Challenging structured participation opportunities

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➜ Introduction

Municipal elections were held in Finland in October 2012. The voting percentage was 58.2%, the second lowest turnout ever in municipal elections in Finland (Statistics Finland 2012). The biggest newspaper in the country, *Helsingin Sanomat* (2012), commented on the non-voters in its editorial by publishing a caricature with a hand holding a remote control. The hand is directed towards a television screen showing a logo displaying the caption "Idiots". The normative pressure of voting manifests itself in this image and in the editorial. Non-voters are thought of as media-driven individualists. The editorial is an example of the dualist attitude towards democracy: you are either a voter or an idiot. A positive way of rephrasing this attitude would be to say that there is a dualism between people believing in an old, representational democracy and people believing in life politics, in making a statement in social media and through consumer decisions.

The low interest in representative democracy is not restricted to Finland. There is a growing concern regarding youth disengagement from politics. Similarly, the need to revitalise democracy is widely recognised in Europe. Challenges presented by globalisation,

environmental crises or the growing importance of identity politics affect the political life of democratic states (Dryzek and Dunleavy 2009). A special emphasis on young people as a future social resource has been translated into policy planning by creating participatory mechanisms. However, there is reason to argue that such mechanisms are partly based on an inadequate understanding of democracy.

Based on the synthesis of international youth studies on participation, case studies in Finland by a collective of 24 scientists (Gretschel and Kiilakoski 2012), and a comparative study between Finland and Germany (Feldmann-Wojtachnia et al. 2010), this article claims that young people interact more widely with societies where formal structures for engagement are too narrow. To be able to respond to such limitations, it is important to resist simple dualism (collectivist/individualist citizen, representative/participatory democracy, representative/direct, institutional/non-institutional participation, party politics/life politics, conventional/social-movement-related citizenship behaviour, modern adults/post-modern young, and so on) and recognise the pluralism and richness of democratic culture. Analysing the state of participation requires recognising different manifestations of democracy and democratic engagement in the daily life of young people.

Many of our examples are from the municipal level. This emphasises the importance of locality and the relationship between local government and citizens. For young people in particular, immediate surroundings are important. If democracy is to be revitalised by decisions made on the street, in parks or communities, democracy itself should be seen, in general, as a result of a democratic process, not as a technocratic solution to social and spatial problems. According to sociologist Ulrich Beck, the new political culture requires "a repoliticisation of municipal policy, indeed a rediscovery and redefinition of it by mobilizing programs, people and ideas" (Beck 1998: 16). Following this attitude we focus on the local level, although the arguments of the article could also be applied at the national and international level, too. We claim that one way of promoting repoliticisation is to recognise the wider scope of democracy (Schulz et al.2008).

Our article is divided into three parts. In the first part we will deal with democracy theories, combining theoretical observations with empirical youth studies. We claim that the creation of democratic culture requires identification of the full spectrum of democracy. In the second part we will analyse different instruments for promoting participation. We will examine EU processes, the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) study and the participation of skateboarders in municipal planning. By studying these different levels, we aim to claim (in the third part) that the full scope of democracy is not recognised in the instruments that are used to promote participation.

➔ The many faces of democracy

Democracy is a political ideal, a life form, a guiding principle of education and a topic of continual debate and reconceptualisation. Consensus on what democracy actually means does not exist. According to Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit, democracy is a systematically ambiguous term, "a technique for changing the government without violence, but also… a full-fledged way of life" (Margalit 2002: 12). The nature of democracy is open to debate. In the course of history, concepts of democracy have evolved. The dominant understanding of democracy, the idea of representative democracy, was conceived in the 19th century when the combination of democracy and representation was seen both as possible and desirable (Palonen 2008: 195-197).

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The question of who is capable of taking part in democratic activity has been refor-mulated and discussed since the birth of democracy. According to the classic theorist of democracy, John Locke, subjects who make a social contract are "free, equal and independent" (Locke 1993: 309). Incidentally, this was understood to mean free men for a significant period of time. Although the range of people capable of taking part in democratic processes has widened, some citizens are still denied the possibility of taking part in representative democracy. An obvious example includes those less than 18 years of age in countries where 16-year olds do not have the right to vote.

Traditional political thinking has excluded children and young people from the role of political subject. Earlier, it was thought that people remain apolitical for a signifi-cant part of their life span. Their interests and experiences are advocated with the accrual of experience, independence and freedom (see Nussbaum 2007: 33). This view of children has, however, changed and nowadays children are considered as political and economic actors in their own right (Alanen 2009) – and that their action is not only a rehearsal for the future but also an integral part of decision making. Nevertheless, this conception requires either the recognition of the inherent limita-tions of representationalism and responding to this by introducing a complementary mechanism for young people (such as youth councils) or the cultivation of different forms of democracy to enrich the way citizens are able to respond to society. We are advocates for the latter attitude and wish to highlight how different theories of democ-racy reveal what it is to be a young citizen. Metaphorically, birds of democracies sing not only in different voices, but they sing in different forests and for different reasons.

In order to document the wide array of participation, it is important to analyse the full scope of democratic life: representative democracy and its ideal conception of citizens electing delegations is contrasted with the ideals of direct, participatory, deliberative and counter-democracy and, respectively, the ideals of direct decision making, participation, democratic discussion and surveillance – for example in the social media. Different conceptions of democracy have different ideals of what constitutes a democratic culture, how citizens engage democratically and what constitutes democratic instruments. (see Table 1). They should not, however, be seen as mutually exclusive. In fact, multiple types can be found in operation in any one location at the same time.

Table 1: Ideals of democracy and democratic instruments at European local level

Theories of democracy	Ideal picture of democracy	Operations in local authority	Possible actions for the youth
Representa-tive democ-racy	Citizen as elector: gathers information and acts by vot-ing. Depending on country a citizen at the age of 16, 17 or 18 can vote and stand as a candidate and change their role. Political culture, where the chosen candidates make decisions and lead processes.	Electing local authority councils and acting in them. In some commu-nities election of mayor.	Depending on country, those over the age of 16, 17 or 18 can vote and stand as a candidate in local elections and be elected to the council; in addition party political organi-sations can choose young members to act on committees and the board of the local authority.

Theories of democracy	Ideal picture of democracy	Operations in local authority	Possible actions for the youth
Direct democracy	Citizen as policy maker. Political culture where citizens make the decision themselves.	Referendums Right of initiative at municipality level (when the power is given to residents).	The right of people over 16, 17 or 18 years of age to vote in referendums. Right of making a popular initiative.
Participatory democracy	Citizen as participant: gives feedback, takes part in discussion/action. Political culture that supports participation and the opportunity for influencing common issues.	Right to set up local initiatives, user or residential inquiries, hearings, meetings, panels and forums, distribution of funds for carrying out different residential projects. Action in NGOs.	Right to set up a local initiative and other similar methods to those described in the neighbouring column for all children and young people. Representative forms of participatory democracy: youth councils, representatives of youth councils in committees or the council of a local authority. Action in NGOs.
Deliberative democracy	Citizen as a deliberative actor: takes part in public debate, offers arguments, and takes part in forming considered and elaborated view on society. Political culture where issues are discussed with citizen and where the decisions, laws and actions are justified so that people can understand. Politics is about individuals and common discussion.	For example citizens' juries, consensus conferences, deliberative discussion days.	Citizens' jury for young people, deliberative discussion days for young people.
Counter-democracy	Citizen as an activist, who monitors, controls, repels questions and tries to reform the content and the actions of decision makers through action (not only by discussion). Political culture where the actions of the decision makers have caused lack of confidence amongst citizens and stimulated political action instead of apolitical passiveness.	Demonstrations, Internet writings and other social media operations, meetings, organisational activities, legal and illegal activism.	Demonstrations and similar methods to those described in the neighbouring column. Also youth and pupil's councils use the methods of counter-democracy (for example walkouts and demonstrations).

This table has been refined and developed from the version originally compiled by Eskelinen et al. 2012.

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Representative democracy

Representative democracy has been a model for living democratically in Western societies. It focuses on political parties, voting, parliaments and representation. The argument for representational democracy states that problems faced in modern societies require politicians who are elected by the public. According to Parkinson, when decisions binding the rest of society are made by persons who are publicly responsible and whose office is dependent on the satisfaction of the constituents, the decision makers can be held accountable. If decision makers were randomly chosen or self-appointed, they would tend not to respond to the needs of the public (Parkinson 2012: 44.) A critical perspective of this type of democracy claims that the citizen's role is passive with the duty to simply react to the few alternatives presented on election day or that politicians tend to pay too much attention to different stakeholders instead of the needs of all members of society (Morrow 2005: 380).

The disillusionment of young people has been the lamentation of political analysts. According to Coleman, the blame for the disconnection between youth and politics can be shared equally between both. Either the young are distracted politically or politicians are unable to motivate the Internet generation and are unable to find ways to politicise affairs current in the life of young people (Coleman 2007). Whatever the reason, young people tend to be less interested in participating in elections. According to an analysis involving 22 European countries, the turnout of voters aged less than 25 was 51% and the turnout of the remaining electorate was 70% (Fieldhouse et al. 2007: 806). Different studies appear to show that although general interest in voting amongst Europeans has declined, there are a growing number of young people disillusioned with traditional representational democracy.

Additionally, it should be pointed out that youth is not a homogenous group. An interesting study by Bhatti et al. (2012) shows that voting turnout is higher amongst 18-year olds, compared to 19-21-year-old voters. The authors conclude that there might be grounds for arguing that the voting age should be lower, especially if an atmosphere favourable to voting is created, for example, in formal education.

According to an ICCS, conducted in 2009, among 38 countries studied globally, the age at which people are legally entitled to vote in elections is 18 in the majority of countries, with the exception of Chinese Taipei where it is 20, Indonesia and Korea where it is 17, and Austria where it is 16. Slovenia has the most unusual approach. In this country, voting is legal at the age of 18, but if people are in paid employment, they can vote from the age of 16 (Schulz et al. 2010: 39). In Norway, 20 municipalities participated in a trial of reduced voting age (to 16) in local elections in 2011. The municipalities organised campaigns and measures directed at such voter groups. The evaluation of the results of the trial process is still in process (Aars 2012; Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development of Norway 2011). It is also known that in some countries, all young people over the age of 16 have the right to vote in municipal elections (city of Vienna, Austria), parliamentary elections (Austria), regional elections (several *Bundeslands* in Germany) and parish elections (Finland).

Direct democracy

Many alternatives to existing forms of representational democracy have been suggested. Direct democracy can be understood as measures which citizens can

decide upon and regarding which they can create a political agenda by voting. According to Butković, when citizens have the independent choice to decide matters themselves, democracy as government by the people can strengthen. Within the European Union, there is some imbalance between member states and, consequently, between the rights of citizens to engage in democratic processes (Butković 2010: 34-37). According to Kaufmann et al. (2010), direct democracy procedures in Switzerland became established as early as the 19th century and have been further developed since. Direct democracy means that popular voting takes place either because a group of voters demands it, or because it is stipulated in the constitution. The government cannot call a popular vote on a substantive issue: direct democracy implies the existence and use of tools for the sharing of political power that are in the hands of the citizens and serve their interests. Not all popular vote procedures are direct-democratic. A plebiscite has a quite different effect from a real referendum. Direct democracy empowers citizens; plebiscites are tools for the exercise of power by those in power. Much misunderstanding and confusion could be avoided if direct-democratic and plebiscitary procedures were clearly distinguished from one another, and even had different names (Kaufmann et al. 2010: 7-9).

From a direct democracy point of view, initiatives at the municipal level in Finland are "agenda initiatives" that enable citizens to submit a proposal that must be considered by the legislature. However, unlike "popular initiatives", agenda initiatives trigger a (referendum) vote and therefore are not a tool of direct democracy, but of participatory democracy.

It is important to note, however, that although direct democracy might be a complementary measure to improve democratic culture, children and the young are still excluded from the process if they have no right to vote because of their age. Therefore, in order to improve direct mechanisms for the young, different procedures are needed. Providing every young person in a school, residential area or municipality with the opportunity to be consulted might be an example of how the ideals of direct democracy could be translated to promoting participation at the municipal level (Feldmann-Wojtachnia et al. 2010: 18). Of particular importance in this context is the emphasis on the opportunity individuals have to engage in decision making as individuals. This is particularly important in countries where participatory mechanisms for the young tend to be group-based, such as youth councils or school councils, and individual participation mechanisms have been under-developed or ignored.

Participatory democracy

Proponents of participatory democracy claim that representative or direct democracy is not enough. Instead, they belive that sites that are normally considered apolitical, such as schools, working places or youth organisations, can be sites of democratic decision making. By participating in these environments, citizens are better equipped to affect their surroundings. Practical examples of participatory democracy are, for example, workplace democracy or participatory budgeting (Dryzek and Dunleavy 2009: 212-213). According to Morrow, the theories of participatory democracy claim that decisions are better if they reflect the interests of the people participating in the process. But they may also believe that participatory democracy promotes citizens' sense of having the capacity to impact decision making in public policy. The ideal image of the citizen describes an active participant, not citizenship as a formal relation to the political system (Morrow 2005: 381).

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Participatory democracy seems well suited to children and the young because no inherent age limits for participation exist. As participants, children and the young are recognised as powerful agents in their own lives and as citizens in their community. This can mean that the power relationship between the young and adults is transformed (John 2003: 208-209). According to Hart, when participating, the young can learn new skills, acquire confidence, create networks and at best more egalitarian relationships with adults. In addition to the personal level, there could be a transformation at the institutional level, when different organisations learn to better respond to the needs, hopes and ideas of the young (Hart 2008).

There are many instruments for promoting participation amongst young people. In fact, most structured participation mechanisms should be considered participatory. For example, youth councils are not mechanisms of representational democracy because they lack the power to make independent decisions on youth policy. Instead, they can contribute to decision making by making statements or clarifying the position of the young. The real question behind the success of participatory mechanisms is power distribution – if power is not redistributed, and youth have to adapt to the decisions and structures instigated by adult society, participatory processes might actually be disempowering (Farthing 2012: 83). According to Mary John (2003: 209) "participation without influence is mere window-dressing". This point is well expressed by a young person in Finland:

> My opinion is that it is of no use organising youth councils, future forums, hearings, initiation boxes or anything that creates an image of listening to the young, if one is not ready to give power and responsibility to the young. It is of course fine that you can say to outsiders that we listen to the young in this municipality, but there would have to be well thought-out opinions on what are young people's real possibilities of making an impact (Huhtala and Tontti 2005: 43).

Deliberative democracy

The idea of deliberative democracy emphasises that democracy is about communication, involving the presentation of good reasons and reflecting on the points made by others (Dryzek and Dunleavy 2009: 215). Thus, it claims that democracy is not only about voting, participating or directly expressing one's will, it is fundamentally about engaging in a dialogue and trying to arrive at a shared understanding of common issues. According to several authors, the ideal of deliberation is based on the idea of a communicative rationality which can overcome attempts to trick, command cunningly or manipulate people behind the same opinion (Honneth 2009: 169; Habermas 1981). In deliberation, one cannot rely on experts or power positions, but on the power of the best argument. Public argumentation and reasoning among equal citizens ensures that public problems can be solved.

According to Cohen, deliberative democratic politics has three conditions. Firstly, there has to be public deliberation on the common good. There probably are alternative conceptions of the meaning of common good, so citizens are required to have a wider perspective instead of narrow, interest-based conceptions. Secondly, equality must be manifest among citizens. Political opportunity must be independent of economic or social position. Thirdly, politics should be ordered in a way that provides a basis for self-respect and creates a sense of political competence. It should shape the identity of citizens. (Cohen 1998: 143-144). These three conditions also emphasise the importance of taking youth seriously, of respecting their ideas and accepting them as equal partners in a dialogue.

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The models for promoting deliberation for the young are being developed. There is evidence that although young people are not interested in the formal procedures of party politics, many would like to be heard by politicians and included in the processes of deliberation within the existing structures of society (Harris et al. 2010). One author of this article has been active in developing a method called deliberative "discussion day" where young people and municipal officials can meet.

Discussion days have been organised in over 60 Finnish municipalities since 2008. An attempt is made therein to inspire discussion between young people and local decision makers in a deliberative manner. The objective is to develop local services from the point of view of adolescents representing different bodies, for example youth and pupils' councils, the youth club visitors and the young people in targeted youth work. Such work begins with group work where the young people become acquainted with each other and the different points of view held by others. At the same time, their own opinions on the state of municipal services strengthens. The main focus of the discussion is on the questions, claims, contentions or proposals presented by the young people to the adults. This ensures that the discussion covers topics that are important to young people. In several municipalities it has been observed that deliberation is achieved: discussion is not "empty talk" or "just talking". Thus, the discussion days can impact the opinions of the people present (cf. Pekonen 2011: 8, 35, 69). There is evidence that decision makers have begun to increase their trust in the abilities of the young to operate within municipal issues. In some municipalities, there have been intentions to hear youth at an earlier stage of planning and decision making. Age-sensitive discussion days can also be applied to other special groups. For example, children and seniors have participated in a deliberative manner (Gretschel et al. 2013).

During discussion days, deliberation is based on the knowledge of and experience of young people themselves. Citizen jury processes have been organised to obtain the opinions and views of the young on more complex issues. In such juries, the participants are allowed to examine evidence about the issue under consideration provided by visiting experts. For example, in Wales young people aged 16-19 examined the principles of "designer baby technology" (Iredale et al. 2006). In the first Finnish Youth Jury, the theme was "involvement in school community" (University of Vaasa 2010; Raisio and Ollila 2011).

Counter-democracy

Democratic participation is usually seen as involvement in a democratic process. There has been powerful criticism of the idea that youth participation is an automatically positive experience for young people. According to Farthing, the criticism claims that participation does not change power relations because participation events are structured by adults and the young have to accept pre-given roles, structures and even discourse. Participation thus reinforces the very power relations it is supposed to change (Farthing 2012). This has led some theorists, such as Slavoj Zizek (2008: 474), to claim that "our 'doing nothing', our refusal to participate, can deal a blow to the power structure, radically de-legitimizing it, preventing its normal functioning". These observations point out that there might be good grounds for examining what form of youth politics exists outside the scope of representational, direct, deliberative or participatory democracy. Farthing has claimed that the disengagement of the young from politics can be seen as an active rejection of old ways which are incapable of meeting the challenges of environmentalism or globalisation. He claims that not giving authority

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to a political system is one way of breaking new ground towards new forms of engaged practices (Farthing 2010).

The French political theorist Pierre Rosanvallon claims that a new democratic culture is emerging. He talks about counter-democracy, a term without connotations of being anti-democratic. Instead, counter-democracy is still democratic life, where the citizen as an elector is replaced by a citizen who monitors how the elected politicians or authorities are behaving. The idea is to ensure that democratic processes work not by participating in them, but by supervising, monitoring or judging the issues in hand. According to Rosanvallon, counter-democracy can be seen as an aspect of democratic life, which complements representative and deliberative processes (Rosanvallon 2008). By using the concept of counter-democracy, we wish to highlight that one can contribute to a democratic process by refusing to participate in the processes directly. Perhaps the idea is not only to oil the wheels of governance, but to occasionally throw a spanner in the works.

Methods of counter-democracy, such as demonstrations, exposures that spread in the Internet and other operations in the social media, legal and illegal methods of activism are also widely used by the young. For example, youth councils and the boards of student bodies use walkouts and demonstrations to deal with situations where their communication has not met with a response from decision makers. This indicates that the young may use different methods of political activism if their iterated demands and needs are not met.

Counter-democracy seems to be somewhat dependent on culture and political system. Finnish sociologist Eeva Luhtakallio conducted a comparative study on Finland and France. According to her, in Finland activists consider themselves citizens and approach their role as such. In France, activism is seen as political activity and as "being-in-the-world", not so much as a commitment to the political system (Luhtakallio 2010: 213-216). A nagging question behind all participation is how much it can remove inherent pluralism and antagonism (Mouffe 2005) in politics. Purely technical hearings would be about giving opinions about the ready-made agenda; participation is also about disagreeing, questioning, being antagonistic or monitoring the process.

➜ Instruments for promoting participation

In the first section, we analysed the ambiguous nature of democratic culture, and showed by examining different conceptions of democracy that democratic behaviour can mean voting, expressing will, participating at a local level, and interacting with others on matters of common good or resistance. All these different aspects point to the need to recognise the plurality of democracy. This section analyses international and local instruments for promoting and examining participation. Firstly, when measuring youth participatory activity, the rich variety of cultural, everyday participatory democracy is not recognised. The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) is analysed as an example of this. Secondly, questionnaires are used to gather information to support decision making, for example in the structured dialogue processes during EU presidencies, yet they fail to obtain information on youth with low social capital. This shows that in order to promote deliberation it should be ensured that all the concerned are able to contribute to the process. Thirdly, the communal urban planning of skate parks is used as an example to highlight the versatility of participatory processes. Based on this analysis, we state that there is an increasing need to recognise different

forms of democratic life and to respond to such versatility by creating mecha-
nisms that are based on qualitative, intensive promotion and research methods
involving groups and individuals.

Forgetting the rich variety of everyday participation

"The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) studied the
ways in which countries prepare their young people to undertake their roles
as citizens" (Schulz et al. 2010: 15). The aim of the ICCS study was to report
on student achievement in a test of conceptual knowledge and understanding
in civic and citizenship education. It also measured the political participation
related behaviours and behavioural intentions of young people. The ICCS gathered
survey data from more than 140 000 students at grade 8 (or equivalent), aged
approximately 14 years of age, in more than 5 300 schools in 38 countries. Also,
reports from principals or teachers from the schools were used in the analysis. The
ICCS documents the differences between countries in relation to a wide range of
different civic-related learning outcomes, actions and dispositions. It also docu-
ments differences in the relationship between the outcomes and characteristics
of countries, communities, schools, classrooms and aspects of students' personal
and social backgrounds in relation to the outcomes of civic and citizenship
education (Schulz et al. 2008; Schulz et al. 2010).

Earlier in this paper, the broad scope of democracy was introduced by using
five different frameworks for understanding democracy. Now we will show how
the understanding of different forms of democracy leads to a need to develop
the issues that arose in the ICCS. As noted earlier, one of the key ideas of par-
ticipatory democracy is repoliticising seemingly apolitical environments, such
as schools, work places, and so on. The ICCS included the research question
"What aspects of schools and education systems are related to achievement in
and attitudes to civics and citizenship?" (Schulz et al. 2008: 10). Several sets of
items were assumed to answer this question. For example, students were asked
to rate the extent – "large", "moderate," "small," "not at all" – to which their
opinions were taken into account in the decision-making process concerning:
classroom teaching methods; subjects taught; teaching and learning materials;
the timetable; classroom and school rules (Schulz et al. 2010: 164). From the
point of view of broad democracy, it is even more important to analyse how
young people are expected to influence decision making than the actual issues
they may or may not impact. Young people should have the opportunity to be
heard in school-related matters using various political instruments, either one at
a time or several simultaneously. The ICCS mainly concentrates on representa-
tive forms of participatory democracy like "voting for class representative or
school parliament" or "becoming a candidate for class representative or school
parliament" (Schulz et al. 2010: 135). According to our view, individual forms of
participatory democracy for all pupils, for example the opportunity to propose an
initiative, take part in inquiries and voting and co-operative planning processes
in the classroom, school and community, are missing from the ICCS framework.
At group level, even class meetings are missing.

As for the other democracy categories, deliberative forms of democracy like youth
juries and discussion days could also have been mentioned as an alternative. As one
overall form of participation in the wider community, the ICCS offers "participating
in peaceful protests against laws believed to be unjust" (Schulz et al. 2010: 95).
According to our knowledge, a mass walkout is a counter-democratic instrument
which pupils use in an attempt to impact school-related decision making.

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In the representative democracy category, it is favourable to ask school principals if there are student representatives in school-related committees of local authorities. In the direct democracy format, popular votes on school-related themes could be such an instrument depending on the age of the pupils and how low the voting age is in each country. By broadening the scope of democracy to include forms of political participation, which now are missing, it is possible to give credence to the development of real multiple participation opportunities for young people as such. The current focus is slightly more on the question of how actively young people participate, especially vote, when they become adults. The authors of the ICCS international report also concede that their framework requires further investigation (Schulz et al. 2010: 257). Of course it should be remembered, "… because the ICCS is an international study, the concrete and abstract concepts … are those that can be generalized across societies" (Schultz et al. 2008: 27). However, it must be added that such an assessment simultaneously generates information in guiding how democracy could develop.

The difficulty of reaching all the young

A questionnaire is a good data-gathering method for the ICCS, where a large amount and type of students answer the questionnaire in schools. The situation is different when a questionnaire is used as an information-gathering method for example in structured dialogue processes during EU presidencies. Structured dialogue can be seen as a manifestation of deliberative democracy. According to Jürgen Habermas, the success of deliberative processes is dependent on the quality of the procedures and conditions of communication. There should also be interplay between institutionalised processes and informal public opinions (Habermas 1996: 298).

According to the Council Resolution (2011/C 164/01), the objective of the structured dialogue is to involve a diverse range of young people and youth organisations in the consultations at all levels. The results of the national consultations in the form of national reports considered and compiled by the European Steering Committee are brought to the EU Youth Conferences. It is also said in the resolution that resulting from the nature of the process, young people living throughout the European Union had the opportunity to express their opinions and ideas during the same consultation phase on a common priority theme. According to the resolution, the involvement of young people with fewer opportunities in the process should be promoted (see Council of the European Union 2011). Also, according to the European Commission, "special attention should be given to young people with fewer opportunities. They must be an integral part of the dialogue, but, in parallel, receive special treatment taking into account the specificity of their problems and concerns" (European Commission 2008).

In the period from 1 January 2010 to 30 June 2011, youth employment was agreed by the Council to be the thematic priority in the structured dialogue process. In the "Compendium of the first cycle of the structured dialogue" (2011: 15) it is stated that: "As part of the dialogue process, on-line consultations and debates were organised with thousands of young people all over Europe." In the compendium it is stated that the national consultations together with the joint outcomes of the EU Youth Conferences and the discussions therein, had impacted "the Council Conclusions on promoting youth employment to achieve the Europe 2020 objectives" (see Council of the European Union 2012). Since it is not known who were the young people consulted at a national level, it might be supposed that such a system only stimulates answers from the most active young

people, even when data concerning the employment problems and experiences of young people with a variety of backgrounds are needed to plan European political processes effectively. This was the case also when the Finnish version of the "Youth Guarantee Model"[23] was planned. The methodology included using an open e-questionnaire (N = over 6 300) for gathering the opinions of young people beyond the reach of schools, training, workshops and rehabilitation. For instance, inequality was highlighted in the Finnish "Youth Guarantee" planning process, when the National Youth Council asked registered youth organisations to encourage their members to give their voice (thus effectively representing the voice of all youth) by completing online questionnaires, yet young people beyond the active membership were not activated to do so.

The structured dialogue as a genuine attempt to promote deliberative democracy shows that the success of deliberation (where all the relevant arguments and viewpoints are reflected) is at least partly based on how well different youth groups are reached. This in turn emphasises that there should exist different participatory mechanisms which would create conditions for co-operation. We argue that to be democratic in such cases, more qualitative and intensive participatory research methods involving group and individual contacts should be used in contacting young people living beyond many societal services.

Everyday politics: planning skate parks

As a last example, we will use a skateboarding area establishment process as an illustration of how young people are able to engage in their immediate local surroundings. Our idea is to recognise the blueprint of a good, democratic co-operation model that includes young people in the process of producing skate facilities for skateboarding, roller skating and kick scooters. The model is based on the experiences of skaters and municipal officers in ten Finnish local authorities (Gretschel et al. 2012). The example has inherent limitations, since the skateboarding culture tends to be urban and gender-biased. However, researching local contexts requires looking at specific cases. By using skateboarders we wish to highlight the difficulties in reacting to issue-based participation of the young and reacting to locally and culturally meaningful forms of youth participation. The aim is to look at how participatory, direct and counter-democracy processes combine at the level of local decision making. This so-called politics of the ordinary indicates that youth participation might be ad hoc and networks based, instead of structural and long term (Vromen and Collin 2010).

The skateboarding facility planning process revealed huge differences in how the needs of skateboarders (later skaters) were handled by the local administration. This is a telling example of how the administration is able to contribute to creating participatory mechanisms. In one town, a skaters' association was helped by the city's director of sport affairs to find a skate hall facility. In another town, the director did the opposite: he denigrated the skaters by describing them as possible vandals. Finally, in both cases skating premises were found. In the latter case, an interviewed activist stated that he had thought, "This is the last time I come to this office." The way the matter of skaters was handled in the latter case tarnished the ideal of good administration (see, for example, The European Ombudsman 2005).

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23. The Young Peoples' Social Guarantee Model is one of the Finnish Government's spearhead schemes. The objective of the scheme is to offer every under 25-year old and every under 30-year old a place of work, training, study, workshop or rehabilitation within three months of becoming unemployed (Ministry of the Employment and the Economy 2011; Ministry of Finance 2011: 20-21).

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It also thwarted the efforts made to encourage young people to participate. A group of active young people were not provided with the support to realise their initiative. This indicates that cultivating different forms of participation requires a change of attitude and working culture.

Democratic culture requires stable structures. These structures should also be flexible enough to respond to emerging, new forms of youth cultures. In particular, participatory and deliberative forms of democracy should not exclude different groups. In this regard, the democratic aspect of the process failed. People engaged in skating should have the same rights as those engaged in other hobbies. They should at least receive help if not investment from their local authority when establishing or improving facilities. The aim is not only to develop the level of democracy in planning and decision making, but also to lower the threshold for newcomers and potential new skaters to use the new area by also including their voice in the planning process. Moreover, it is also important to take into account gender-specific needs in planning processes. According to interviews, girl skaters often need lower threshold structures – even lower if they are new-comers to the scheme.

According to data collected in ten cities in Finland, skaters are involved in skate-facility planning processes nowadays. Lessons were learnt after building several unusable skating areas. Some of these were provided as ready-made packets thanks to the goodwill of donators. However, even though the level of co-operation with skaters has now deepened, the idea of collaboration with skaters with skating expertise is not carried through all the stages in the process. For example, mistakes have been made involving a critical few millimetres when asphalt was laid by the labourers. The unusable asphalt clearly displays that increased participatory and deliberative forms of democracy not only create better community, but also mean improved public services if everyday expertise is respected.

When analysing the scope of democracy in the above processes, it is possible to notice that the expert voice of skating often belongs to an older generation, to those who began their lifestyle several years or even decades ago. In Finland, such experts are often over 30-year-old males. They are the life and soul of reg-istered skating associations in the cities and at a national level. They are asked to participate in planning processes by the local authorities. However, it is often forgotten that non-sportive young people can also contribute a significant amount of expertise to the process. For example, young people are very aware of the social openness of the sports facilities in question. Although there clearly are different deliberative and participatory processes used in planning, they tend to be too narrow, particularly if the main potential users cannot be reached. To use Habermasian jargon, democratic opinion- and will-formation requires paying attention to different groups (Habermas 1996: 299). Working with established associations might be easy for the administration, but it does not fulfil the ideals of participatory or deliberative democracy, which aim at offering a substitute to the expert culture.

The quality maintenance of skating structures does not always depend on the economic situation of the city. Data collected in Finland indicates that skating areas are not maintained with the same intensity as other sports facilities in several cities. The city or municipal authority has a gatekeeper role in defining which sports opportunities are available at a local level – which of these receive investment, and which do not. Bodies of representative democracy may have

quite a traditional image of sport. Skateboarding is a manifestation of both youth and sport culture. In some cases, neither the youth nor sports department of a local authority takes the responsibility of skateboarding facility maintenance seriously. It can be observed that cities seem to have a significant amount of difficulty in reacting to needs arising from an increase in the amount of skate-boarders. Moreover, skaters' achievements often improve. However, it takes the local authority a considerable amount of time to develop the facilities' levels of difficulty. In contrast to cross-country ski tracks, wrestling rings or swimming pools, which have quite a stable profile in Finland, skate, parcour, snowboarding and trick-biking have continuously changing profiles. Local authorities should be sensitive to the characteristics of different sports. Skating as a sports and youth culture phenomenon provides a fruitful field of co-operation for municipal youth and sports departments. Skate areas could serve as versatile and unique oases of youth and sport culture. From an opposite perspective, many municipalities in Finland order ready-for-use from the same catalogue.

➔ Responding to multiplicity

The first two concrete examples mentioned above (the ICCS study and structured dialogue) are adult-led cases where the initiative and structures are given by adults. The skate example shows that there are occasions when young people themselves will propose an initiative. These are likely to be issue-based, short-term projects. As has been indicated, the difficulties in answering the call of the young show that political culture is not always willing or able to recognise the democratic opportunities such projects could generate.

The three examples above highlight a number of points. Firstly, the examples' forms of democracy do not use all the aspects of democratic life described in the first section. Secondly, the choice of democratic instruments tends to narrow the focus group. One of the most challenging tasks in avoiding polarising societies is to ensure that all voices are heard. It is particularly difficult to reach youth with low social capital and whose position in the labour market is fragile. Therefore it is vital that the failure of existing democratic mechanisms to reach a broad base of young people is recognised. And thirdly, short-term everyday politics should not be forgotten in local politics. The linking of such democratic behaviour to long-term processes requires a tangible interface between the different concepts of democracy. The points above indicate that the conception of democracy should be wide enough to cover all relevant aspects of democracy. This in turn could positively contribute to reaching more young people than at present.

The five conceptions of democracy indicate that democracy has both social dimensions (working together, participating, interacting, monitoring admin-istration) and individual dimensions (the decision to participate and speak out). Recently the Council of the European Union (2012) has invited all the member states to develop "an integrated approach similar to the 'youth guarantee' already developed in a number of Member States". In this article, we highlighted two examples (too infrequent structured dialogues, too open questionnaires to cover all types of young people) of how national or European planning of themes such as the "youth guarantee" should ensure to a certain extent that it is not only active young people who are empowered to take part in hearing processes organised to support decision making. We argue that to achieve democracy in these cases, more qualitative and intensive methods

involving direct group and individual contacts should be used to find young people who are beyond the reach of many societal services.

➜ Conclusion

At the beginning of our article, we observed that voting is often counted as the only relevant indicator of people's political activity. If this is the case, the analysis is based on an inadequate framework for understanding democracy. In a democratic society, agenda listing and theme prioritisation in decision-making processes should be based on an analysis of citizens' activity in different forms of democratic arenas. This requires considering different manifestations of democracy, highlighted in the different conceptions of the nature of democracy. We have argued that the question of apathetic and passive youth might be mis-guided because the nature of democracy from which the young are supposedly disengaged is not based on a wide understanding of democracy. Operating within narrow definitions not only generates a false image of the young, it might, in some cases, even prevent mechanisms for seeing youth and consequently block a fair response to their needs.

Recognising the pluralism of democracy and responding accordingly might raise the question why promoting participation would be a reasonable thing to do, given the time and effort required to meet the needs of the young. Arguments for promoting participation can be based on the developmental perspective (helping young people to learn democratic behaviour), service perspective (organising services more efficiently by listening to the actual users), democracy perspective (the more citizens are interested in common matters, the more likely they are to engage democratically), but they can also be based on a community perspective (the more groups feel they are accepted as legitimate members of a community, the safer, more comfortable and creative the community is likely to be). For these reasons, youth participation is not only about the young, it concerns all of us.

One strategy to deepen participation is to react to the shortcomings of a system that prevents some people from voting because of their age. The Council of Europe has emphasised the need to investigate the possibility of lowering the voting age to 16 years in all countries and in all types of elections (Council of Europe 2011). With a lower age of voting, the issues of those less than 18 years of age would be seen more in representative democracy, where the voice of young people is otherwise quite often missing. Another solution is to create a participatory democracy mechanism that mimics representational structures. For example, youth and school councils are forums where social capital and taking broader responsibility for common issues potentially accumulates through the experience and coaching these groups receive. While we feel that these solutions are necessary steps towards a more participatory future, we wish to point out that in addition, different types of solutions are needed. There is also a genuine fear of tokenism – that only a fraction of young people are represented and those that are not are likely to distance themselves even further from society.

In summary, the main consideration in improving democracy or engaging the young in democracy is to clarify the conception of democracy used. Democratic culture can take many forms. The question is not only how the needs of the young could be moulded to stimulate an interest in representational democracy, it is also how society could be reformed to create a culture of multiple voices with an emphasis on participation.

Challenging structured participation opportunities

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