refer to official documents, policies or regulations that shape the rights and power relations of CA, establishing basic conditions to promote their participation and citizenship. Studies such as that of Sabariego et al. (2023) highlight the value of local regulations and plans in universalising participatory models. However, guaranteeing rights not only requires their knowledge (Del Barrio & Picornell, 2020) but also the development of spaces that enable CA to express and project their opinions on urban life.

From a comparative approach, Rossi and Baraldi (2009) demonstrate that while Italy focuses on fostering active and autonomous participation by CA, Scotland prioritizes an educational dimension from the school. These differences underscore the need for effective policies that integrate CA into urban planning, promoting their autonomy and empowerment through community-based and participatory approaches.

3.6.2. *Impacts and achievements of child and youth participation*

Four levels of impact derived from child and youth participation are identified in:

• **Children and Adolescents (CA) themselves:**

Participation fosters the development of personal and social skills,

including confidence, self-esteem, autonomy, and communication competencies (Cano-Hila et al., 2021; Fonseca & Maiztegui-Oñate, 2017). These experiences contribute to a sense of agency, an understanding of democracy, and the ability to make informed decisions (Esteban, 2023; Flanders & Van Vliet, 2016; Crowley, 2015). Additionally, these spaces serve as socio-educational environments where CA acquire knowledge and develop democratic and institutional commitment (Forde & Martin, 2016; Flanders & Van Vliet, 2016). They also promote critical thinking, rights awareness, and civic competencies, often linked to human rights education (Nir & Perry-Hazan, 2016; Sant & Davies, 2018). Other benefits include increased social capital, academic performance, and leadership skills (Palmy & Buchanan, 2019).

• **The Community or Place of Belonging:**

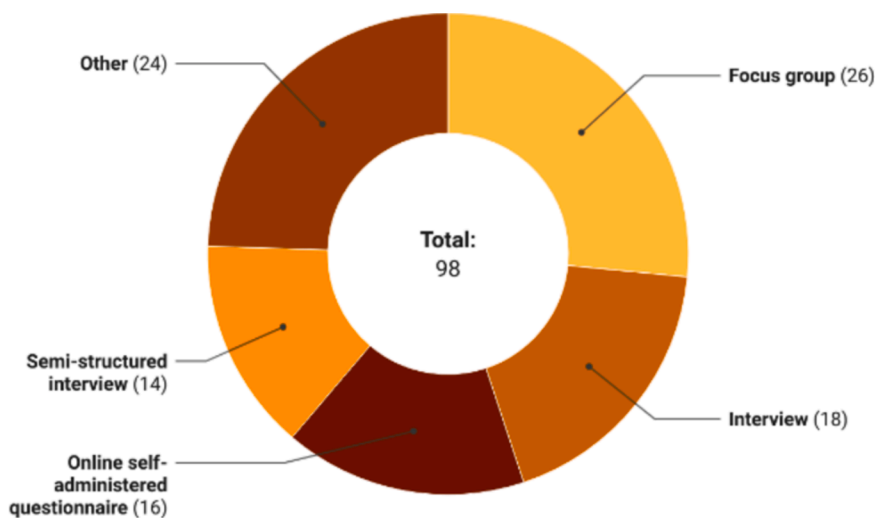
The existence of youth councils brings local benefits, such as improvements to public spaces and services for CA (Cano-Hila et al., 2021). They also enhance community engagement and adolescent participation in neighbourhood life (Fonseca & Maiztegui-Oñate, 2017). However, concrete impacts are less evident (Flanders & Van Vliet, 2016), though examples like participatory budgets in Boston have empowered entire communities (Augsberger et al., 2018).

• **Governance and Public Policies:**

Although youth participation can enrich public policies and foster innovation, its influence is limited due to bureaucracy, lack of meaningful inclusion of CA perspectives, and the limited decision-making power of youth councils (Augsberger et al., 2018; Cano-Hila et al., 2021; Del Barrio & Picornell, 2020; Flanders & Van Vliet, 2016; Palmy & Buchanan, 2019). Youth participation requires political commitment

Table 5
Relationship of Thematic Categories and the Studies from the SLR.

Thematic Categories	N° studies
1. Referential frameworks	9
2. Impacts and achievements of child and youth participation	12
3. Role of adults / Training	7
4. Enabling elements of children and youth participation	17
5. Barriers, inhibitors, and challenges	12
6. Inclusiveness	4
7. Levels, forms, and scenarios of child and youth participation	4



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Fig. 7. Research instruments employed to collect data.

and organisation (Crowley, 2015); considering that well-informed and empowered CA will be able to influence policymakers (Shier et al., 2014).

- *Organisational Structures and Institutions:*

Participation challenges adult roles and promotes intergenerational cooperation and critical reflection on educational practices (Crowley, 2015; Nir & Perry-Hazan, 2016). However, sociocultural, ideological, and gender factors shape relationships and shared decision-making processes (Forde & Martin, 2016). To effectively influence organisational decisions, CA need accessible information about programmes, strategies, and governance. In other words, educating CA in democracy and governance is essential (O-Kane et al., 2021).

3.6.3. Role of adults / training

Different studies have addressed the role of adults in the dynamization and supporting child and youth participation, highlighting their role as educators and mediators to prevent symbolic participation. Their function includes promoting deliberative democratic structures and adapting communication and information methods to the languages of children and adolescents, thereby enabling their influence on local policies (Harada, 2021). Although adult leaders acknowledge the socio-educational potential of youth participation, they also point to limitations in the power and status of youth councils, demonstrating a limited commitment beyond their professional roles (Nir & Perry-Hazan, 2016).

Adult training is key to fostering participation, as it requires training professionals to share power, information and space with children and adolescents, with an emphasis on skills such as active listening (O-Kane et al., 2021). Novella et al. (2022) highlight workshops as an effective strategy for training professionals in this area, promoting inclusive and sustained participation. Moreover, Shier et al. (2014) assert that training is essential to enhance children's and adolescents' influence in political decision-making. Wyness (2009a) identifies differences between participatory approaches in educational and civic contexts, revealing diverse ways in which adults support youth participation. From a child's perspective, Agud et al. (2014) highlight that adults should recognize children as active citizens, foster relationships, and manage conflicts, particularly in contexts such as children's councils.

3.6.4. Enabling elements of children and youth participation

This category synthesizes a series of enabling elements for child and youth participation at the local level. Essentially, these are facilitators that enhance opportunities for achieving real and genuine participation. Sabariego et al. (2023) highlight the value attributed to child and youth participation in municipal policies in Spain, emphasising the motivation of local authorities and children's interest in community matters. The training of local technical staff and the creation of inclusive normative frameworks further strengthen participation opportunities; hence, membership in networks such as Educating Cities or Child-Friendly Cities and fostering interdepartmental collaboration are key enablers (Sabariego et al., 2023).

Local participation councils empower children by allowing them to express themselves, propose actions, and observe tangible outcomes, encouraging greater involvement (Chaskin et al., 2021; Novella et al., 2023; Riádigos & Gradaille, 2023). Similarly, Matthews and Limb (2003) emphasise the importance of youth councils as democratic structures requiring adult support, clear objectives, financial resources, and evaluation mechanisms to ensure effectiveness.

Other approaches include community work, the use of social media, and public protests, with forums and deliberative spaces playing a central role (Chaskin et al., 2021). Action-research projects and initiatives such as municipal participatory budgeting also empower children and young people, fostering leadership and collaboration skills (Augsberger et al., 2018; Formoso-Silva et al., 2023). Esteban (2023) stresses the need to recognise them as social actors and provide

reflective spaces to evaluate the impacts of their participation.

Research in Zimbabwe (Munyede et al., 2021) identifies three key conditions for youth councils: (1) normative frameworks mandating participation, (2) explicit inclusion of youth councils in local government budgets, and (3) institutional support from NGOs. Similarly, Harada (2021) notes that youth councils in Denmark promote equitable decision-making and the development of civic skills.

To achieve meaningful participation, Esteban (2023) and O-Kane et al. (2021) emphasise the need to create spaces for reflection and *meta*-participation. Meanwhile, Palmy and Buchanan (2019) argue that support from local governments and the inclusion of young people in governmental planning processes are essential. Fonseca and Maiztegui-Oñate (2017) highlight that the active and responsible profile of adolescents, their relationships with the educational team (based on trust, empathy, and horizontality), and the perceived benefits (friendships, knowledge, communication skills and autonomy) are facilitators of their participation in community projects promoting active citizenship.

Studies also show that adult support is crucial to equipping children and young people with the necessary skills for effective participation (Flanders & Van Vliet, 2016). Shier et al. (2014) propose three conditions for increasing children's influence on public policies: (1) fostering self-organisation and youth leadership, (2) applying a rights-based approach, and (3) involving families, schools, and local authorities as collaborators.

Finally, Agud et al. (2014) stress the importance of recognizing children's rights, promoting active listening, and ensuring intergenerational collaboration. Accessibility, diversity, visibility of outcomes, and enriching experiences are essential to sustain effective participation.

3.6.5. Barriers, inhibitors, and challenges

Some of the selected studies addressed barriers or inhibitors to children's participation in the local public sphere, which pose challenges for contemporary democratic societies. Internal and external factors were identified:

- *Internal Factors:*

Social representations that limit the recognition of children and adolescents as full rights-holders contribute to feelings of frustration and lack of self-efficacy (Novella et al., 2023; Riádigos & Gradaille, 2023). A lack of education in human rights, both for children and adults, is also observed (Corrales-Soto et al., 2022), alongside distrust in decision-makers, particularly politicians (Chaskin et al., 2021). Young people from disadvantaged and minority contexts face additional barriers due to alienation and lack of opportunities for participation (Chaskin et al., 2021). Fonseca and Maiztegui-Oñate (2017) highlight that characteristics of adolescence, such as individualistic attitudes and peer group influence, complicate community participation.

- *External Factors:*

- 1) Adult agents involved in child and youth Participation processes: The lack of commitment from adults, especially politicians, is a significant barrier. Adult-centric views reduce genuine youth participation, and a lack of adult accountability (Corrales-Soto et al., 2022; O-Kane et al., 2021; Riádigos & Gradaille, 2023; Shier et al., 2014). Furthermore, excessive adult control in youth councils is noted (Matthews & Limb, 2003), as well as a lack of institutional and community support (Munyede et al., 2021; Novella et al., 2023).
- 2) Allocated resources: The lack of material and human resources, such as trained personnel, severely limits participation opportunities (Corrales-Soto et al., 2022; Novella et al., 2023; Palmy & Buchanan, 2019; Riádigos & Gradaille, 2023). Additionally, a lack of transparency in fund management and geographic disparities (between rural and urban areas) exacerbate participation challenges, often favouring urban groups (Munyede et al., 2021).

- 3) Political-Legal conditions: The absence of clear legal frameworks for youth councils can render participation a mere formality, with little real impact on local decision-making (Munyede et al., 2021). However, some studies, such as that by Palmy and Buchanan (2019), indicate that not all respondents perceive significant structural barriers.
- 4) The Idiosyncrasy of organizational structures: The structures and sustainability of youth council participation often negatively affect young people, leading to demotivation, frustration, and symbolic participation (Augsberger et al., 2018; Matthews & Limb, 2003). Taft and Gordon (2013) emphasise that the lack of real power for young people in youth councils and their limited influence on political decisions contribute to dissatisfaction and scepticism towards these structures. Palmy and Buchanan (2019) note that while the institutionalisation of youth participation presents a low barrier, challenges remain in its effective implementation.

3.6.6. Inclusiveness

The inclusion of children and adolescents (CA) as a diverse group—considering gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic level—is essential for genuine participation in municipal processes. Their involvement in local participatory processes requires strategies that address access and representation in councils, as well as the promotion of inclusive interactions. It is vital to ensure their social inclusion through local policies, value adult support, break away from adult-centric views, and create contexts that give meaning and value to their participation (Laforgue et al., 2022).

To achieve diverse and effective representation, it is necessary to inform and raise awareness among families and community agents, encourage the democratic election of representatives, implement positive discrimination mechanisms, ensure gender equity, and provide appropriate information and training for active participation (Morentin-Encina et al., 2022). Both formal and informal spaces, such as children's clubs and school councils, are essential for CA to learn, organise, and make decisions. Various creative methods—such as body mapping, theatre, and digital media—can motivate and develop their participatory skills from an inclusive approach (O-Kane et al., 2021).

However, effectively including CA from diverse backgrounds remains a challenge, as traditional forms of participation, such as youth councils, tend to reproduce inequalities by excluding the voices of minority groups. In this sense, it is necessary to adopt alternative approaches that promote horizontal relationships and accommodate diversity in public participation (Wyness, 2009).

3.6.7. Levels, forms, and scenarios of child and youth participation

Ultimately, there are studies focusing on the contexts or settings of children and youth participation to foster their engagement in political and social life. Local contexts with a higher density of participatory spaces tend to have a high population density, a solid history in participatory policies, and a significant commitment from technical staff (Novella, Mateos-Blanco, et al., 2021). These settings are mainly divided into administration-led spaces, self-managed contexts by children and adolescents (CA), and municipal participation bodies, with the latter being the most predominant. Beyond a consultative function, participatory spaces should aspire to co-produce transformative actions at various levels: awareness and education in democratic values, promoting civic engagement, diagnosing social realities, organising events, and defining local government strategies.

The digital environment also emerges as a determining space for participation. According to Novella, Romero-Pérez, et al. (2021), municipal agents recognise the importance of the virtual environment to boost children's participation. However, they highlight the need to rethink its use to ensure that technology effectively supports children's citizenship.

Shier et al. (2014) identify four organisational settings that facilitate CA's influence on public policies: dedicated spaces where they can

establish community networks and ensure representation; formative spaces to develop communication skills and strengthen their role as social agents; pressure groups, such as councils and forums, which require monitoring to ensure political commitment; and adult decision-making spaces, where they can directly influence policies that affect them.

However, Taft and Gordon (2013) caution that an inadequate configuration of youth councils can turn them into tools of social control that suppress youth dissent rather than politically empower young people. Therefore, it is crucial to design spaces that promote genuine and effective participation of CA, both in face-to-face and digital contexts.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The results of the systematic review of municipal child and adolescent participation (CA) show that it is a recent field of study, with a clear upward trend since 2012, with Spanish universities, through inter-university alliances and coordinated projects, leading the largest number of publications of this scientific knowledge and analysis of the realities of this international law. This research should be reinforced with studies carried out by different international organizations. In this sense, the publication of Roger Hart's ladder model of child participation (1992) was a turning point in this field, as it was the most cited document. Likewise, Professor Ana Novella Cámara—from the University of Barcelona (Spain)—who leads in this review the largest number of scientific publications related to the promotion of the exercise of CA participation rights in local governments. studies that address this topic, especially in those geographical contexts where there is still a lack of research on the subject. Furthermore, they challenge the ways of undertaking children's research, since they consider CAs as partners of or *with whom* to research or research directed by the CAs themselves, to the detriment of the traditional method that carries out research *on* or *about them* (Hunleth, 2011; Jug & Vilar, 2015; Tisdall et al., 2024). Proof of this is that CA become the participant profile of the research that makes up the corpus of this review.

The thematic analysis made it possible to synthesize research trends in this field of study, as well as facilitating the identification of some existing knowledge gaps in the peer-reviewed scientific literature. In the first case, there is a research bias in three directions: 1) to investigate the elements—conditions and facilitators—that enhance opportunities for achieving real and genuine participation at local level; 2) to identify those barriers, inhibitors or challenges expressed by the list of informants that constrain the exercise of social and political participation; and, 3) to examine the impacts or achievements of child and youth participation in the local context, as well as in public policies and in the organic structures or institutions that foster child-adolescent participation, in addition to the analysis the social and power relations established for this purpose.

The results reveal the importance of promoting the participation of CA at the local level to transform daily realities and promote the construction of citizenship from a pluralistic perspective that overcomes the adult-centric vision (Novella et al., 2014); therefore, their participation transcends the exercise of a right, to become an educational opportunity to promote personal development and autonomy (Castro, 2021) in order to turn them into active, critical subject with a sense of agency (Esteban, 2023; Pávez-Soto & Sepúlveda, 2019). This responsibility and commitment must be reflected in local policies related to CA.

Therefore, the need to advance in topics related to the inclusiveness and representativeness of CA in the diversity of forms and/or spaces for participating and exercising active citizenship, as subjects of civil, political, social and cultural rights, from an enabling perspective (Liebel, 2015) in order to promote changes in the closest social realities is evident. Also, in references to the need to question the roles of adults who accompany or are involved in participatory processes in the local-

community context, considered —many times— as true experts and spokespersons of CA rights, but which also limit the capacity of CA agency (Corrales-Soto et al., 2022; Matthews & Limb, 2003; Riádigos & Gradaille, 2023; Shier et al., 2014). Likewise, it is necessary to deepen into the referential frameworks of both adult figures and CA from which they position themselves to facilitate and exercise this right, transforming the vision that has historically been held of CA, giving them greater visibility in society (Gallego-Henao, 2015).

Based on these findings, it is suggested that research should be carried out to broaden the geographic scope of the field and the multidisciplinary vision, combining educational, political, social and cultural aspects, as can be concluded from the analysis of journal that publish studies on the topic. Likewise, it would be interesting to analyze —from an integral and holistic perspective— what connotations CA participation has at the local level, examining whether a greater involvement of children and adolescents in participatory processes promotes —or not— changes in the sociopolitical structures and dynamics of their territories (Novella, 2012; Osorio, 2016).

On the other hand, it would be interesting to extend the study by considering adult perceptions and family roles, the associative fabric and the perspective of other socio-educational professionals who facilitate participatory processes, as well as the functions they perform. In addition, from the analysis carried out emerges the need and opportunity to investigate the participation of CA through digital environments, since they have become new scenarios of relationship and interaction of the younger generations, stimulating political commitment and socio-educational action with their local communities of reference (Castellanos et al., 2022). Similarly, it underlines the importance of conducting longitudinal or evaluative research to expand knowledge on: (1) the impacts on governance, on public policies and, even, on social and power relations between CA and adults; (2) the inclusiveness of CA in participatory processes and practices; and, (3) delve into the levels or scenarios of child and adolescent participation existing in the municipality to learn about and expand on the opportunities for participation. For this, it is necessary to focus on research centred on successful participation initiatives —genuine and real— of CA based on their realities, needs, interests and experiences; but also, on multiple case studies —of an international and hybrid nature (CA and adults)— in order to identify socio-educational elements or strategies —idiosyncratic or common— that help to strengthen and consolidate the participation of these new groups in municipal politics and, ultimately, in social life; in order to make cities and/or communities more habitable and friendly for children (UNICEF, 2022).

5. Limitations

First, the language skills of the reviewers/authors led to a linguistic bias, since only studies written in Spanish, English, Italian and Portuguese were included, so that a total of 167 records were excluded (79 from Scopus and 88 from Web of Science) that were published in other languages. This limitation could have influenced the geographic and cultural diversity of the studies analyzed.

Second, the selection of Scopus and Web of Science as the main databases used may have limited access to studies —perhaps also relevant— published in journals not indexed in these repositories. Although these databases provide exhaustive and high-quality coverage, it is possible that some important studies were not considered because they were published in local and/or specialized journals with a relative level of indexing.

Finally, another key limitation was the restriction in the type of document analyzed, being limited to articles published in academic journals; a circumstance that may have obviated significant findings available in other formats, such as books, conference proceedings and gray literature.

These limitations, inherent to this type of review study, in turn represent opportunities for further research to update and complement

the results of this study. Transparency and detail in the process followed is an indispensable requirement to provide this type of study with replicability and allow the possibility of updating it. Therefore, future reviews on the topic could consider these limitations and expand the findings presented through studies that consider publications in other languages, with searches in different databases and that included other formats such as books and conferences.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2025.108141>.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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