Active citizenship 3.0/2020 – Youth participation and social capital after post-democracy

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➜ Criticism of and approaches to an ambivalent concept

The concept of participation has been depoliticised in the last few years and preference is often given to the term "engagement". The German Government's "engagement report" of autumn 2009, for example, may be regarded as the climax of this creeping depoliticisation of the concept of participation. In it, a new concept was introduced in order, supposedly, to avoid the dilemmas concerning the unsettled definitions, and the proposal was made to refer in future to "*Zivilengagement*" (civil engagement) (see also Priller et al. 2011). It was asserted that the term "*bürgerschaftliches engagement*" (citizen engagement) hitherto employed in Germany was too closely linked to contexts involving political participation and the perception and strengthening of democracy and that the fact that daily commitment to society produced important products and services of the welfare state was quickly overlooked (Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth – BMFSFJ 2009: 11).

As far as youth policy is concerned, the dilemma of the depoliticised concept of participation manifests itself in the excessive importance attached to

voluntary engagement, such as (international) voluntary services (see also, on this and what follows, Widmaier 2011b and 2011c). Even if democracy, in line with American pragmatism, can not only be seen as a form of government, but also as a social and life model (cf. Himmelmann 2001), the focus appears to have continually slipped in the last few years from the political goal and political core of democracy, as well as from youth policy. In terms of democratic theory, it may be a mistaken belief that young people's disenchantment with politics could be compensated for by an increase in social engagement.

This potential dilemma is also reflected in the discussions of democratic theory among political scientists. In an effort perhaps to make the political problem seem less significant than it is, reference is made in America to "engaged citizenship" (cf. for example Dalton 2006), in Germany to "citizen engagement" (*bürgerschaftliches engagement*) and in the European debate to "active citizenship". Even if it sounds paradoxical and is probably hardly intended by those involved in the debate, the continued uncritical and depoliticised view of engagement and participation could contribute to rather than prevent the further development of a post-democratic situation (cf. Crouch 2008).

The aim of the following contribution is to shed light on the European aspects of this debate on democratic theory, especially as far as youth policy is concerned. First of all, a number of important European statements of principle as well as research into issues of active citizenship and the associated challenges for civic and citizenship education are discussed. This is followed by a discussion and critical assessment of the theory of "social capital", which is the dominant paradigm in the debate on democratic theory. Finally, there is discussion of what these debates on democratic theory mean for youth policy and youth education, and an approach is outlined that, in addition to the importance of social capital, postulates the need for political capital.

Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education

To a large extent unnoticed by the political public, but also by political and educational experts – at any rate in Germany – the Council of Europe adopted in May 2010 a Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. After the disappearance of the Iron Curtain, the Council of Europe had already begun to extend the field of human rights education, which developed from its traditional mandate, and to turn its attention to "education for democratic citizenship" (EDC) (cf. Becker 2008 and 2012; Lösch 2009; Dürr 2011). The charter followed on from this and to some extent rounded off the efforts made over many years to focus more on civic education and learning democracy – that is, citizenship education.

The charter, which dates from 2010, defines education for democratic citizenship as:

> education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law.

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Human rights education is defined as:

> education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower learners to contribute to the building and defence of a universal culture of human rights in society, with a view to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Education for democratic citizenship and human rights education are described as being "closely inter-related and mutually supportive" and "(differing) in focus and scope rather than in goals and practices". The text goes on: "Education for democratic citizenship focuses primarily on democratic rights and responsibilities and active participation, in relation to the civic, political, social, economic, legal and cultural spheres of society, while human rights education is concerned with the broader spectrum of human rights and fundamental freedoms in every aspect of people's lives."

A glance at two practical consequences appears interesting. (1) A call is made for democratic principles actually to be experienced in order not only to learn, but also experience democracy and respect for human rights: "Effective learning in this area involves a wide range of stakeholders including policy makers, educational professionals, learners, parents, educational institutions, educational authorities, civil servants, non-governmental organisations, youth organisations, media and the general public." And the charter continues: "the governance of educational institutions, including schools, should reflect and promote human rights values and foster the empowerment and active participation of learners, educational staff and stakeholders, including parents". (2) Research on education for democratic citizenship and human rights education should be initiated and promoted in order "to take stock of the current situation in the area and to provide stakeholders including policy makers, educational institutions, school leaders, teachers, learners, non-governmental organisations and youth organisations with comparative information to help them measure and increase their effectiveness and efficiency and improve their practices" (Council of Europe 2010).

Civic skills and lifelong learning in the EU

In addition to the Council of Europe, the European Union has in the course of the last decade closely linked the subject of active citizenship to lifelong learning, that is further education in the broadest sense of the term. Already in the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (European Commission 2000) "employability" – namely qualification for and integration into the job market – and "active citizenship" were mentioned as the two central and (supposedly) identical aims of lifelong learning.

Later, the "twin terms" active citizenship and employability were given prominence in an EU document entitled "Key competences for lifelong learning" (European Commission/European Parliament 2006), which may be regarded as an important step on the way to the so-called European Qualifications Framework. In that document, key competences are described as those skills "which individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment" (Ibid: OJ L 394/13).

It is conspicuous that "active citizenship" is first mentioned in the English version and that the term is somewhat inaccurately translated into "*Bürgersinn*" (which equates more to "public spirit"). Just as the term "*Staatsbürger*" is often translated into "citizen" or "citizenship" in the documents referred to here, the term "*Bürgersinn*" is more appropriate for an uncritical, affirmative concept of citizenship. In a number of other statements, however, the language employed is more emancipatory, for example when it is stated that civic competence also involves "critical and creative reflection" (Ibid: OJ L 394/14).

"Civic competence equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation" (Ibid: OJ L 394/16). The document goes on:

> Civic competence is based on knowledge of the concepts of democracy, justice, equality, citizenship, and civil rights ... . Skills for civic competence relate to the ability to engage effectively with others in the public domain, and to display solidarity and interest in solving problems affecting the local and wider community. ... Constructive participation also involves civic activities, support for social diversity and cohesion and sustainable development (Ibid: OJ L 394/17).

Evidence studies and research on "active citizenship"

In 2005, the European Commission created with the Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning (CRELL) its own research institute to deal with issues relating to lifelong learning. In the same year, the centre began a research project together with the Council of Europe on "Active Citizenship for Democracy". This involved the interdisciplinary collaboration of an international team of academics and experts in the fields of education, political science and sociology. The key objective of the research undertaken by CRELL was the development of a so-called "Active Citizenship Composite Indicator", a policy consultation tool that enables the status and development of "active citizenship" to be measured and compared among European countries. The data from the 2002 European Social Survey were used as the empirical basis (cf. on this Widmaier 2011a).

Three documents in particular from the CRELL research need to be emphasised:
- "Measuring Active Citizenship in Europe" (Hoskins et al. 2006);
- "Measuring Civic Competences in Europe" (Barber et al. 2008);
- A summary entitled "The characterization of Active Citizenship in Europe" (Mascherini et al. 2009).

In particular "Measuring Civic Competences in Europe" raises the political-educational question "What were the learning outcomes required for an individual to become an active citizen?" The aim of the study, the text goes on, is to "(explore) the learning outcomes – referred to in this paper as civic competence – the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to enable individuals to become an active citizen" (Barber et al. 2008: 11).

CRELL plays an important, indeed decisive, role in the discussion of "active citizenship" in Europe. It was, for example, not only involved in the EU's Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, but makes its expertise available for the regular reports on "Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training". Both in those and in many other documents since then, the definition of "active citizenship" developed by CRELL has repeatedly been used. The

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following can therefore be more or less regarded as the official EU definition of "active citizenship":

> Participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy (Hoskins et al. 2006: 4; see also Hoskins et al. 2012: 17).

Since 2012, reference has also been made in the European debate to "participatory citizenship", although the debate as a whole continues to be driven by the individuals who are also responsible for the CRELL studies. Last year, the international research group, prominent members of which are Bryony Hoskins and David Kerr, published four reports on behalf of the European Commission under the title "Participatory Citizenship in the European Union" (see, *inter alia,* Hoskins et al. 2012). These reports once again summarised the debate on "active citizenship".

The dominant paradigm of social capital

In the context of democratic theory, this European discourse on "participatory citizenship", "active citizenship" and "education for democratic citizenship" is very much dominated by the American communitarian variant (Robert Putnam) of the theory of so-called "social capital". Robert Putnam is, for example, also one of the main reference authors in the aforementioned European Commission reports. In Report 1, which as a "context analysis report" sets out the foundations for the discussion, there are six references to Putnam (Hoskins et al. 2012: 9, 10, 3 x 11, 28).

There are a variety of reasons for these many references to Robert Putnam, but it can in the final analysis be said, albeit somewhat bluntly, that the social capital theory best fitted in with the (also European) zeitgeist of the 1990s. In the specialist literature of the English-speaking world, reference is made to a "culturally embedded concept" (Amna 2010: 193), which doubtless describes the matter quite well. The social capital theory evidently corresponds to a large extent to the development of political culture and the growing importance of civil society theories of democracy and ideas on governance (see Evers 2011) in the Western industrial countries in those years. The basic summary of the theory is as follows:

> People who play an active role in a club or association lead a happier life, have a larger circle of friends and tend to trust others and are physically and mentally healthier and more satisfied with themselves and their environment. ... However, a club or association produces direct democratic effects. ... These effects, which make the member of the club or association appear more competent and more democratic, may be described as the effects of a *school of democracy*, to quote de Tocqueville. Members of a club or association learn the high art of tolerance and peaceful and constructive discussions with people of different opinions and engage in political discourse (Rossteutscher 2009: 61ff.).

Apart from the fact that the advocates of this variant of social capital theory are consequently also referred to as neo-Tocquevillians, the social capital discourse contains numerous additional cross-references to important socio-political discussions of the 1990s. Related terms on which separate detailed social debates are/have been conducted are, for example, "civic engagement"

and "civil society" or the so-called "third sector" (in addition to the state and the economy) (see for example Zimmer 2002).

In democratic theory, the political science terms "strong democracy" (Benjamin Barber), "participatory democracy" or "associative democracy" are closely linked to Putnam's social capital theory, and in political theory and political philosophy the communitarianism debate is closely connected to the social capital theory. Robert Putnam is regarded as "America's model communitarian" (Braun 2002: 6).

Putnam has also played a significant part in shaping the image of the European citizen and the belief in "the benevolent consequences of civil society and social capital for the functioning of democracy" in European politics (van Deth 2009: 177). The strong orientation towards the civil society image of the citizen played a key role as early as the CRELL study entitled "Measuring Active Citizenship" (Hoskins et al. 2006: 9), but it also becomes clear in the current "Participatory Citizenship" report, which states with reference to Putnam that "the quality of democratic governance relies on the civic virtues and engagement of their citizens" (Hoskins et al. 2012: 9). And, with reference to Benjamin Barber (!), it goes on to say: "The result therefore is a shift in the understanding of citizenship to be more than just a legal concept and now to include one of individual involvement in participatory democracy, with a greater focus on citizens' involvement in decision making, particularly policy development" (Hoskins et al. 2012).

In social capital theory, it is assumed that active social participation in clubs and associations teaches fundamental social skills. "Once such skills and abilities are acquired, they can be turned into political capital at any time" (Rossteutscher 2009: 165). This to some extent automatic development of social and civic engagement towards active political citizenship as the basis of a strong democracy is also referred to in political science as a "spill-over hypothesis" (see for a critical assessment Hüller 2006: 10f.). The fact that the spill-over hypothesis is also/has also been supported at the European level may be illustrated by taking the example of a statement by the European Economic and Social Committee on "Voluntary activity, its role in European society and its impact". Here, too, there is once again a reference to Putnam. The statement reads, *inter alia*:

> Voluntary activity is inextricably linked with active citizenship, which is the cornerstone of democracy at local and European level. ... suitable approach, illustrated in research work on civil society (for example, Putnam, 2000), is "social capital", to which voluntary activity makes a significant contribution (European Economic and Social Committee 2006: 4, 11).

Deconstruction of the social capital theory

Robert Putnam further developed his social capital theory when critics pointed out to him that extremist groups, for example, could be regarded as civil society associations. He therefore subsequently divided the social capital generated into "bonding social capital" and "bridging social capital". Clubs and associations can accordingly mainly exert a positive influence on the development of a democratic society when they are prepared to permit a certain heterogeneity of their members and have the effect of integrating people (bridging) and not shutting them out (bonding). This places very high demands on the – at any rate in Germany – generally very homogeneous system of clubs and associations and on compliance with reciprocity standards in relations between their members (see on this Zmerli 2011: 32f.).

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In German contributions to the debate, it was possible early on to sense a more detached relationship with the social capital theory. Claus Offe, for example, points out that the quality of a democracy is "not only determined by the level of civic willingness to become involved and the amount of social capital. Rather, the state's legal and institutional structures and the principle of citizenship on which they are based ... play an independent and at least equally important role" (Offe 2001: 492). Sebastian Braun noted early on that civil society must be further strengthened by "the active responsibility of elites to ensure social justice" (Braun 2002: 11). Roland Roth points out that the democratisation of liberal democracies ... requires new institutional forms and ... cannot be limited to invoking civil society (Roth 2004: 58). And Sigrid Rossteutscher states that societies have historically been and are also today confronted by undemocratic associations (bonding social capital!). Using a simple cause-effect model, she shows that, although voluntary involvement in clubs and associations can – on the positive side – generate a democratic political culture, it is equally possible – on the negative side – that an "undemocratic civil culture" will have an impact on an anti-democratic self-conception of clubs and associations (cf. Rossteutscher 2008). Sandra Seubert warns, at the end of a very detailed examination of the concept in terms of democratic theory, against "celebrating social capital unconditionally as the resource that, if looked after and fostered, ... will help to overcome the problems of democracy" (Seubert 2009: 267).

Most recently, the German debate on "bad civil society" has also had an impact on the discussion on the aims and tasks of civic education – that is, including the objectives of education for democratic citizenship. At the same time, it is made clear with reference to contrary historical experience (such as the extensive involvement in clubs and associations in Germany in the Weimar Republic before the outbreak of fascism) that a properly functioning civil society cannot provide a guarantee of strong democracy on its own (Klatt 2012: 7f.).

Cultural embeddedness and normative reflexivity or reciprocity accordingly appear to be crucially important for assessing the positive or negative social effect of clubs and associations. It may therefore be doubted that sports clubs (the most important youth associations in Europe; cf. Schild 2013) are somehow automatically "schools of democracy". Lotte Rose has pointed out that, fully reflecting the language of globalised neoliberal capitalism, reference is made in children's and youth sports today to the human body as a "capital resource", to the promotion of "the development of biographical capital", to "performance models" and individual "competitive advantages" that children (!) and young people can already acquire through sport in their young years. According to Rose, young people's membership of a sports club is subject to "relatively stringent market laws". In addition, sports clubs quite clearly find it difficult to cultivate a liberal democratic educational style: in sports education, a high degree of "authoritarian behaviour coupled with drill elements can still be found" (Rose 2004: 430).

The references to Putnam and his theory of social capital are now no longer as euphoric in European documents on active citizenship as they once were. In contrast to the introduction to the first CRELL study (Hoskins et al. 2006), the introduction to one of the more recent CRELL documents (Mascherini et al. 2009) states:

> As can be seen within this definition [*cf. the above definition of "active citizenship", B.Wi.*], active citizenship incorporates a wide spread of participatory activities … However, and in our view correctly, action alone is not considered

active citizenship, the examples of Nazi Germany or Communist Europe can show mass participation without necessarily democratic or beneficial consequences. Instead participation is incorporated with democratic values, mutual respect and human rights. Thus what we are attempting to measure is value based participation. The difference between this concept and social capital is that the emphasis is placed on the social outcomes of democracy and social cohesion and not on the benefits to the individual from participation (Mascherini et al. 2009: 10).

The effect on political-educational theory and practice

The European debates and academic publications, especially on active citizenship, have, in Germany at any rate, only rarely been picked up on and discussed in the (youth-) educational professions up to now. On the other hand, the adoption of the theory of "social capital" plays a not insignificant role in the controversy between a supposedly "new" education for democracy and "old" civic education.

The impetus for discussion on active citizenship in Germany mainly came from the field of non-formal civic education outside the classroom. For example, in 2009 the Haus am Maiberg Academy for Civic and Social Education held a since well-documented conference entitled Active Citizenship and Citizenship Education (Widmaier and Nonnenmacher 2011), at which supranational European ideas on citizenship education and country comparisons of civic education were presented and an attempt made to place them in the national discourse on the teaching of civics.

Between 2009 and 2011, the so-called Researcher-Practitioner Dialogue for International Youth Work (RPD) carried out a research project and submitted an expert report on the subject of active citizenship (Brixius 2010). The report mainly presents and discusses the extensive collection of Council of Europe, European Commission and CRELL publications and makes them accessible by providing links to the expert community, thus creating an initial basis for their possible further dissemination. The RPD project ended in March 2011 with a specialist conference organised by the German Agency for the EU's Youth in Action programme and other international youth work organisers. As active citizenship is one of that programme's major funding priorities, the German Agency is one of the most important German institutions with a significant interest in the subject (cf. Müller 2011).

The strong influence of the theory of "social capital" on the learning of democracy has been recently described and discussed by a number of social scientists at the German Youth Institute (DJI) (Gaiser et al. 2009; Gaiser and de Rijke 2010; de Rijke et al. 2010). With the empirical data of the DJI Youth Survey, they have reached the conclusion that:

> the central thesis that clubs and associations are "schools of democracy" is only weakly confirmed. Although their effects among individuals actively involved in clubs and associations are found to be more pronounced in all three aspects of democratic-civic orientation [*the idea of democracy, social trust, political skill, B.Wi.*], those effects are much less pronounced than anyone who strongly supports the thesis could have expected (de Rijke et al. 2010: 40).

In educational practice, ideas, concepts and methods based on the theory of "social capital" and the Education for Democratic Citizenship project initiated

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by the Council of Europe have mainly become known in Germany through the "Learning and Experiencing Democracy" programme of the Federal and State Commission for Educational Planning and Promotion of Research (BLK-Programm, www.blk-demokratie.de). It is not entirely coincidental that Anne Sliwka, who played an important role with regard to the implementation of the practice in English-speaking countries (for example, service learning) in connection with the BLK programme, also refers to "education for democracy as civic education" (*Demokratiepädagogik als Bürgerbildung*) (Sliwka 2008: 20f.). The concept of service learning popularised in Germany in this context has, on the other hand, been criticised from the point of view of the objective of civic and citizenship education because, it is claimed, it essentially involves social learning with no consideration of politico-structural problems (cf. Nonnenmacher 2009: 277f.; and now also individual papers in Hedtke and Zimenkova 2013).

The fact that "European citizenship education" is a concept of education for democracy – that is, it involves an approach based on social learning and the formation of a democratic disposition – rather than political education (in the broad sense of the German term "*politische Bildung*") is also criticised by Bettina Lösch, who calls for educators "to work with a more subtly differentiated concept of democracy that refers to the opportunities, conditions and problems of democracy" (Lösch 2009: 854).

So far, three facts in particular may be pointed out in an initial interim assessment: (1) in the documents of both the Council of Europe and the European Union, an extremely close link is established between education for democratic citizenship/citizenship education, human rights education and active citizenship; (2) in the context of European citizenship education, active citizenship is primarily understood as civic engagement in civil society, even if political participation in the narrower sense is not excluded; (3) the strong link to the communitarian theory of social capital reinforces the trend towards a depoliticised concept of the citizen and the relevant concepts of citizenship education. For civic education in the narrower sense, this means a challenge to reduce European theory and practice, which is more oriented towards education for democracy, to a political understanding of participation and to develop and test models in which both approaches are productively linked together (for a current discussion of this, cf. Hedtke and Zimenkova 2013).

Active political citizenship as a challenge of post democracy

The proliferation of ideas for activating citizens at the very time when political scientists are speaking of post-democratic developments in the Western industrial states (cf. Crouch 2008) is not anachronistic but logical since the aim is to counter a rising disaffection with the established political process and an increase in complexity resulting from international developments (Europeanisation and globalisation).

However, studies so far show that there are no magic recipes for activating citizens. For youth policy and youth work, however, taking a critical look at the dark sides of civil society is a big challenge. The differences between social engagement and social learning on the one hand and political participation and political learning on the other make it clear that the preservation and development of democracy will only be possible with both social learning and citizenship education. Both fields of learning complement and build on one another and a democratic society capable of meeting future challenges needs both social and political capital.

Ultimately, political participation is the fundamental principle of democratic politics (see on this Widmaier 2011b) since it is only through political participation that citizens are given a share of power and government. This key correlation is crucially important, especially in the European political context, because, as experience shows, the disenchantment of citizens with the political process is still much greater at the international level – this also applies to the objective of a cosmopolitan world citizenship (cf. Widmaier 2012a) – than in the case of domestic politics. Cross-border political learning projects, such as the "Learning Active Politics Laboratories" (Transnational LAP Labs) proposed by a working group at the Global Youth in 2020 conference held in Germany by the Federal Youth Ministry (Widmaier 2009), should therefore continue to gain in importance (cf. also Widmaier 2012b).

Learning active politics means above all that political issues in the narrower sense should be made more clearly the focus of discussion in the context of international youth meetings, international voluntary services and international school exchanges. International meetings and experience basically already constitute political experience, but they are only perceived as political by young participants when this is actually planned and discussed from the educational point of view. This presupposes that educators first see themselves as political actors in international youth work. Moreover, they need the relevant qualifications and a critical attitude to all issues relating to active citizenship and participatory citizenship. Opportunities to gain qualifications already exist, for example in the form of a curriculum for European citizenship training courses. However, individuals engaged in this field describe their work as a "drop in the ocean" (Schild 2013: especially 31). Furthermore, there should be a self-critical examination of the assertion currently made that "the dominant idea of the uniformity of an education for active citizens' participation in Europe restrains authorities of citizenship education from reflecting on their own relevant conceptions of state, democracy, citizenship and participation and from thinking about their specific goals of citizenship education" (Hedtke and Zimenkova 2013: 225).

Overall, we have up to now had little practical and reflected experience with "learning active politics" in international youth work, and it is not entirely coincidental that this experience originates from institutions in which international youth work is "understood and practised as civic education" (Schwieren and Götz 2011: 161). A critical look at such international meetings with young people who are already involved in the work of youth councils or youth parliaments must initially produce an ambivalent result. On the one hand, success has been achieved in creating motivation for new engagement and in promoting the idea of political youth representation in the participating countries, such as Bulgaria. On the other hand, however, it has become clear how hard young people find it to understand their clearly political engagement as actually political, because their disenchantment with the political system and the established political process seems too great for them to do so. Young people can clearly hardly draw on their own positive experience with politics and political self-efficacy, so access to politics in the narrower sense is mainly possible through sustained educational assistance and support. Such assistance and support is also unavoidable in order to ensure the sustainability, and therefore effectiveness, of youth participation. Young people's worlds are so dynamic today and the demands with regard to mobility so great that a permanent political youth forum beyond action-based forms of participation can in many cases only be assured by providing educational assistance. Not unsurprisingly, this becomes clear with initial experience with "learning active politics" (see Schwieren and Götz 2011: 161-170).

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However, what "learning active politics" precisely means in conceptual terms will need to be further developed in the coming years – and 2020 is a good target to aim for. In non-formal youth education, experience has been gained based on ideas discussed at the aforementioned Global Youth in 2020 conference (Schwieren and Götz 2011). Nonetheless, it has become apparent, especially in Germany, that political participation in the narrower sense – that is, "participatory/active citizenship" as understood in the European debates – is encountering strong reservations as a practical objective in formal education. First and foremost, schoolteachers do not regard it as their task to prepare young people for active participation in political life by means of practical training approaches and prefer to speak of "cognitive mobilisation". In their opinion, the individual decision in favour of active participation should be left to the young people themselves (for a current discussion, see for example Scherb 2012: 94ff.).

Here, the European debate, and especially the wide-ranging demands of the Council of Europe's Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, promises to provide a tailwind for a more open national debate – no doubt not only in Germany. It can therefore only be hoped that the call for democratisation at all levels (school and education policy, NGOs and civil society, education and youth research and, last but not least, the field of politics) is taken up and that, in particular, non-formal youth education exploits the European tailwind for the further development of education for democratic citizenship. In their latest study, Hedtke and Zimenkova conclude that further critical research on this subject is unavoidable (Hedtke and Zimenkova 2013: 236). However, I do not agree with their closing argument that it "could ... be wiser to leave aside enthusiastic participation approaches" (p. 237). Participation is the principle and cornerstone of democracy, including in post-democratic times of crisis, so there is little sense in talking it down as the aim of citizenship education.

A picture painted of young people in Europe who have not only recognised but also actively make use of the opportunities provided by new means of democratic governance can be seen as both a utopian dream and a hope for 2020. To exploit those opportunities, young people possess skills and knowledge of society and politics and act in accordance with their own well-considered critical judgment based on the public interest. The preconditions for this have at any rate been created and the political will also seems to exist.

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