Reflection Group on
YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Revisiting youth participation: current challenges, priorities and recommendations

CONTENT

Introduction

Despite the fact that there are numerous political and research documents, as well as good practice examples, it seems to be important and yet quite difficult to keep track of the state of affairs in the reflections and discussions on youth participation. The EU-CoE youth partnership has therefore focused on the topic of youth participation in its work in 2014. This effort allows following up on the work done by both partner institutions, in the political arena but as well in the research field.

The EU-CoE youth partnership aimed at deepening the reflections on youth participation while continuing the activities carried out so far, particularly in the 2013-14 work plan (e.g. the symposium 'The Current Crisis and Youth – Impact and Ways Forward', Strasbourg, February 2013; the conference 'Youth in 2020', Budapest, October 2013; the youth policy symposium with EECA countries on the 'Role of youth work in education for democratic citizenship and participation', Yerevan, November 2013; the seminar 'Youth and Citizenship – focus on youth participation', Jordan, November 2013; the seminar on youth participation in the Eastern Europe and Caucasus context in Chisinau, Moldova, October 2014).

Following a first gathering of facts and figures by a smaller group of experts in spring 2014 three analytical papers were commissioned, on the questions "Why Participation?", "What is Participation?" and "How is Participation learned?". These draft papers were discussed in a larger reflection group meeting in July 2014. All the reflections and discussions have been documented and collected by Serdar M. Değirmencioğlu, rapporteur of the reflection group and later edited by the EU-CoE youth partnership team. The results are presented in this document, inviting policy makers, practitioners and researchers to continue promoting participation of young people in all spheres of their lives[1].

The EU-CoE youth partnership team

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[1] Unsurprisingly, the results (and recommendations) of the Multilateral Co-operation Project (MCP) "Participation of young people in the democratic Europe" are quite similar to the findings of the EU-CoE youth partnership reflection group on youth participation. MCP presented its results of the 18 months peer learning process of five countries (DE, IL, LT, PL, UK) as well in summer 2014, at the same time when the EU-CoE youth partnership reflection group met. In their next steps both projects worked on joint recommendations, which were further discussed and qualified during the "Hear my voice!" conference in Brussels, October 2014. These recommendations will be published in a separate document.

1. Executive summary of discussions in the reflection group on youth participation

> *Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society[2].*

Participation is an essential, if not the most important, principle for democracies. European institutions and their member states as well as non-governmental organisations have repeatedly emphasised the importance of youth participation to foster young people's active citizenship, enhance their integration and inclusion and strengthen their contribution to the development of democracy. Active participation of young people in decisions and actions at all levels is essential in order to build more democratic, more inclusive and more prosperous societies.

Young people are not "citizens-in-training", a role where they are often pushed back by education and political institutions. They are actors of today's democracy. Young people have in many ways taken the leading role in initiatives and movements that proclaim the urgent need to deepen and expand democracy. Young people are not 'victims' or 'problems' as often claimed, but diverse and critical stakeholders in democracy.

Participation 'paradox'

There appears to be a 'paradox' with youth participation: voting turnout, membership in political parties, interest in politics and trust in political institutions are in decline, especially among youth. Only 37% of young people did vote in national elections[3], far more than any other age category. Concerns about youth grew following the 2014 European parliament elections, given the low turnout among young voters in many countries and the high vote for far right and /or Eurosceptic parties.

However, research evidence indicates that young people are far from apathetic but are actors of today's democracy and participate mostly in non-conventional ways. The problem, therefore, is with an over-simplified conception of political participation – one that focuses exclusively on conventional politics and doesn't see the many other forms of youth participation.

Diversity and change

Cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic diversity have always been important principles for (European) youth policies. Youth in Europe are now far more diverse. The Council of Europe and the European Union have completed several rounds of enlargement, vastly expanding their borders and (young) population. Globalization and an ever-expanding virtual world are generating further diversity. A domain where diversity appears to be particularly important is youth participation.

With increasing diversity, it is even more necessary to expand the concept of participation and democratic citizenship beyond conventional forms of representative democracy. There is more

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[2] Revised European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life, 2003
[3] 2010 Eurobarometer survey

to democracy than formal institutions and there is more to political participation than voting and supporting parties.

It is also necessary to improve mutual understanding of institutions and youth on participation, where a major challenge lies in the wide gap between what institutions and what most young people mean by participation. Finally, it is important to link participation to empowerment and agency, particularly for marginalised youth.

Diverse reasons – diverse forms

The increasing diversity in youth participation requires an understanding of not only the political system but also societal conditions in Europe. Various phenomena such as migration and mobility, consumerism and individualisation, economic crises are introducing new challenges. Youth in Europe now experience local and global simultaneously, which allows for global commitments often at the expense of involvement in local or regional affairs. Individuation in consumer societies often results in an exaggerated emphasis on the self and loosening of community ties. Participation often serves as a means for self-expression and conscious consuming, expressing opinions with T-shirts, badges or bags, and with online methods made visible in social online networks gain popularity. Voting is not visible: the secrecy of a ballot is just the opposite of self-expression. Thus, it is important to recognise the diverse reasons underlying new forms of youth participation in order to generate youth policies.

Learning opportunities

Youth learn about participation through participation. However, learning participation is facilitated when opportunities for participation are available, when there is support to develop skills for participation, and when obstacles to participation are reduced. Young people learn about democracy and participation in formal education, such as schools, and through non-formal education, in local youth clubs and civic organizations, and through participation in local and regional youth councils and parliaments. Moreover, they also learn informally to participate while experiencing participation in diverse youth work settings and practices.

It is necessary to equip educators (both in formal and non-formal settings) with the capacities for developing and implementing processes that encourage the learner's ability to develop motivation and competences for participation. It is also important to explore the potential of democratic and participatory pedagogies both in formal and non-formal settings so as to allow exploration of the interest and initial knowledge of learners, critical questioning of what is being learned, application of what is learned to the learners' environment and further exploration.

Increasing Knowledge and Understanding

Research is essential to inform youth policies and youth work practice. It is clear that research is needed to better understand new forms of youth participation (particularly political and online participation) and to improve knowledge on the diverse ways through which participation is learned and experienced, and their impact on learners including on synergies between formal and non-formal environments for the promotion of participation. Research is also essential to document and disseminate better practice. In disseminating knowledge on youth participation to policy makers and youth, knowledge should be presented in an accessible manner and the added (political) value of participation should be underscored.

Revisiting youth participation

Current challenges, priorities and recommendations

Participation 'is widely regarded an essential, if not the most important, principle of the democracies of our time, and European institutions and organisations have repeatedly emphasised the importance of youth participation to foster young people's active citizenship, enhance their integration and inclusion and strengthen their contribution to the development of democracy.'[4]

Active participation of young people in decisions and actions at local and regional level is essential in order to build more democratic, more inclusive and more prosperous societies.

> *Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.[5]*

It is important that participation is conceived not as a "yes-or-no", "either-or" matter but as a dynamic ongoing process. When conceived as an ongoing process, participation can be best described as a series of opportunities. To employ a metaphor, participation is best understood as open public space – one that offers a process of opportunities rather than a series of obligations in the conventional sense. In this context, participation can be seen as a platform for exercising active citizenship. Participation provides an opportunity to appreciate and exercise democracy, and build a sense of public responsibility and ownership.[6]

Participation as a process

The concept of agency is essential to understanding participation as a lifelong process. Agency implies an active individual, one who desires, makes plans, and carries out actions. Education, for instance, cannot happen without the voluntary participation of the learner. The importance of agency cannot be overstated. Even at the earliest hours of life, an individual displays agency so that his/her needs are met. From an evolutionary and comparative perspective, survival is not possible without the agency of the individual. From an anthropological perspective, agency is expected from each individual across cultures, societies, and time. From a sociological perspective, an individual is expected to display agency to fit in a given society, in its social structures and social life. Social services are always designed with the assumption that an individual seeks services when necessary.

In this sense, participation is a dynamic process that involves, ideally, the fit between a young person's agency in a given social environment. Some contexts require or allow more agency or participation, and therefore the degree of participation varies according to context. As noted above, participation begins early in life and is perhaps best illustrated in children's play activity. Children's engagement in play is voluntary, continuous, unmediated and authentic, and fosters genuine learning.

Play activity is also the context where feelings of inclusion vs. exclusion emerge. When children feel that they are unable to participate in play, a feeling of exclusion follows. As children age, feelings of inclusion/exclusion are also connected to perceived efficacy – the degree to which an individual feels he or she is able to participate, be heard, be an active part of the ongoing activity, and have a degree of control and influence over decision-making. Participation without a feeling of control and influence often leads to feelings of exclusion and to less motivation to participate.

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[4] European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy > Youth policy topics > Citizenship, participation and information.
[5] Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, 2003.
[6] Williamson, 2002.

In this sense, participation involves a sheer sense of inclusion coupled with a feeling or perception of influence (i.e., capacity to make a difference). From an analytical standpoint, the key process in participation is decision-making and the key concept is influencing decisions. What follows as the key feeling is a sense of efficacy. Because participation is an ongoing process, there needs to be an emphasis on continuity: participation applies to decisions, their application, evaluation, and re-design.

In this perspective, participation is not only an essential principle of democracy but also an inherent process in daily life beginning at an early age. Moreover, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* identifies participation as an inalienable right for all children.[7] That is, young people have a right to participate in decisions that affect them at an early age and this is an inalienable right.

In short, participation is an integral process in daily life and it is important from psychological, sociological, anthropological, historical as well as political and legal vantage points. Participation offers an ongoing process of opportunities for inclusion, active citizenship, public responsibility and ownership, and a platform for appreciating, exercising and enhancing democracy.

The issue

Youth participation is a priority topic for European youth policies. In view of changing realities and the economic upheavals that encompasses political and cultural dimensions, it is a popular belief that young people are disengaging from democratic and civic behaviour. Many young people seem to be disillusioned; some behave in undemocratic, xenophobic and discriminatory ways while others look for nothing but their own professional careers. However, this is only one side of the medal. Even if young people may be more distant to traditional, conventional forms of democratic engagement, in nearly all political and civic movements over the last decade they played a prominent role; some of these movements led to quite radical political changes.

Recent studies show that the democratic values are still strong and that young people's participation in political processes continues though in different and new ways, e.g. through signing petitions, conscious consumerism, dressing up, graffiti, making verbal and visual statements online and in social media, but as well in flash mobs and street performances, stunts, protest, demonstrations and sometimes riots. Young people engage in different forms of democratic activities that respond to their own understanding of democracy and citizenship and find different ways of making their voices heard.

These findings are shared by the report of the *Congress on 'Youth and Democracy'* (2012), the European Commission's Youth Report (2012)[8], the final report of the study "*Youth Participation in Democratic Life*" (LSE 2013)[9] as well as the replies of EU Member States to the questionnaires used for the European Youth Report analysed by the EU-CoE youth partnership.

But the debate is not only about participation in democratic life and in representative political structures. It is also about the questions on how marginalized young people do in terms of social inclusion, how they can actively participate in education, employment and society at large and how they can manage their transition to adulthood and to an autonomous life. It is also about ensuring that all young people have an equal access to well-being and can participate in all spheres of their lives.

Some elements for discussion can be grouped around the study of Eurofound '*NEETs - Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe*'

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[7] When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account, in accordance with their level of maturity. (Article 12 - Respect for the views of the child). Children also have the right to meet together and to join groups and organisations. (Article 15 - Freedom of association). http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf.

[8] http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/reports/eu-youth-report-2012_en.pdf.

[9] http://www.lse.ac.uk/businessAndConsultancy/LSEEnterprise/pdf/YouthParticipationDemocraticLife.pdf.

(2012)[10], which aims at investigating the current situation of young people in Europe, focusing specifically on those who are not in employment, education or training, and understanding the economic and social consequences of their disengagement from the labour market and education.

Consequently, Member States and European institutions need to identify which forms of participation meet the demands of young people and provide them with diverse forms of support. Adequate structures, tools and methods are needed for this to happen. This concerns for instance the use of social media and information and communication technologies ('e-participation'), but not exclusively. Also youth work is invited to develop new approaches and ideas to find adequate answers to the questions raised. A recently published study, titled '*Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union*' provides some insights in this regard by highlighting the impact of youth work for young people for their personal development (self-determination, self-confidence, self-esteem, socialisation) and their participation and social inclusion.

Background

Youth participation has been largely and increasingly discussed over the last 40 years. Creation of youth related activities in the Council of Europe and then the European community, the adoption in 1992 of the '*European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*'[11], then in 2001 of the European Commission White Paper '*A new impetus for European Youth*'[12], and more recently in 2007 of the Communication '*Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society*'[13] are but a few stepping stones in this process.

The European Union and the Council of Europe both evoke youth participation as a priority in their respective youth policy documents, the *EU Youth Strategy and Agenda 2020*. Many more political and other initiatives in both institutions as well as their member states have been undertaken. Other players in the youth field, particularly youth NGOs and the research community, also played a pivotal role in making the subject of youth participation a key topic and priority of European youth policies.

The strong institutional commitments to promote youth participation in Europe also constitute an effort to address the widening gap between the quite dramatic decline in voting turnout and diminishing participation in formal political institutions, on the one hand, and generally high interest of young people in politics, resulting in shifting and novel patterns of political engagement, on the other hand. These two opposite trends are illustrated further by the paradox that, while public arenas for youth involvement appear to be more numerous than ever before, few would claim that these opportunities have amplified the participation of young people.

Youth participation in the Council of Europe[14]

Youth participation has been a central issue to the youth policy of the Council of Europe, expressed in the slogans "*working for and with young people*" or "*nothing about us without us*". It finds a formal dimension in the principle of co-management with decision-making shared equally between government officials and representatives of youth organisations. Thus participation is at the same time a goal, a principle and a practice in the work and philosophy of the youth sector of the Council of Europe. One of its purposes is to provide a specific contribution to the objectives of the organisation (Human Rights, Rule of Law and Democracy) and its capacity to develop appropriate responses to new situations and challenges.

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[10] http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2012/54/en/1/EF1254EN.pdf.

[11] Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, forerunner to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

[12] http://eryica.org/files/EC_White%20Paper%20on%20Youth_2001_EN.pdf.

[13] http://ec.europa.eu/health/mental_health/eu_compass/policy_recommendations_declarations/com2007_en.pdf.

[14] For further reading see: „The Council of Europe and youth – Thirty years of experience" by Laurence Eberhard (2002).

In the early 1970s, when the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg and the European Youth Foundation were established, youth policy needed to find comprehensive and integrated strategies to the problems young people were facing. It is stated in the final text of the 2nd World Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth of the Council of Europe (1988): 'participation is more than involvement in institutions and decision-making. Participation is a pattern of how one lives in a democracy; it is relevant to work, housing, leisure, education and social relations'. In the same year, the Committee of Ministers adopted a report on 'Participation as a means of integrating young people at risk into society'. In 1992 and as a prelude to the "*European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life*", the Council of Europe's Congress underlined that youth participation required a strong commitment to build a culture where young people are able to contribute in valuable and meaningful ways. The Charter was revised in 2003 taking into account new challenges faced by young people in today's societies and following a reflection, initiated in 1999, on new forms of participation.

The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in its Resolution (98) 6 on the Youth Policy of the Council of Europe (1998) stated that 'to encourage young people's participation in civil society was among the policy objectives and stipulated that the encouragement of new forms of youth participation and organization was one of its priorities'.

In its Resolution Res(2003)7 the Committee of Ministers reiterated that 'empowering young people to play an active role in the strengthening of civil society in Europe was one of the policy objectives. It also named participation and democratic citizenship of young people, as one of the thematic priorities for the years ahead, with special emphasis on, among others: young people's participation in and access to democratic institutions and processes, in particular those from disadvantaged and minority groups; the reduction of barriers to youth participation, at local, regional, national and European levels; the establishment and proper functioning of democratic youth bodies representing young people and non-governmental youth organisations, at local, regional and national levels'.

Today's youth policy of the youth sector in the Council of Europe is based on the Declaration of the 8th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth which took place in Kyiv, Ukraine, in 2008: '*The future of the Council of Europe youth policy: AGENDA 2020*". Under the heading "Human rights and democracy" ministers regard as a key priority to promote "young people's active participation in democratic processes and structures and equal opportunities for the participation of all young people in all aspects of their everyday lives'.

As a consequence of the above mentioned documents youth participation is a key topic in the work programme of the Council of Europe youth sector, particularly by promoting the participation of young people and children at local, regional and national levels and by empowering young people from vulnerable groups and enhancing their participation through education and youth work.

In addition to the above-mentioned processes, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has recently strengthened its activities around the topic of participation and made citizen participation a priority for 2013-2016. In 2012 the Congress published the report '*Youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement*'; it shows that contrary to popular belief young people have not disengaged from democratic engagement but they participate differently.

In view of emerging new forms of participation a new report is now envisaged which will take a different look at youth participation and explore how local and regional authorities can engage with young people and promote their participation beyond the traditional models of youth councils.

Youth participation in the European Union

After having made youth participation a key topic in the already mentioned White Paper '*A new impetus for European Youth*' (2001) and having developed a broad concept of youth consultations on topics that concern young people, the European Commission broadened its understanding of youth

participation and orientate itself towards a concept of a knowledge-based, cross-sectorial and participatory youth policy, which represents today's understanding of youth policy in the European Union discourses.

Already earlier the European Commission has been prioritizing the promotion of active European citizenship and participation in its non-formal learning programmes, starting with the Youth for Europe programme in 1989 (1989-1999), YOUTH (2000-2006), Youth in Action (2007-2013) and now Erasmus+ Youth (2014-2010).

In 2006, the European Commission adopted a communication on active European citizenship of young people, COM(2006) 147 final to promote a structured dialogue with young people.

Further, the European Commission adopted in 2007 a communication '*Promoting Young People's Full Participation in Education, Employment and Society*' which develops a rather broad concept of youth participation in various environments in which young people live. The communication states that working towards young people's full participation requires a transversal youth strategy and outlines steps in that direction, including the open method of coordination and a reinforced process of structured dialogue from local to regional and national and to the European level.

The most recent relevant documents on youth policy in the European Union are the Communication from the Commission '*An EU Strategy for Youth: Investing and Empowering - A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities*' (2009) and the subsequent Council Resolution. The strategy outlines key priorities for the period 2010-2018, in which participation is one out of eight fields of action.

The EU youth strategy sets on two overall objectives:

- to provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and in the job market; and

- to encourage young people to actively participate in society.

Ways to achieve these objectives include a) the development of mechanisms for engaging in dialogue with young people and facilitating their participation in the shaping of national policies, b) the support of youth organisations, including local and national youth councils, c) the promotion of participation by under-represented groups of young people in politics, youth organisations, and other civil society organisations and d) the support of ways of "learning to participate" from an early age. The strategy also includes the structured dialogue between policy and young people as a key instrument to foster youth participation in European and national level youth policies.

The 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework states that 'Youth participation has figured prominently on the EU youth policy agenda in recent years. Participation is key to youth policy in all Member States and many activities have been carried out, including the development of structures for involving young people in decision-making and review of the quality of participatory mechanisms. Activities were also undertaken to promote wider involvement of youth in participation, including production of relevant information material and room for more dialogue online'.

The Council confirmed its dedication to this field by making 'youth participation in democratic life' the overall priority of the second Trio Presidency in the youth field (mid 2011-2012). It also adopted a resolution on new and effective forms of participation of all young people in democratic life in Europe. The so-called structured dialogue has become an increasingly influential instrument for involving young people in decision-making. It is currently undergoing modifications based on the evaluation run in 2013.

The Commission also took steps to strengthen the evidence base on participation through the 2011 Flash Eurobarometer on 'Youth on the Move', 2013 Flash Eurobarometer on 'European Youth: Participation in Democracy' and a report on evidence from Eurobarometer surveys conducted in

2012 on 'Political Participation and EU Citizenship: Perceptions and Behaviours of Young People'[15]. Moreover, a study on changing patterns of youth participation 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life' was conducted by the London School of Economics on behalf of the European Commission (February 2013). The latter study produced several policy recommendations around the themes: youth representation; youth engagement in policy and politics; (e-)voting; creativity, innovation and participation; traditional/new media and youth participation; social exclusion and youth participation.

Current debates on youth participation

It is a popular belief that young people are disengaging from democratic and civic behaviour. This belief is often based on untested assumptions:

> (...) recent attention to young people stems mainly from the broader preoccupation with the distancing of citizens from democratic institutions in Western democracies. Paradoxically, as the consensus grows that democratic institutions are the only legitimate and desirable form of government, Western citizens increasingly retreat from the familiar forms of representative democracy. The clearest symptoms of the withdrawal from democratic institutions are the overall decline in electoral participation (...), the desertion of parties' grass-roots members (...), a rising anti-party sentiment (...), and the decline of associative life (...). Since each of these symptoms is clearly observable, particularly among the youngest citizens, overall declining trends have been interpreted as the product of generational replacement (...).[16]

Despite the fact that many young people are disillusioned; some behave in undemocratic, xenophobic and discriminatory ways while others look for nothing but their own professional careers, there is much more on the other side of the medal. Even if young people may be more distant to traditional, conventional forms of democratic engagement, in nearly all political and civic movements over the last years they played a prominent role; some of these movements led to quite radical political changes, be it the 'Arab spring' or the Ukrainian political crisis.

Recent studies also show that the democratic values are still strong and that young people's participation in political processes continues though in different and new ways, e.g., through signing petitions, conscious consumerism, dressing up, graffiti, making verbal and visual statements online and in social media, but as well in flash mobs and street performances, stunts, protest, demonstrations and sometimes riots. Young people engage in different forms of democratic activities that respond to their own understanding of democracy and citizenship and find different ways of making their voices heard.

These findings are shared by the report of the Congress on 'Youth and Democracy' (2012) of 2012, the European Commission's Youth Report (2012), the final report of the study "*Youth Participation in Democratic Life*" (LSE 2013) as well as the replies of EU Member States to the questionnaires used for the European Youth Report analysed by the EU-CoE youth partnership.

But the debate is not only about participation in democratic life and in representative political structures. It is also about the questions on how marginalized young people do in terms of social inclusion, how they can actively participate in education, employment and society at large and how they can manage their transition to adulthood and to an autonomous life. It is also about ensuring that all young people have an equal access to well-being and can participate in all spheres of their lives.[17]

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[15] Produced by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission
[16] Gema Garcia Albacete, Young People's Political Participation in Western Europe: Continuity or Generational Change? Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. (p.2)
[17] Some elements for discussion can be grouped around the study of Eurofound '*NEETs - Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe*' (2012), which aims at investigating the current

Consequently, Member States and European institutions need to identify which forms of participation meet the demands of young people and provide them with diverse forms of support. Adequate structures, tools and methods are needed for this to happen. This concerns for instance the use of social media and information and communication technologies ('e-participation'), but not exclusively. Also youth work is invited to develop new approaches and ideas to find adequate answers to the questions raised. The recently published study 'Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union' provides some insights in this regard by highlighting the impact of youth work on young people for their personal development (self-determination, self-confidence, self-esteem, socialisation) and their participation and social inclusion.

Reflection Group on Youth Participation

Despite the fact that there are – as described above – numerous political and research documents, as well as good practice examples, it seems to be important and yet quite difficult to keep track of the state of affairs in the reflections and discussions on youth participation. The EU-CoE Youth Partnership has therefore begun work in 2014 to continue focusing on the topic of youth participation. This effort will allow following up on the work done on the topic by both partner institutions, such as the LSE report on 'Youth Participation in Democratic Life', commissioned by the European Commission, and the Finnish Youth Research Network report 'Youth Participation, Good Practices in Different Forms of Regional and Local Democracy', commissioned by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

The effort will also deepen the reflections on youth participation matters carried out in the framework of the EU-CoE youth partnership so far, particularly in the 2013 activities (e.g. the symposium 'The Current Crisis and Youth – Impact and Ways Forward', Strasbourg; the conference 'Youth in 2020', Budapest; the seminar 'Youth and Citizenship – focus on participation', Jordan; the symposium 'Youth Policy with EECA countries on the role of youth work in education for democratic citizenship and participation' in Yerevan, etc.).

Diversity and changing faces of youth participation

Cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic diversity have been important issues for European youth policies.[18] Youth in Europe are becoming more and more diverse. The European Union has completed several rounds of enlargement, vastly expanding its borders and its young population. Migration, intercultural dialogue, globalisation and an ever-expanding virtual world are generating further diversity, sometimes in unexpected and very unusual forms.

If diversity itself is dynamic, it is important to recognise and examine various forms of emerging diversity in Europe. A domain where diversity appears to be particularly important is youth participation.

Diverse youth – diverse participation

When political participation, new and alternative forms of participation, social movements, digital youth participation, social participation, individual participation are examined, it is possible to identify different understandings of citizenship, such as global citizenship, cosmopolitan citizenship, environmental citizenship, passive citizenship, standby citizenship. Young citizens, however, may not have much influence on decision-making and youth may not have the conditions for autonomy in order to participate. Their minor status may be a barrier. Their gender may influence how much they can participate and have influence. Youth organizations are best suited to facilitate youth participation but they do not always fulfil this role.

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situation of young people in Europe, focusing specifically on those who are not in employment, education or training, and understanding the economic and social consequences of their disengagement from the labour market and education.

[18] https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/cultural-diversity/publications/.

Social movements help youth learn that democracy is a contested concept but it is not realistic to expect that youth can to participate in all social movements. Some social movements may not be open to all youth. Youth may not be involved in trade unions as international solidarity with labour movements sliding back. Digital participation (e-participation) may be much easier than fitting in a major social movement. This may partly explain why digital activism has increased. On the other hand, there are examples where youth have actively engaged with election debates via twitter. Therefore, it might be useful to ask politicians to devote time (e.g., one specific hour) per week to youth for questions through Twitter. Digital participation requires, however, easy access to internet, as well as availability of information.

Current developments in youth participation

Drawing on four recent sources and also recent European projects dealing with young people and participation,[19] Geoffrey Pleyers and Nadine Karbach have recently drawn attention to the '*participation paradox*' and examined current developments in youth participation – particularly political participation - in Europe.[20]

Voting turnout, membership in political parties, interest in politics and trust in political institutions are in decline, especially among youth. The 2010 Eurobarometer shows that 37% of young people didn't vote in national elections, far more than any other age category. Concerns about youth grew following the 2014 European elections, given the low turnout among young voters in many countries and the high vote for far right Eurosceptic parties.

There appears to be a 'paradox' with youth participation. On the one hand, youths are actors of today's democracy and often have better access than before to information resources. On the other hand, they appear to be quite reluctant to participate in conventional politics.

Research evidence, however, indicates that the paradox is rather illusory; young people are far from apathetic but participate mostly in non-conventional ways. The problem, therefore, is with an over-simplified conception of political participation – one that focuses exclusively on conventional politics. Even low turnout among young voters may not be regarded as a sign of political apathy given the fact that various networks of critical youth citizens developed campaigns to promote abstention or blank vote at the 2014 European elections in various countries.

Pleyers and Karbach have suggested four interconnected ways to better understand current developments and ways to deal with youth participation, particularly political participation. First, there are newer forms of participation and the wider diversity in forms of participation has to be recognised. It is therefore necessary to expand the concept of participation and democracy beyond conventional forms of participation and representative democracy. Secondly, it is necessary to improve mutual understanding of institutions and youth on participation, where a major challenge lies in the wide gap between what institutions and what different young people mean by participation. Third, participation needs to be more connected to empowerment and agency. Fourth, a better understanding and a more efficient promotion of youth political participation require diverse approaches that could facilitate special handling of various categories of young people with specific challenges.

The scope of classical participation thus needs to be extended to include multiple forms of participation while it is important to "define 'the political' more widely".[21] Furthermore direct and

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[19] e.g. youthpart, Ourspace, PuzzledbyPolicy.
[20] The analytical paper, titled "*What is youth participation?*", was commissioned by the EU-CoE youth partnership in 2014. [HYPERLINK TO-BE-INSERTED]
[21] The Council of Europe has embraced this broader scope on participation for many years. The Council of Europe's "Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life" (2003), states that "participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the

indirect forms of participation should be distinguished: indirect forms of participation require reaching out to citizens, encouraging them to support certain issues and positions, enabling discussions, opinion-building as well as campaigning.

There is a gap between institutions and youth. The relationship between youth participation and the European institutions is marked by a general paradox: in spite of the European Union and the Council of Europe commitment to promote young people political participation and European identity, a wide gap remains between European youth and institutions, and various surveys show it has widened in the last 5 years (2012 Flash). Encouraging young people's participation in democratic life is a core mission of the Council of Europe and a duty stipulated in various European Union treaties. European institutions have created multiplied campaigns, forums, meetings and funding to promote youth political participation. Both Institutions invest time, energy and money in various programmes, some of which are very successful in different ways, but not in closing the gap between youth and European institutions.

This gap reflects three issues: first, there is a g*ap between institutional vision on youth participation and experience-oriented practices of participation privileged by young people.* Many young people privilege cultural and personal forms of political commitment and experience-based, expressive and horizontal way of participation. Their focus on experience, loose structure and horizontality is hardly compatible with an institutional perspective. Many young people are generally distrustful of institutions which embody, in their eyes, a 'top-down', state-centred approach to political life which they reject. This gap often results in deep misunderstandings between active young citizens and institutions. On one side, many young activists develop monolithic and often very simplified views of institutions, and in some case even a rejection of all intervention by institutions and all dialogue with political and institutional actors. On the other side, institutions fail to consider these forms of political participation as genuine participation. Young people are often considered as "*good citizens of tomorrow in training*" who may later develop "*more mature*" (ie, institutionalized) forms of participation.

Secondly, there is *disillusionment with institutional participation settings*: "Young people are not apathetic or unwilling to participate, but rather feel that the political system is neither sufficiently listening nor sufficiently adapting to their hopes and needs." (LSE report, p. 19). They don't vote "because they don't think politicians deal with their problems".

Third, there is *limited openness to unconventional forms of participation*. Taking conventional participation for granted, European and national institutions develop mechanisms that allow young people to participate in conventional ways. The issue of inclusiveness is often reduced to a communication problem and a lack of information among young people, which is only a part of the issue at stake.

Finally, an element to explain the decrease in young people conventional forms of participation indicators and notably of the voting turnout in recent years lies in its connection with *a decrease of trust in the European Union* and *disagreement with austerity policies* that particularly affect young people in Southern Europe.

Fostering political participation: In order to foster young people's political participation, it is necessary to focus on empowerment. Empowering young people translates into providing them with the means and ways to become actors of their life and of their world. The scope of political participation thus has to be expanded in three directions:

    1. *Beyond representative democracy*: Democracy is not limited to a single formal institutional system and political participation cannot be reduced to voting in elections or to supporting parties.

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means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engaging in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society."

There are multiple ways to conceptualise democracy or multiple ways for citizens (young or otherwise) to participate in public life.

Participatory democracy, for instance, involves direct influence on various processes. In a more limited sense, it can offer "organised citizens' groups and non-governmental organisations the opportunity to challenge and deliver information, views and suggestions." *Deliberative democracy* allows for a genuine collaboration between citizens and decision makers. *Counter-democracy*, on the other hand, involves diverse forms of monitoring, protest and non-conventional practices.

2. *Beyond the public spaces/private life divides*: Political participation is often conceived as a public space disconnected from everyday life, as if only the actions that matter are those that point to political institutions and attract some attention from mass media. This conception is misleading because politics and daily life cannot be two separate spheres. This perspective offers new levers both to a better understanding of participation and to ways to promote it.

Daily life provides an important space to experience participation and learning by doing. Daily life itself is an arena of political participation and social transformation. It offers spaces to participate in multiple ways, including conscious or critical consumption (buying local food, de-growth, solidarity economy, etc.). It is also important to recognize that expression and diffusion of opinions via online participation is becoming ever easier with new information technologies. Participation in daily affairs allows young people to participate not only in politics but in society, bridge daily with politics, and become empowered in the process.

3. *Beyond the online/offline divides*: The increasing use of ICT in people's everyday lives has created new ways to communicate, new spaces to share cultural experiences, and new methods to make their voices heard. For a majority of young people, consuming digital media and engaging in social networks have become normal parts of their lives. Besides, it offers new ways of engaging online and of becoming involved in (political) decision-making. Various recent projects (e.g. youthpart, Ourspace, PuzzledbyPolicy) now offer valuable experiences and insights. One of the key insights is that there is no straight separation into online and personal interaction.

Main challenges in e-participation are as follows:

First, e-participation processes need to be aligned with young people's lives. This relates to matters such as content, information and time management, but also to design and technical implementation. The processes should be designed to interest, stimulate and motivate young people to ensure their continuing involvement.

Secondly, e-participation processes require sufficient resources such as expertise, time, funding and technology, as well as staff to provide guidance and advisory services.

Third, e-participation processes needs to be transparent for everyone. This requirement extends to all information related to the process as well as to the software and tools used. Young people need to be involved in all stages of the process, including providing feedback during all phases.

Diverse reasons – diverse forms

The discussion on diversity in youth participation cannot be complete without an examination of the diversity in the reasons to participate. Sladjana Petkovic and Manfred Zentner have recently examined new forms of youth participation and forces that lead to this diversity.[22]

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[22] The analytical paper, titled "*Why youth participation?*", was commissioned by the EU-CoE Youth Partnership in 2014. [HYPERLINK TO-BE-INSERTED]

In political sense participation has to do with the power relations in a given society. It is therefore important to consider who defines, sanctions and limits participation in (post-) modern societies. It is appropriate to reflect whether participation is still interesting to young people. Colin Crouch (2004) coined the term 'post-democracy' to describe the existence of nominal democracy in a neo-liberal society. The term describes a political environment that has all the formal democratic institutions which have become increasingly hollow. This condition leads to the perception on the part of the citizens that their power to influence decision-making by democratic methods is diminishing and thus fostering their withdrawal from these democratic forms.[23] This might lead youth and adults alike away from engaging in politics.

On the other hand new forms of youth engagement, from demonstrations to occupations, from conscious consumption to boycotts are visible. The increasing variety in youth participation requires an understanding of not only the political system but the societal conditions as a whole. Various forces are influencing societies in Europe and elsewhere, and youth are often highly impacted. These forces include globalisation, migration, individuation, consumerism, economic crises and the media.

Youth in Europe now experience local and global simultaneously, which allows for local/regional ignorance and global commitments. Individuation in consumer societies often results in an exaggerated emphasis on the self and loosening of community ties. Participation often serves as a means for self-expression and thus non-traditional forms like conscious consuming, expressing opinions with T-shirts, badges or bags, and with online methods made visible in social online networks gain popularity. Voting, however, is not visible: the secrecy of a ballot is just the opposite of self-expression. Up-to-date forms of participation have to offer opportunities to share with others and to gain respect.

If participation cannot be used as a method for self-expression it has to have a direct and immediate impact on the "market" – implying that it has to tackle those topics important rather for the individual than for the community. Thus it appears that participation has to bring an immediate benefit to the individual – be it social prestige and market value or direct change of the personal situation.

It should also be noted that mass media is supposed to serve as a tool for information provision but it has become a very effective tool to control political participation and to selectively invite, involve or exclude certain groups of people of participation. Not surprisingly many critical media researchers have noted that control of media by political regimes was an essential measure to obtain power. Therefore, it is essential that alternatives to mass media are considered and utilized.

Diverse opportunities – diverse learning

Matina Magkou and Maria Paschou have recently examined the different processes and ways in which participation is learned.[24] First, it is clear that participation is learned by doing. That is, an individual learns about participation through participation rather than learning about participation. However, it is also clear that learning participation is facilitated when opportunities for participation are available, when there is support to develop skills for participation, and when obstacles to participation are reduced.

There is an emphasis on participation as a competence in the European context. The *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Framework*[25] proposed that young people should be assisted in developing social and civic competences, defined in terms of knowledge, skills and

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[23] Colin Crouch, Post-democracy. Cambridge: Polity, 2004.

[24] The analytical paper, titled "*How do we learn participation?*", was commissioned by the EU-CoE Youth Partnership in 2014. [HYPERLINK TO-BE-INSERTED]

[25] Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December on key competences for lifelong learning, OJ L 394, 30.12.2006.

attitudes. The sixth competence "*social and civic competence*" is linked to personal and social well-being and it is understood that civic competence, and particularly knowledge of social and political concepts and structures (democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights), equips individuals to engage in active and democratic participation.

The White Paper on Youth was also intended as a response to young people's strong disaffection with the traditional forms of participation in public life, what in the White Paper was called the "*citizenship deficit*". "Citizenship training for all" as demanded already in the White paper, has been and still is one of the main concerns of all youth programmes up to now. Encouraging volunteering as a key aspect of civic consciousness amongst young people has been one of the EU and Council of Europe's foremost strategic goals in the past five years while more recently the EU Youth Strategy seeks to encourage young people to participate in the democratic process and in society and a way to achieve this is defined as "supporting ways of 'learning to participate' from an early age".

Participation is learned in various settings. Young people learn about democracy and participation in formal education, such as schools, and through non-formal education, such as in local youth clubs and civic organizations, and through participation in local and regional youth councils and parliaments. They also learn participation informally while experiencing participation in youth work settings.

It is becoming increasingly clear that it is necessary to equip educators (both in formal and non-formal settings) with the capacities for developing and implementing processes that encourage the learner's ability to develop motivation and competences for participation. It is also important to explore the potential of democratic and participatory pedagogies in educational programmes both in formal and non-formal settings that allow exploration of the interest and initial knowledge of learners, self-managed learning, critical questioning of what is being learned, application of what is learned to the learners environment and further exploration. Finally, there is a need for research on synergies between formal and non-formal environments for the promotion of participation.

Summary of

Priority Considerations & Recommendations

1. **Acknowledge and promote diversity in forms and arenas of participation by extending the scope of participation in order to allow for:**
   a. new as well as old forms of participation ;
   b. participation in both urban and rural settings ;
   c. participation in daily life, community life, in educational and work settings, public space, youth care and welfare systems, civil society, culture, and across political, social, individual, virtual contexts ;
   d. sub-cultural elements, forms of self-expression, new and unstructured ways of participation;
   e. debates on democracy and contentious issues in Europe: participation cannot be disconnected from debates about politics, about paths for citizens to have an impact on political decisions, or from the problems of social exclusion and inequalities.

2. **Promote participation for all youth, with particular attention to:**
   a. non-organised youth;
   b. disabled, disadvantaged, marginalised, disenfranchised youth;
   c. youth in rural areas;
   d. gender-specific barriers to participation;
   e. youth in youth care.

3. **Promote tools and services to foster participation, including:**
   a. the legal and political framework;
   b. permanent and direct (face to face) dialogue with youth (by/with policy makers, public administration, policy experts, teachers, youth workers, multipliers);
   c. information and services (face-to-face and online), clear and transparent communication culture;
   d. open days, lobbying, campaigning and other promotional methods;
   e. youth task forces, ombudsmen, persons of trust, mentoring systems;
   f. policy debates with youth, structured dialogue, co-management, consultations (face-to-face and online);
   g. good practice documentation, easy-to-access manuals;
   h. training of youth and multipliers/policy makers.

4. **Promote and strengthen youth structures by:**
   a. supporting youth NGOs and youth initiatives;
   b. organizing debates and dialogue with youth;
   c. facilitating critical reflection on participation, policy and democracy;
   d. supporting relevant communication, consultation and co-decision structures;
   e. raising awareness about participation amongst youth;
   f. using and disseminating available tools and information channels.

5. **Promote lifelong learning opportunities to foster participation across settings by:**

    a. generating holistic and inclusive learning models encompassing formal, informal and non-formal learning opportunities;
    b. considering diverse settings that can offer formal, informal and non-formal learning opportunities and promote cooperation structures;
    c. ensuring that youth are aware of the democratic opportunities available and they have access to diversified channels of information;
    d. ensuring that the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Youth in Local and Regional Life is widely consulted and used by authorities and youth;
    e. making learning attractive and employing democratic and participatory approaches, such as peer learning, learning-in-action, etc.;
    f. maximising outreach to all groups of youth, particularly vulnerable and marginalised groups;
    g. developing and providing mentoring and diverse support structures;
    h. understanding skills needed for effective participation and ways to foster them in and out-of-school learning environments;
    i. promoting skills and competences for participation and learning (e.g. media literacy);
    j. establishing links to other learning arenas (such as democratic citizenship education, human rights education, intercultural education);
    k. revisiting the content of citizenship education and make sure it is updated in light of the current socio-political context;
    l. equipping educators with the capacities for developing and implementing processes that encourage learner to develop competences for participation;
    m. exploring the potential of democratic and participatory pedagogies that allow exploration of the interest and knowledge of learners, critical questioning of what is being learned, application of what is learned to the daily life;
    n. encouraging synergies with non-formal settings for genuine opportunities for participation and links with the community;
    o. offering flexible and easy-to-access training opportunities to youth and multipliers, trainers, policy makers and administrators, particularly to interact with institutions and for institutional staff to interact with youth;
    p. considering ethical and quality standards in learning objectives;
    q. continuously documenting and disseminating good practices.

6. **Promote research to better understand and disseminate good practices by:**

    a. supporting research on processes and new forms of youth participation;
    b. improving knowledge on the diverse ways through which participation is learned and experienced, and their impact on learners;
    c. promoting in-depth qualitative research and practice on youth political participation to foster a better understanding of new forms of participation;
    d. better understanding online participation, its importance and limits, and how it gets articulated with other forms of participation;
    e. disseminating knowledge on youth participation to policy makers and youth in an accessible manner;
    f. disseminating examples of good practices in facilitating participation of youth from disadvantaged backgrounds;
    g. organising debates around youth participation;
    h. publishing findings and outcomes.

REPORT

from the meeting of the Reflection Group on Youth Participation

Bureau International Jeunesse (BIJ)

Brussels

30 June 2014 – 2 July 2014

Participation "is widely regarded an essential, if not the most important, principle of the democracies of our time, and European institutions and organisations have repeatedly emphasised the importance of youth participation to foster young people's active citizenship, enhance their integration and inclusion and strengthen their contribution to the development of democracy."

The strong institutional commitments to promote youth participation in Europe also constitute an effort to address the widening gap between the quite dramatic decline in voting turnout and diminishing participation in formal political institutions, on the one hand, and generally high interest of young people in politics, resulting in shifting and novel patterns of political engagement, on the other hand. These two opposite trends are illustrated further by the paradox that, while public arenas for youth involvement appear to be more numerous than ever before, few would claim that these opportunities have amplified the participation of young people.

However, the discussion around participation focuses often strongly on civic participation and participation in formal political processes such elections. What needs to be discussed is a larger concept of participation, relating to the various environments in which young people live: education and training, work, communities and neighbourhoods, civil society structures. Today many young people engage differently, in (new) social movements, in social media, through (sub)cultural expression and so on.

Against this background the Reflection Group on Youth Participation met to assess the knowledge base about youth participation, to identify the essential key findings and conclusions of existing policy, applied work, and research, and to produce recommendations towards policy, research and practice.

The meeting was opened on 30 June 2014 with an introduction round. Hans-Joachim Schild (EU-CoE Youth Partnership) and Floor van Houdt (European Commission–DG Education and Culture/Youth Unit) welcomed the participants. Ms. van Houdt noted that the meeting was very timely in light of the recent elections. Marta Medlinska (EU-CoE Youth Partnership) provided background and went over the expectations.

In the first session Michael Bruter (London School of Economics) presented the main findings of the final report on youth participation by the London School of Economics, followed by a discussion. These findings are based on two projects and on multiple methods.

Michael Bruter first noted that stakeholders and young people pointed out that young people are not a homogenous group. They are as diverse as adults and have competing political interests. Young people should be viewed not as 'victims' or as 'problems' but as a diverse group of stakeholders in a democracy. Secondly, the findings indicate that there is no major disenchantment with politics on the part of young people, but only a clear and growing disenchantment with politicians and the political elites.

Thirdly, political education was seen, by most stakeholders and most of the young people interviewed, as a key to participation in politics. It was noted that thoughtful young citizens who would not vote for extremist far right parties can come as a result of free political education for 12-

16 year olds, both formal and non-formal. This must be part of the compulsory curriculum and mandatory. It cannot just be based on books alone but must be based on debates around political values and economic issues, government and policies. It must involve authentic contact with serving politicians at all levels, also possible shadowing, mentoring and apprenticeships. It must not be 'boring' – i.e., shying away from debate and just telling young people 'facts' to memorise.

National histories and political contexts matter as to how youth participate in democratic life but the findings indicate that young people are dissatisfied and feel ignored but they are not uninterested/apathetic. Young people want politicians to address them as well and not only expect young people to adapt to a discourse intended for others. In terms of voting, the findings indicate that the "first vote" experience matters a lot and young people look forward to it. A question that comes to fore has to do with lowering the voting age to 16.

Why participate?

The first working session of the meeting focused on the question "Why youth participation?" with the presentation of an analytical paper by Sladjana Petkovic and Manfred Zentner, followed by a discussion.

In political sense participation has to do with the power relations in a given society. It is therefore important to consider who defines, sanctions and limits participation in (post-) modern societies. It is appropriate to reflect whether participation is still interesting to young people. Colin Crouch (2004) coined the term 'post-democracy' to describe the existence of nominal democracy in a neo-liberal society. The term describes a political environment that has all the formal democratic institutions which have become increasingly hollow. This condition leads to the perception on the part of the citizens that their power to influence decision-making by democratic methods is diminishing and thus fostering their withdrawal from these democratic forms.

On the other hand new forms of youth engagement, from demonstrations to occupations, from conscious consumption to boycotts are visible. The increasing variety in youth participation requires an understanding of not only the political system but the societal conditions as a whole. Various forces are influencing societies in Europe and elsewhere, and youth are often highly impacted. These include globalisation, migration, individuation, consumerism, economic crises and the media.

Youth in Europe now experience local and global simultaneously, which allows for local/regional ignorance and global commitments. Individuation in consumer societies often results in an exaggerated emphasis on the self and loosening of community ties. Participation often serves as a means for self-expression and thus non-traditional forms like conscious consuming, expressing opinions with T-shirts, badges or bags, and with online methods made visible in social online networks gain popularity. Voting, however, is not visible: the secrecy of a ballot is just the opposite of self-expression. Up-to-date forms of participation have to offer opportunities to share with others and to gain respect.

If participation cannot be used as a method for self-expression it has to have a direct and immediate impact on the "market" – implying that it has to tackle those topics important rather for the individual than for the community. Thus it appears that participation has to bring an immediate benefit to the individual – be it social prestige and market value or direct change of the personal situation.

Mass media is supposed to serve as a tool for information provision but it has become a very effective tool to control political participation and to selectively invite, involve or exclude certain groups of people of participation. Not surprisingly many critical media researchers have noted that control of media by political regimes was an essential measure to obtain power. Therefore, it is essential that alternatives to mass media are utilized.

What is participation?

The second day of the meeting (1 July) opened with a working session focused on the question "What is youth participation?" with the presentation of an analytical paper by Geoffrey Pleyers and Nadine Karbach, followed by a discussion. Drawing on four recent sources and also recent European projects dealing with young people and participation, the researchers pointed to four interconnected ways to better understand current developments, paradoxes and ways to deal with youth political participation in Europe.

First, it is necessary to expand the concept of participation and democracy beyond conventional forms of participation and representative democracy. Secondly, it is necessary to improve mutual understanding of institutions and youth on participation, where a major challenge lies in the wide gap between what institutions and what most young people mean by participation. Third, participation needs to be more connected to empowerment and agency. Fourth, a better understanding and a more efficient promotion of youth political participation require a specific handling of various categories of young people with specific challenges.

The scope of classical participation thus needs to be extended to include multiple forms of participation. That is, it is important to "define 'the political' more widely". Furthermore, direct and indirect forms of participation should be distinguished: indirect forms of participation require reaching out to citizens, encouraging them to support certain issues and positions, enabling discussions, opinion-building as well as campaigning.

In a broad and ambitious acceptance, to foster young people's political participation is to empower them and provide them the means and ways to become actors of their life and of their world. The scope of political participation thus has to be expanded in three directions: 1. Beyond political institutional democracy; 2. Beyond the public spaces/private life divides; and 3. Beyond the online/offline divides.

The discussion was carried out in small groups and several issues were identified. These included research questions (e.g., how influential is youth participation? How influential is online participation? What is optimal youth participation? To what extent do adults listen to young people?), biases (e.g., little is known about youth participation rural areas), gaps (e.g., there is little research on how policing practices influence youth participation), and the need for common research base for youth policy in Europe.

Diverse participation

The meeting continued with brief inputs on specific topics: political participation, new and alternative forms of participation, social movements, digital youth participation, social participation, individual participation, followed by a "Participation café" discussion. It is possible to identify different understandings of citizenship, such as global, cosmopolitan, environmental, passive, standby citizenship. Young citizens, however, may not have much influence on decision-making and youth may not have the conditions for autonomy in order to participate. Their minor status may be a barrier. Their gender may influence how much they can participate and have influence. Youth organizations are best suited to facilitate youth participation but they do not always fulfil this role.

Social movements help youth learn that democracy is a contested concept but youth may or may not be able to participate in all social movements. Some social movements may not be open to all youth. Youth may not be involved in trade unions as international solidarity with labour movements sliding back. Digital participation (e-participation) may be much easier than fitting in a major social movement. This may partly explain why digital activism has increased. On the other hand, there are examples where youth have actively engaged with election debates via twitter. Therefore, it might

be useful to ask politicians to devote time (e.g., one specific hour per week) to youth for questions through Twitter. Digital participation requires, however, easy access to internet, as well as availability of information.

Learning to participate

The next session focused on the question "How do we learn participation?". The presentation by Matina Magkou and Maria Paschou was followed by a discussion. In many ways, participation is learned by doing. That is, an individual learns about participation through participation rather than learning about participation. However, it is also clear that learning participation is facilitated when opportunities for participation are available, when there is support to develop skills for participation, and when obstacles to participation are reduced.

Young people learn about democracy and participation in formal education, such as schools, and through non-formal education, such as in local youth clubs and civic organizations, and through participation in local and regional youth councils and parliaments. They learn participation as well informally while experiencing participation in youth work settings.

It is becoming increasingly clear that it is necessary to equip educators (both in formal and non-formal settings) with the capacities for developing and implementing processes that encourage the learner's ability to develop motivation and competences for participation. It is also important to explore the potential of democratic and participatory pedagogies in educational programmes both in formal and non-formal settings that allow exploration of the interest and initial knowledge of learners, self-managed learning, critical questioning of what is being learned, application of what is learned to the learners environment and further exploration. Finally, there is a need for research on synergies between formal and non-formal environments for the promotion of participation.

Conclusions and recommendations

The last day of the meeting (2 July) started with recommendations from Serdar M. Değirmencioğlu (rapporteur). He emphasised the importance of finding novel ways to show the significance of youth participation to various stakeholders. Perhaps the true test for youth participation emerges when it disappears: what would happen if young people stopped participating? This lesson one can derive from labour movements: they use strikes to show that their labour is needed. Similarly social movements use boycotts and civil disobedience.

Finding ways to showcase youth participation has led to participation fairs, which are fast, crowded and polished, but they are effective in facilitating youth participation. What is needed to show that participation involves several dynamics: participation often happens for the sheer joy of participation. Young people express their creativity through participation. They also learn through participation. But from a political vantage point, it is necessary to show young people as well as stakeholders whose participation leads to influencing public life. In order to influence stakeholders with more power, particularly decision-makers, demonstrating an added (political) value is essential.

It is therefore important to document and disseminate better practices. This should not only be done through reports and books, but also through newer ways of dissemination. Specific attention should be paid to age or developmental level, and to power differentials (gender, social class, citizenship status, handicaps, etc.). It is important to remember that participation can lead to offering more advantages to the already privileged young people. In the process of documenting and disseminating better practices, the added (political) value should be underscored.

The session ended with a ranking exercise, whereby the recommendations towards policy and practice that had been generated in the meeting were ranked by participants in terms of their importance.

Closing of the meeting

The meeting closed with summary statements by Hans-Joachim Schild (EU-CoE youth partnership), Floor van Houdt (EC – DG Education & Culture/Youth Unit), Lyubomir Todorov (MIJARC/Advisory Council), Jan Vanhee (CDEJ), with an evaluation round led by Gisèle Markovic Evrard (EU-CoE youth partnership). Marta Medlinska (EU-CoE youth partnership) thanked the participants before closing the meeting.