

# The Hearth: Youth Fire Circles

Turning risk into responsibility, and space into place.



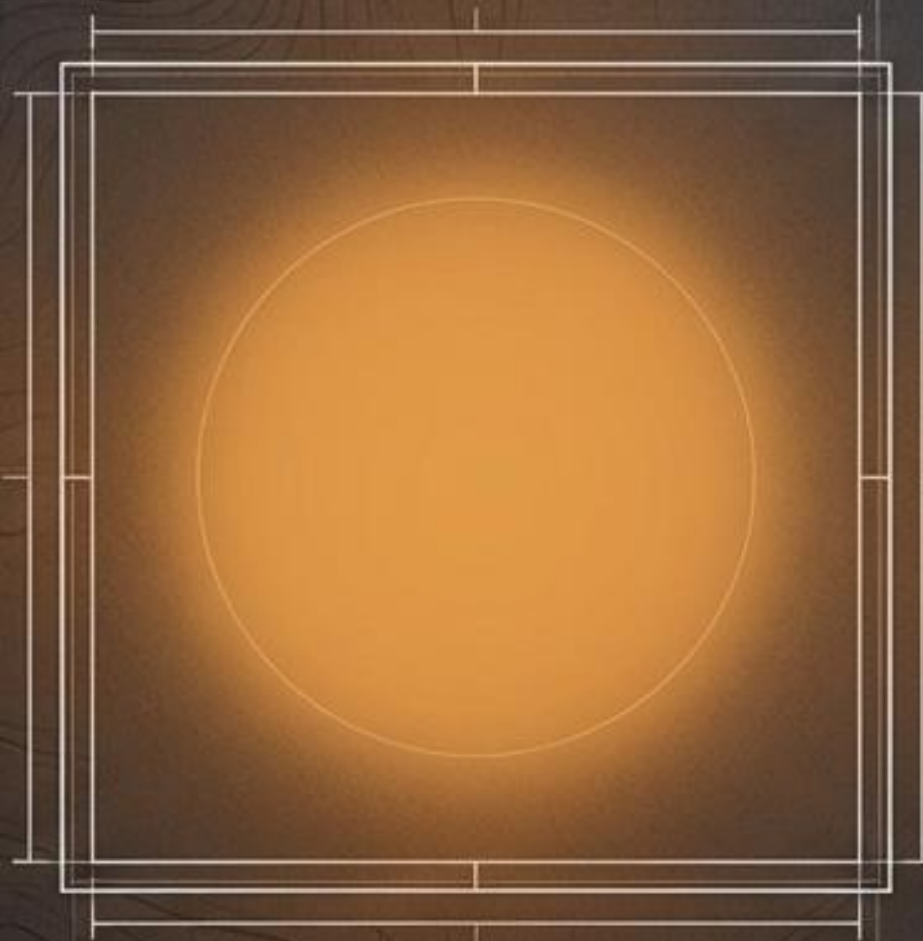
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HARTLEPOOL  
SPORT

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SPORT

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PLAY



## A space for calm, grounded conversations.

A simple but powerful intervention: bringing young people together around a managed fire to create psychologically safe environments to talk openly about what matters to them.

# Fire acts as a primal social anchor.

*"I've never felt safe sharing like this before."*

*"This corner used to feel so forgotten."*



## The Anchor.

Fire slows the conversation down. Instead of formal answers, it elicits personal stories and emotional connections to place.

## The Output.

It reveals pride and local knowledge, validating the need for adaptable, hyper-local spaces. Positive use of the park is modeled, not just told.

# The anatomy of a Hearth session.

6–12 young people

60–90 minutes

Outdoor, hyper-local setting

## Step 1: Optional Lead-in.

Walking Quest to explore the area, gather questions, and notice place.

## Step 2: Arrival.

Fire is lit safely; informal welcome to the space.

## Step 3: Engagement.

Shared responsibility around the fire (where appropriate).

## Step 4: Conversation.

Prompted, but not directed. Stories take precedence over answers.

## Step 5: Reflection.

Discovering what matters and what should change.

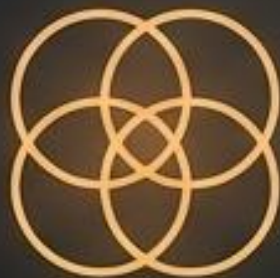
# Core principles of spatial and social design



**Agency over instruction.**  
Young people drive the meaning-making process.



**Environment shapes behaviour.**  
Calm, focused spaces yield calm, focused engagement.

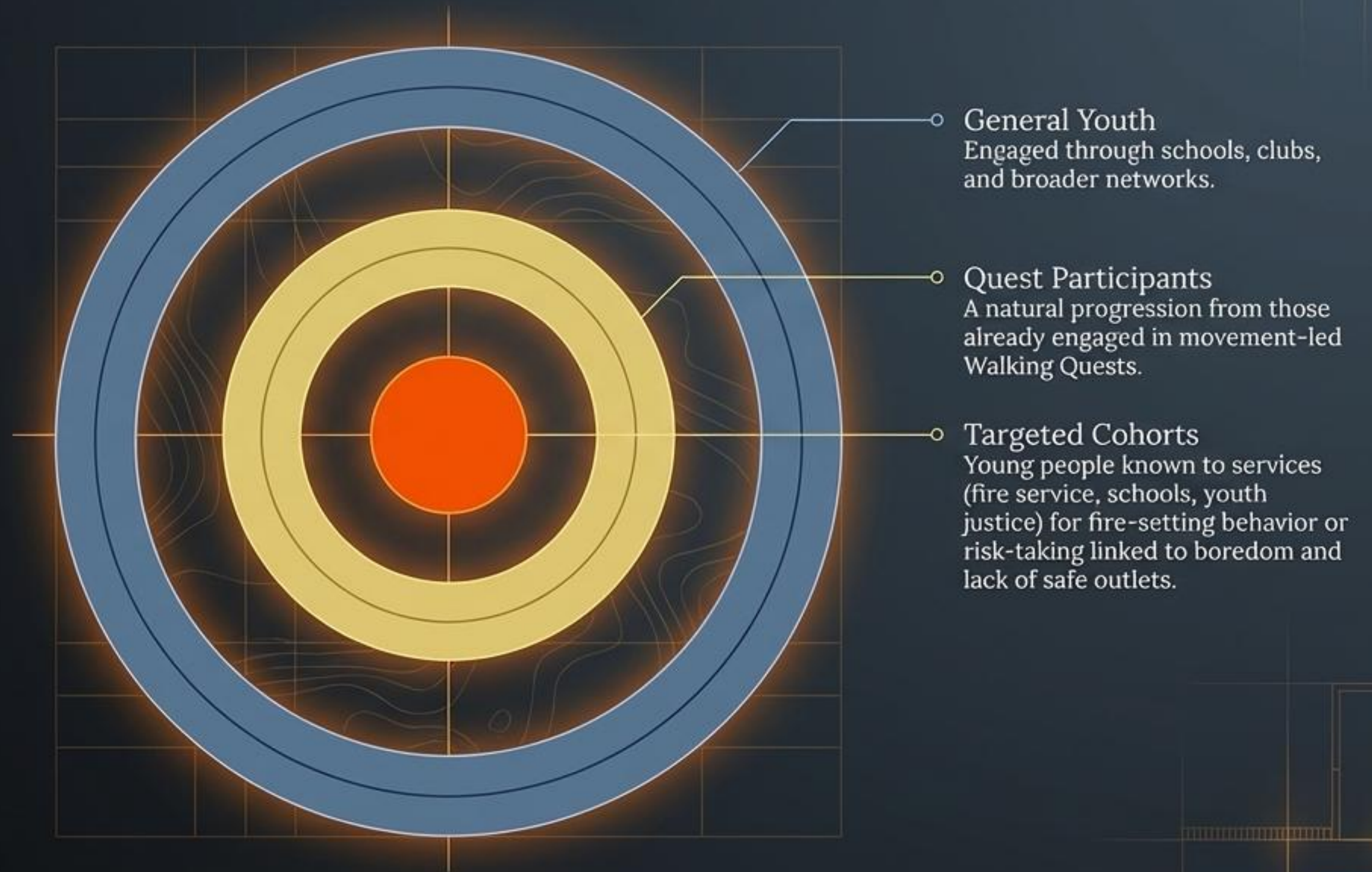


**Relational, not transactional.**  
Building trust supersedes extracting data.



**Asset-based approach.**  
Focused on what young people bring to the space, modeling positive use rather than dictating it.

# Reaching the right cohorts.



# Matrix: Shifting the engagement paradigm.

	Traditional	The Hearth
Mechanism	Uses structured insight (School deep dives) and formal voice mechanisms (Youth forums).	Provides a slower, relational space.
Output	Seeks formal answers.	Surfaces authentic, place-based stories and memories.
Environment	Occurs in indoor, institutional settings.	Outdoor and hyper-local.
Accessibility	Caters to highly engaged youth.	Serves as an entry point for disengaged young people who avoid formal settings.

# Working with fascination, not against it.



For young people drawn to **fire-setting** due to **boredom** or **curiosity**, traditional interventions attempt to shut down their fascination. **We take a different approach:** creating **psychologically safe environments** to explore that curiosity responsibly.

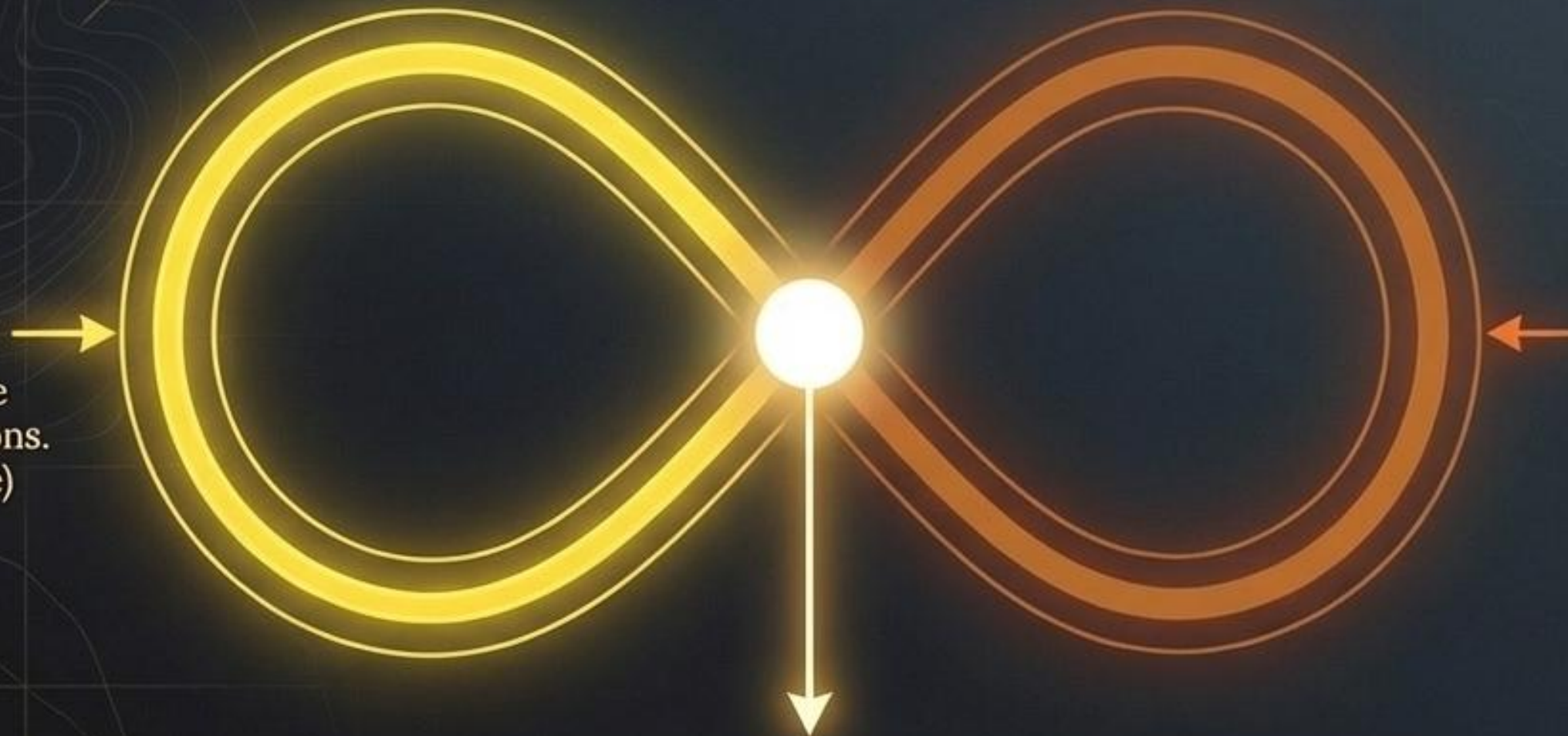
# The fire responsibility funnel.



# A paired pathway for the civic journey.

## Walking Quests:

Generate curiosity, movement, and observation.  
Young people explore place and ask questions.  
(Path: Move → Notice)



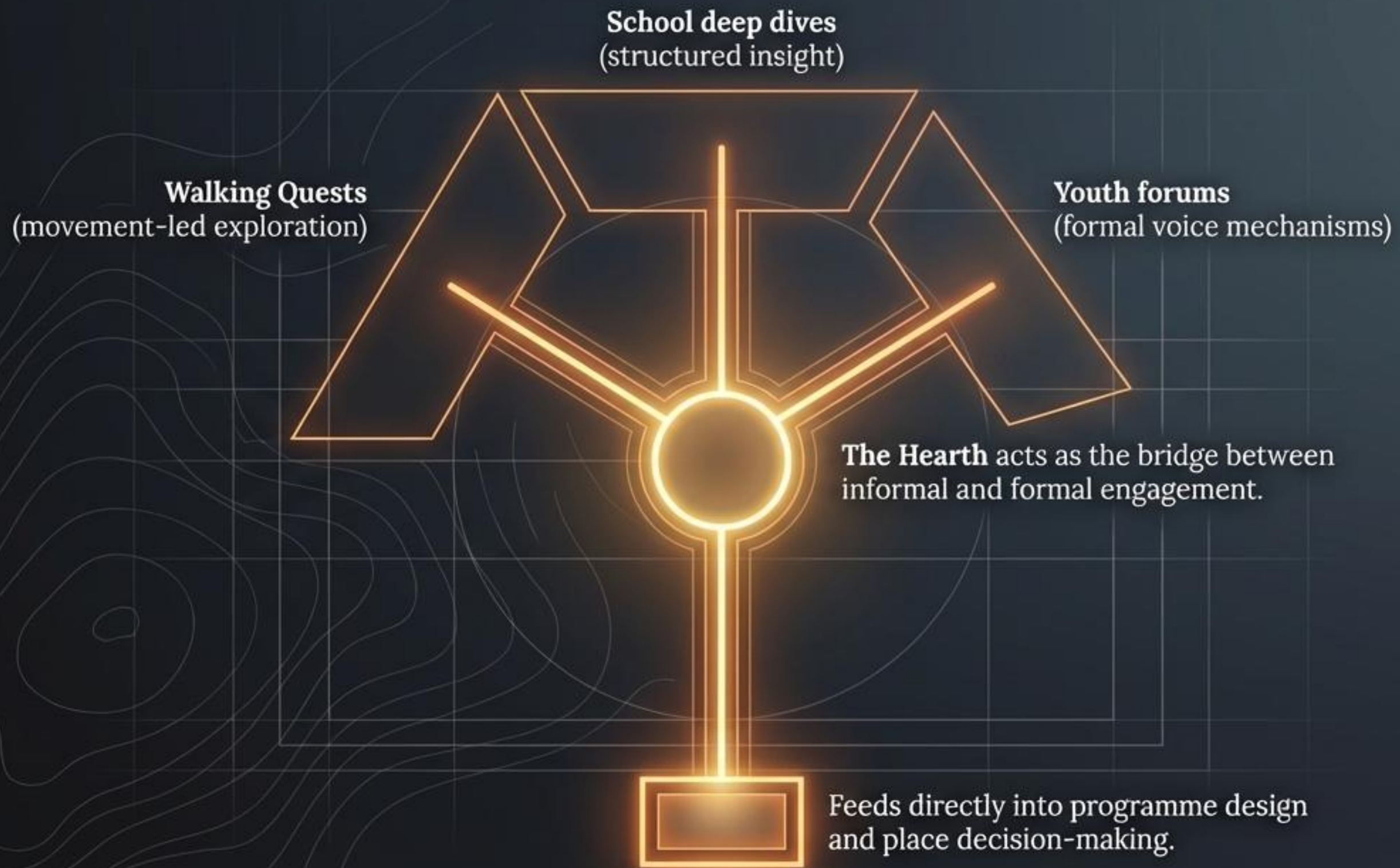
## The Hearth:

Creates the moment to pause, reflect, and make meaning.  
Stories and opinions emerge naturally.  
(Path: Gather → Reflect)

**Act.**

A more complete civic journey  
than either approach alone.

# Fitting into the broader civic ecosystem.



# The ripple effect of the Hearth.



## **Immediate:**

More open, honest conversations. Calm engagement from young people who typically avoid formal settings.

**Short-term:** Rich, grounded insight linked to real places. Improved behaviors in parks and public spaces.

## **Long-term:**

Increased civic agency. Stronger pathways into leadership and community roles. A cultural shift in how space is used and valued.

# From participating in place to shaping it.



Walking Quests get young people moving and noticing. The Hearth gives them space to stop, reflect, and be heard. Together, they create something powerful: transforming disengaged youth into active stewards of their city.