

Peer Learning MCP Participation

Inspirational paper

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- II Sustainable Youth participation – which are the core elements?**
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I Report and main findings of the 2nd peer learning seminar of the MCP

Seminar „Youth Responsibility for Democracy“ (28th – 31st October 2013, Jerusalem)

Background

Starting point for initiating the *MCP Participation* is the EU Youth Strategy (see: COUNCIL RESOLUTION of 27th November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)). For its implementation in Germany, the federal and state youth ministries (“Bund” and “Länder”) agreed on three content areas (so called "themed corridors") while one of them is "To promote participation and to strengthen democracy." The issues of "participation" should relate not only to new target groups and deal with an extended impact. Also new forms of participation and instruments should be developed and tested, best practise should be implemented. The claim "To strengthen democracy" is based on the assumption that the culture of participation can be improved in Germany through an enhanced dialogue of young people and decision makers in the field of relevant policy processes for young people. Particularly disadvantaged target groups and young people with fewer opportunities are to be reached and involved.

For a wider understanding of the two objectives of the themed corridor "participation", peer leaning processes among experts from youth work and youth policy, two *Multilateral Cooperation Projects (MCP)* are currently supported at the federal level:

- *MCP "youth part"* looks for new formats in the area of e-participation

- *MCP "Participation of young people in the democratic Europe"* enables an exchange of methods and concepts, which creates effective and sustainable forms of youth participation and for example manages to reach less active, particularly disadvantaged target groups.

While focussing on peer learning among experts and including a commitment of the existing expertise from international contexts, both projects aim at new discoveries, recommendations and guidelines which can be incorporated into the debate, respective national and European processes and the current work contexts of the cooperation partners. Within this frame, the two year peer learning process of the MCP "Participation of young people in democratic Europe" involves in total three peer learning seminars, an international stakeholder conference in Brussels and an evaluation meeting in London. The aim of the peer learning seminars is to discuss the core elements of youth participation and to develop together strategic recommendations for youth work and youth policy. During the previous two seminars in Berlin (spring 2013) and Jerusalem (autumn 2013), the following topics were addressed:

- Definition of youth participation in a civic and political dimension
- Tailored approaches to different target groups

- Social requirements for youth participation in changing societies
- Values and attitudes of young people
- Reasons for a negative image of youth in the society.

The aim of the third peer learning seminar in Lithuania is to create a synthesis of the results of the previous seminars in order to figure out the relevant factors and main pillars of sustainable youth participation and to derive recommendations for political action, which will be further discussed and presented during the international conference in Brussels in autumn 2014.

Topics and Findings of the 2nd seminar

During the meeting in Jerusalem from 28th – 31st October 2013, twenty-one experts from Israel, the United Kingdom, Poland, Lithuania* and Germany were invited to learn more about youth participation in Israel and to consider the question how young people could and should be motivated to become more actively being a part of the society and become more involved dealing with policy issues. Similar to the first seminar, the participants and the additionally invited Israeli experts and political actors were a winning composition of stakeholders in the field of youth work and youth policy. Besides practitioners from NGOs and youth organisations, representatives of ministries for youth as well youth researchers, young official mandate holders, e.g. members from the national youth council and youth parliament were invited.

Regarding the general topic of the seminar “Youth responsibility for democracy”, the following issues were discussed:

- Identity, values and attitudes and education for democracy
- The role and view of young people in the society and vice versa in the light of concepts of participation
- The quality of activating approaches in social and political terms
- Approaches for an honest, fruitful and continual dialogue between young people and politics.

In the course of the seminar, the issue was discussed, whether a lively culture of youth participation is a fundamental condition of democratic society. If so, a clear imperative for a value based education of children and young people would have to arise. Therefore, the participants figured out action guiding core principles, how democratic values can be taught in order to strengthen youth participation. As a result, educational settings are helpful, which allow training, offer a space of experience and transfer a part of the power of adults to young people. The learning objectives should focus on

> developing empathy, tolerance and pluralism and

* For financial reasons, Lithuania was unfortunately not able to send a delegation to the first seminar.

- > activating an internal approval that everyone has the same right to have a say and to be heard.

An inclusive approach, peer to peer education, and learning-by-doing methods have been considered to be a useful enabling element to strengthen youth participation. Non-formal education in youth work and in schools play a particular role. Beyond a political culture of participation, the legal and political framework must be provided, which intends a corresponding effect on youth work as on school development as well. To develop and establish programmes and educational curricula, which are tailored for the needs of young people - both in terms of content and methods, also mean to provide the appropriate resources including well-trained educators and teachers. To put such an emphasis in youth and education policy, a clear political will is necessary. Achieving a new momentum for more youth participation and an educational quality change, youth participation has to be made a top priority.

An accompanying impact could have spill-over-effects between social and political activities. In that field, however, the decisive factors for a positive interaction should be further explored by pilot projects and accompanying research. In addition, an increase in voter turnout among the young generation is a big issue in democratic states where registration is not automatic. In general, activating bystanders towards youth participation not only means taking part in elections, but to be more involved in social and political affairs. Influential and respected figures and role models from the younger generation can inspire bystanders easier. Called by the dictum of Elie Wiesel "*The opposite of love is not hate. It is indifference*", the participants discussed in detail the question which innovative learning approaches and pedagogical projects get passive young people out of their attitude of indifference and in which way learning about history and Holocaust education should contribute in that context.

II Sustainable Youth Participation – which are the core elements?

Youth Participation implicates both – acting and education. Active citizenship and youth participation cannot develop without a wider learning process which has to include not only young people themselves, but concerns institutions, organisations, educators, teachers and political actors as well. The diversity of young people requires many different approaches in order to involve young people and foster youth participation. There is not only one approach. The type of participation depends on the age and has to be guided by the possibilities and specific needs of each target group as well as to the local conditions. Since youth participation is focussed on a voluntary basis, it is important for young people to have a choice among various forms of participation.

In community settings political participation can take a wide variety of shapes and be implemented in several different ways. Therefore, the seminar will focus on the policy aspects of youth participation, take up these issues and concentrate on three areas of interests, in order to identify core conditions and the main success factors for good and sustainable youth participation by discussing the following questions:

- (1) Which are good places and educational approaches for learning democracy and a sustainable participation? Which special role should non-formal education settings and

schools play?

(2) Learning democracy and participation – how to foster the political impact? How can institutions and organizations as well as their actors open up for participation?

(3) How could a wide-spread spectrum of target groups be involved in participation processes, which are the special empowerment needs for disadvantaged young people?

Institutional learning processes and political impact

Youth participation is voluntarily for the young people, but to a certain extent binding for most of the public, especially political institutions. When young people are directly involved, social and political issues become clearer to them. Furthermore, they can learn that their practical commitment is relevant in the democratic society – as long as they are involved as equal partners or team players, their efforts are appreciated and the results are easily noticeable or visible. Authentic settings and persons which young people face in participation projects broaden their horizons, as well in terms of development of their competencies, skills and capabilities. But how can institutions learn to open up for more youth participation? How can they offer “**time limited projects**” or “**participation slots**” for young people, which are relevant to the regular working processes and attractive and interesting for young people at the same time? Which supporting meaning do the EU Youth strategy, legal frameworks and agreements have for the political decision makers?

If youth participation is meant seriously by the institutions and their decision makers, they have to commit that they **transfer concrete decision-making power and freedom of action to the young people** - with possible consequences, such as the provision of appropriate resources. Which are the advantages for the institutions and organisations? A profitable learning process towards more youth participation inside institutions and organisations need convincing converters in order to promote **internal learning processes** and establish youth participation in the decision-making structures. However, such **key figures** must be identified, sensitized, and specifically prepared, if youth participation should be anchored sustainable

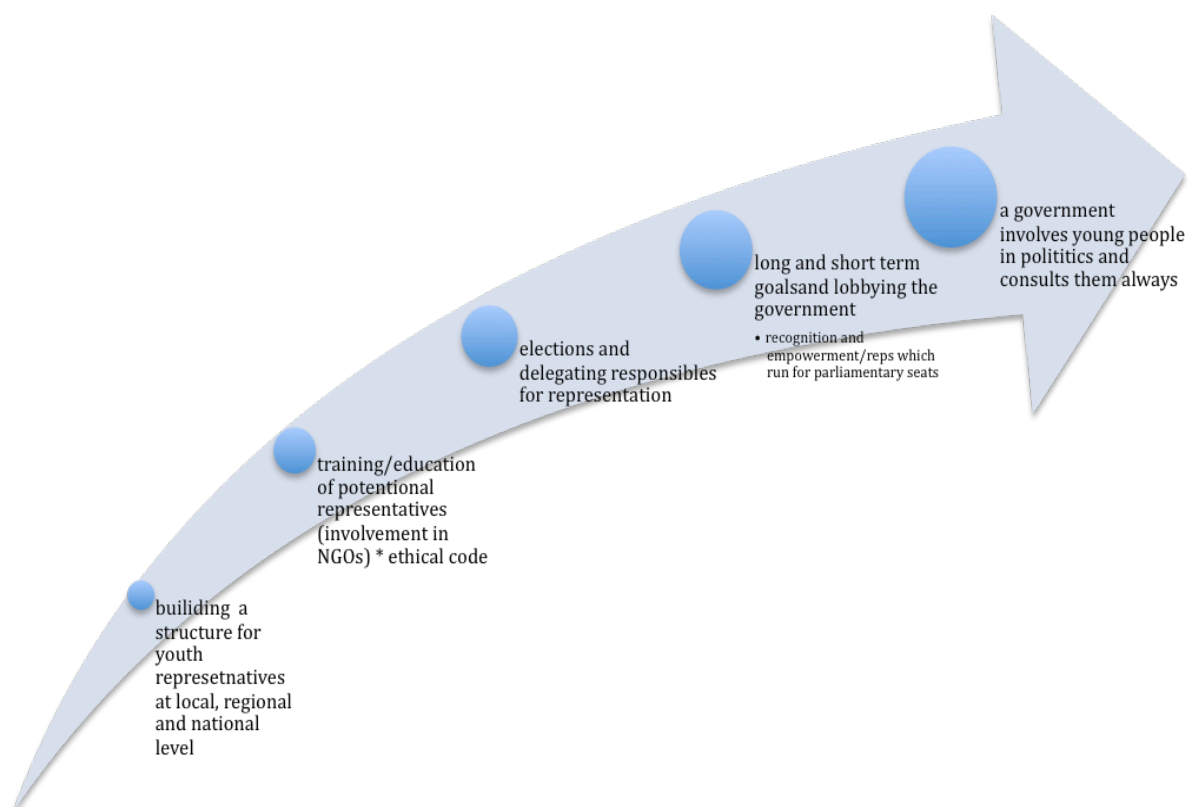
> in public, political and educational institutions such as local, regional and national governments, city councils, administration, schools, municipal youth work as well as

> in social, political and educational organisations like NGOs, political parties, lobby groups or trade unions.

In addition, common visions for participatory models should be discussed at a **round table of relevant cross-sector stakeholders**. The discourse should be connected with the general question of how the increasing political alienation can be overcome and which political notion is basically relevant for the different stakeholders.

How can it be ensured that youth participation has an impact on decision-making?

Political influence of youth participation does not just happen. Besides structural opening of institutions and organizations for participation formats that enable young people short-term projects, a participatory democratic society does not only need the dissemination of cognitive knowledge of youth participation and the recognition of democratic representative structures and shapes, but also practical action. Therefore, harmonized and interlocking steps at the political level are necessary. The following empowering model was developed during the 2nd seminar in Israel, which illustrates the various measures to be taken.



Young people should be actively included in the organisation and the execution of projects and processes. They need support in such structural involvement by means of monitoring and good guidance. Youth work offers conditions, settings and educational approaches for successful interaction between young people and decision makers in political and social institutions and organisations. Participation projects in the framework of youth work are characterized by activating approaches, action-based methods and peer group learning processes, in order to enable young people to gain new experiences and to actively take part in the society and the political sphere. Against the background of the comprehensive experience and knowledge in the field of non-formal learning processes and education for democracy, precisely the sector of youth work could function as a useful transmission belt.

Which concepts assist the implementation of sustainable youth participation?

If the European Union, the federal, state and local governments actually want more involvement and participation, they must also be willing to offer binding rules and contracts with the target group. There must be something 'real' to negotiate, participation processes have to be made mandatory and items or projects that young people want to discuss or realize should face serious interest and political consideration. Without a broader political commitment, youth participation is hard to show long-term effect. On the other hand, youth participation needs enabling pedagogical methods and political instruments and a real and serious dialogue between youth and politics with a real listening to each other. A reduction of youth participation only to its pure consultation function would be too narrow and not attractive enough for young people. Against this background, a multi-modality access, which promotes flexibility and diversity in the implementation and diversified responsibilities, is considered as one of the key factors.

The following dimensions of youth participation are relevant to the implementation context:

Implementation matrix for Youth participation

| Places for Youth participation | Stakeholders/ Actors |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political and public institutions • NGOs • Schools • Vocational training • Youth work • Leisure time activities • Home and family • Place of residence • all media, especially internet • | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people • Politicians • Representatives of public administration • Children or youth Representatives • Educators • Teacher • Social and political decision makers • Representatives of the media • Researcher • Parents |
| Approaches and programmes | Supporting systems |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects • Hearings • Youth events • Seminars, workshops, World cafés • Un-conferences • Social activities • Volunteering • Peer education • Neighborhood exploration • Media partnerships • Cross-sectoral implementation of youth interests in all relevant policy fields • Structured Dialogues Formats | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Councils • Youth or student parliaments • Youth conferences • Youth Bureau • Youth Advisory Committee • Youth consultation of Mayor • Young Mayors • Youth check • Round tables • Projects • Qualification for decision makers • Training for educators • District conferences • Youth budget • National Youth act/ local Youth legislation • Structured Dialogue/ EU Youth strategy |

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Successful and long-lasting youth participation must take into account four dimensions of implementation: possible and suitable places, a broad range of stakeholders including social actors and political decision makers, diverse educational approaches and programs and different supporting systems. Developing concrete implementation concepts, they have to be tailored specifically to the local needs. And it is important, that the corresponding places, approaches, actors and support systems are jointly involved from the very beginning of the implementation process.

III Recommendations for sustainable youth participation towards politics and towards youth work

The main objective of the MCP is the development of joint recommendations. For this purpose, below some first conclusions are drawn from the debate of the second seminar.

General conclusions

- ⇒ Interlinking of existing projects
- ⇒ Stronger involvement and systematic development of civic education as an actor for the implementation of youth participation structures
- ⇒ More exchange and working groups on the implementation of sustainable youth participation structures
- ⇒ Targeted approach of social youth work
- ⇒ Inclusion of creative ways and methods of cultural youth education
- ⇒ Increased emphasis on the inclusion of disadvantaged young people in the Structured Dialogue and the necessary framework
- ⇒ Activation of additional funds to finance projects

Winning school as a new player

School is the place where the foundations for political understanding and thus for the willingness to political participation are laid. In schools a larger number of young people and a representative cross-section of society could be achieved. Learning Participation should be part of a holistic 'Education for Democracy' and should focus on the identity of young people and their responsibility for democracy; therefore learning participation should not only take place in projects of youth work but also be linked to curricular activities at school. However, the transfer of youth participation as a part of learning democracy into the school context seems to be a greater challenge. In this context, the following proposals and pilot approaches were discussed:

- ⇒ Implementation of youth participation in the framework of working groups, project work, activity days, or other volunteer formats
- ⇒ Development of linking models and formats for cooperation between formal and non-formal education.

More real contact and dialogues between youth and politics

For a sustainable implementation of youth participation dialogue projects between youth and political stakeholders play an important role since they are part of learning democracy. However, if youth participation is taken seriously on all sides and should go beyond a pure consultation function, there must be something “real” to decide. In order to better link the concerns of young people with political decision making the following aspects are found to be useful:

- ⇒ Establishing of local and regional support and coordinating bodies
- ⇒ Active part of young people in the definition and specification of the issues
- ⇒ Greater consideration of the interests of young people and communicate their proposals for agenda-setting
- ⇒ Clarification of the substantive link between the project work with the local social and political agenda.