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• Coyote Theme

Youth Participation globalisation and democracy

Globalisation and its consequences have led to transformations of various life stages. Childhood and youth are especially affected by these shifts. Formerly known as a moratorium for the preparation of adulthood through education and apprenticeship, this description of youth has changed. Young people have to design their lives not only for adolescence but also to be able to fulfil future expectations.

Not only does the individual side have to be seen when talking about globalisation and its consequences, but also international relations and accompanying challenges for nation states have to be considered. Migration and heterogeneity, denationalization tendencies are some of the challenges today. Democracies are grounded on the concept of political participation – citizens need to participate and they need to learn how to do so. Therefore attitudes and the capacity to engage in dialogue, respect, solidarity, tolerance and a sense of responsibility are required (Willems 2007). In this way citizenship through participation is not only considered as a legal status, but also as a competence, whose acquisition cannot be left to chance.

▶ Youth Participation – conceptual and theoretical implications

Youth participation is one of the main programmes for the promotion of young people’s active engagement in societies today. The 1989 *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* is based on four main categories: *survival rights* (right to life and to have the most basic needs met), *development rights* (enabling children to reach their fullest potential), *protection rights* (safeguarding children and adolescents from all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation) and finally *participation rights* (permission to take an active part in the community) (UNO 1978; Human Rights Education Association). There are also numerous campaigns and initiatives like the *World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000* or the survey *EUYOUPART* focused on democratic learning processes for and with young people. The 1999 IEA study *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-eight Countries* revealed that the political attitudes and (political) willingness of young people to participate is clearly high. Students in most countries have an understanding of fundamental democratic

values and institutions and they agree that good citizenship includes the obligation to vote. But there are also some negative indicators about youth participation. Depth of understanding is still a problem. At the same time students are very sceptical about traditional forms of political engagement but many are open to other types of involvement (Torney-Purta et al. 2001). But what exactly is youth participation and why is it so important? Does it only cover political participation or are there other participation levels as well? What alternative forms of youth participation can be identified?

Participation is a broad concept which pivotally refers to active partaking of citizens in collective (political) concerns such as decision-making processes. Democracies are based upon citizen’s rights and will to take part in decision processes. Without these two preconditions democracies would not function (Kaase 2003; Schubert/Klein 2006). According to the United Nations World Youth Report 2003, *youth participation* is not an end in itself. It needs to be defined as a procedural right and represents the means through which young people “take part in and influence processes, decisions and activities in order to achieve justice, influence outcomes, expose abuses of power and realize their rights” (United Nations 2003: 271).

The European Commission 2001 White Paper *A New Impetus for the European Youth*, lists five pivotal principles which frame the underlying concept of European governance. *Openness* which includes the provision of information and active communication for young people; *Accountability* stands for the development of new and structured forms of cooperation between Member States and the European institutions. *Effectiveness*, which means the holistic involvement of young people; *Coherence*, which includes the provision of an overview of all the different forms of policies concerning young people. And finally the provision and



encouragement of *Participation*, which includes the consultation and involvement of young people in decisions is listed (European Commission 2001: 8; Barrington-Leach et al. 2007). In real life young people experience only very limited access to political participation – under 18 they have no voting rights. Furthermore, access to participation is unequally distributed due to socioeconomic differences like family background, educational differences or migration status. At the same time the understanding of the reality of youth participation leads to a broader demand for the recognition of the rights of young people. Young people need to be acknowledged as active agents rather than simple recipients of adult protection (United Nations 2003: 272; Fatke et al. 2006).

Hence youth participation takes different forms and can include *political, social, economic and cultural participation* (United Nations 2003: 279). These dimensions have to be located on a continuum since they cannot be completely distinguished from each other. The linkage between youth participation and *political processes* is stricter – it is located within representative democratic systems and refers to concepts of active citizenship. Here engagement includes voting, participation in election campaigns or party work. A broader definition connects participation to *social and public processes* and contains social involvement which is indirectly connected to political issues. It is located outside representative democratic systems and describes alternative forms of participation. Here different participation modes can be distinguished. Social participation also includes the initiation of political discourses by collecting signatures or holding political speeches, political protest and/or strikes as well as illegal and violent forms of political participation. Also membership in NGOs (e.g. Greenpeace) is an example for social participation (Gaiser/de Rijke 2001:11f.). Another example is product boycott. EUYOUTH PART revealed that ethical consumerism is the most common day-to-day reclamation by young people. 25% of the Finnish, 17% of the Italian and 16% of the Austrian youth boycott certain products on a regular basis (Ogris/Westphal 2006: 10). *Economic participation* relates to work and development as “economic participation and civic engagement are two critical indicators of the success of investments in the development of knowledge and skills of children and teenagers” (Barrington-Leach et al. 2007: 61). *Cultural participation* refers to the arts, cultural values and expressions (United Nations 2003: 279) and includes two interrelating dimensions of adolescence. First cultural participation is found in the various expressions of youth culture and lifestyles. Not only through music and fashion do young people innovate

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Arnstein, 1967

their life and lifestyles but also through a deep influence on society. Therefore on a second level cultural participation can lead towards changes within society – orientations and norms can be transformed (for example, the so-called «sandwich generation») (Willems 2007).

Taking these different concepts of youth participation into consideration, different types of participation can be distinguished. In an older but nevertheless relevant article Sherry R. Arnstein (1967) connects citizen participation as an equivalent term to citizen power. *Citizen participation is the redistribution of power which enables have-not citizens – people who are presently excluded from political and economic processes – to be comprehensively included in the future* (Arnstein 1967). A participation ladder clarifies three dimensions of participation:

hensively included in the future (Arnstein 1967). A participation ladder clarifies three dimensions of participation:

- *non participation*: manipulation, therapy
- *tokenism*: information, consultation, placation
- *citizen power*: partnership, delegated power, citizen control

The objective of *manipulation and therapy* is not to enable people to participate in society but to allow leaders to ‘educate’ or ‘cure’ participants. *Information, consultation and placation* describe forms of so-called participation, since participants are allowed to speak but have no decision-making rights. While *partnership* enables participants to actively negotiate and engage, *delegating power* and *citizen control* describe power processes where citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats (Arnstein 1967).

This participation ladder demonstrates why participation is important for society as a whole and even more so, for young people’s growing up processes. Regarding the link between participation and democracy, John Dewey interprets *democracy as a maxim of the associated life* – as an idea of communal life itself. Therefore democracy commits to the principles of freedom and equality and is located beyond dogmatism or ideology. At the same time democracy – for Dewey – is a *creative process*. The main condition is the provision of opportunities to participate through curiosity, active engagement, creativity, protest or resistance (Dewey 1993; Himmelmann 2004). According to Himmelmann the *main benefits of citizen participation* can be found within three dimensions of democracy. The *first dimension* is the *form of government*. Here human rights, the constitutional state, elections and the sovereignty of people, parliamentarism and competition of parties, division of powers and social security are the main objectives. The second societal dimension is its *corporate form* including pluralism, social differentiation,

peaceful conflict settlement, competition, free market economy, openness, as well as public and civil society. The third dimension is reflected in certain *life forms*. Civility and fairness, tolerance, pursuit of happiness, variety of chances, solidarity and self-organization belong to this dimension (Himmelmann 2004).

This rationale points towards the importance of *democracy learning* as the main requirement of participation possibilities for young people. Education for democracy is a universal challenge and takes place on a *continuum between the transmission of knowledge through older generations for the younger and self-learning processes* (Reinhardt 2004). The main outcome of these learning processes is the development of competences that allow young people to meet the demands of their social and societal life. Insofar as the concept of competences “is the meeting point between structural requirements and individual capacities. It is dependent on knowledge; however the challenge is not only to have more knowledge or be more qualified, but rather to be able to translate contextual problems and competence demands into information and knowledge queries” (Mørch 2002: 66).

► Settings and Opportunities of Youth Participation

Although a lot is being done, the reality of youth participation within representative democracies is not promising. The political interest of young people is decreasing dramatically. Günther Ogris and Sabine Westphal point out that the voter’s participation in the 2004 election for the European Parliament was disappointing. More than two thirds of 18-24 year-olds did not participate (Ogris/Westphal 2006: 7). General or council elections within the nation-states echo the same picture (Hurrelmann 2007: 150f.). This leads to the assumption that low interest and frustration of young people with politics could be mainly focused on conventional forms of political participation whereas alternative forms of engagement as shown above are mobilizing more and more young people (Hurrelmann 2007: 151).

EUYOUPART identified three main sources of political participation – *families/peers, school and political organisations*. Next to the important influence of families it has been widely accepted that schools offer the best chances of promoting political knowledge and democratic values and skills. Democracy learning for youth participation needs the interconnection between schools as places for formal education and the community (family, peers etc.) as places of informal learning. As Birger Hartnuß and Stephan Maykus (2006: 48) point out, only through intermediary interchange between the two main dimensions of youth growing up processes can political participation be realized.

Political socialisation through family and peers influences political opinion making processes the most. “Parents are perceived both as an arm of society – as a mediating agency between society and the child – and as powerful sources of primary and enduring influence on the internalization of values and norms” (Liebes/Ri-

bak 1992: 619). Within politically engaged families, young people learn through role modelling, discussions and participation experiences of their parents (Ogris/Westphal 2006).

Schools provide learning environments where young people not only learn premises and characteristics of politics. This is where young people also get to know what participation through activity is through electing class representatives, meeting with visiting politicians or setting up a youth parliament. The above mentioned IAE study *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-eight Countries* revealed that schools who model democratic practice are most effective in promoting civic knowledge and engagement (Torney-Purta et al. 2001).

Learning processes in schools refer to didactic principles which not only count for this specific environment but also bear a meaning for the understanding of political socialisation processes through families and peers. The interplay between objective factors and subjective views offers a great chance for democracy learning and participation processes; therefore the *orientation on lived-worlds and individually developed learning ideas* is one main principle of democracy learning (Schelle 2007: 88). In addition the *orientation of scientific knowledge through reflection and decision-making* is also a principle of democracy learning (Gagel 2007: 156ff.) *Problem-focussing* including *problem solving* processes is another way of democracy learning. The aim is to initiate reflection for following actions (Breit 2007: 108f.). The encouragement of participation includes also *controversy*. This principle follows two main ideas: education for citizenship and education towards enlightenment (Grammes 2007b: 127). Learning processes also point towards *different forms of action*, not only within the school environment but also in families and peers. It is obvious that concepts of democracy learning mainly focus on schools. Nevertheless students transport their formal knowledge into their lived social worlds. Therefore the connections between the various environments influencing young people’s opinion-forming and decision-making processes cannot be neglected. Although studies of youth participation are not new there are still various challenges and frequent points of criticism. The following paragraph will highlight some of these remaining issues.

► Remaining Challenges

A growing number of young people throughout the world are affected by social exclusion and various disadvantages. Raising poverty levels not only in poor non-western countries but also in the rich westernised world have implications for the day-to-day safeguarding of children’s and adolescents’ basic needs. When these needs are met participation levels for young people still remain low. Some youngsters look and find chances for participation far away from traditional political systems. Some engage in radical forms and choose extremism as their form of opposition.

Future concepts and political programs of youth participation should therefore focus on strengthening processes in families,



communities and the representative political system. Also different ways of supporting young people's democracy learning have to be provided – ideally in close interrelation between formal and informal learning environments. Attempts to promote youth participation have to lead towards young people's impressions of their impact on decision-making processes. ■

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