Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth

EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Notes
of the preparatory meeting for a
Reflection Group on Youth Participation

Brussels,
15th - 16th April 2014

Venue of the meeting

Council of Europe Liaison Office with the European Union
85, Avenue des Nerviens
1040 Bruxelles

Agenda

1. Opening and introduction of participants

2. Adoption of the meeting agenda

3. Presentation of the concept paper by the EU-CoE youth partnership and space for reactions

4. Sharing expectations towards the reflection group

5. Definitions and concepts related to Youth Participation

6. Mapping knowledge about Youth Participation in Europe: What exists / What do we know already / What is needed?

7. Defining the structure of the analytical paper and methods & approaches to elaborate it; designing the further process

8. Rationale, participants, aims, format, programme and dates of the envisaged reflection seminar

Participants

Raluca DIROESCU, SALTO-Youth Participation Resource Centre

David GARRAHY, European Youth Forum

Lihong HUANG, NOVA Norway & Pool of European Youth Researchers

Nadine KARBACH, IJAB Germany

Janne LINDSTRÖM, Youth for Understanding & Advisory Council on Youth

Geoffrey PLEYERS, University of Louvain & CADIS - EHESS

Graeme ROBERTSON, European Commission – DG Education and Culture / Youth Unit

Jan VANHEE, CDEJ & Flemish Community - Agency for socio-cultural work

Floor VAN HOUDT, European Commission – DG Education and Culture / Youth Unit

Helmut WILLEMS, Université du Luxembourg / FLSHASE

Philipp BOETZELEN, EU-CoE youth partnership

Gisèle EVRARD MARKOVIC, EU-CoE youth partnership

Hans-Joachim SCHILD, EU-CoE youth partnership

Notes

A. Presentation of the concept paper on the "*Reflection Group on Youth Participation – realities and needs*"

At European level participation of young people is a key topic of youth policy since about 40 years[1], obviously with changing focal points. Throughout these years the European institutions, Council of Europe and European Communities / European Union and their respective bodies (Parliamentary Assembly, Committee of Ministers, CLRAE – European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the European Union and the Committees) have developed opinions and adopted numerous political statements on various subjects addressing youth participation. Today, the most relevant political documents are the European Union's Renewed EU youth strategy "Investing and Empowering" and the Council of Europe's "Agenda 2020 – the future youth policy in the Council of Europe". Both demonstrate the institutional commitment for youth participation and their relevance for policy making.

The debates today are concerned by an obvious decline of interest in traditional policy making and formal political institutions and - at the same time - the growing relevance of new forms of engagement. Also other increasing reactions of young people such as absenteeism and indifference, individualisation and push-and-shove mentality or

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[1] 1972 European Youth Centre in Strasbourg as a result of the 1968 student and workers movements; 1994 European Youth Centre in Budapest as a result of political changes in Eastern and Central Europe; 1989 European Youth Programme (and follow-up programmes) in the European Union and 2001 White Paper "New impetus on European Youth" to foster European Citizenship

undemocratic, xenophobe and discriminatory behaviour can be observed. Numerous studies, research and reports show evidence of changing patterns in last years and provide knowledge on various quantitative and qualitative factors, facts and figures. Key questions resulting from these findings are, how to engage in a dialogue with young people, how to promote participation of underrepresented groups, and how to support ways of learning to participate.

However, the discussion around participation focuses often strongly on civic participation and participation in formal political processes such elections. What is 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..... it is also to be taken into account that today many young people engage differently, in (new) social movements, in social media, through (sub)cultural expression and various, including new forms of youth work.

More conceptual reflection can be found here:

Concept paper_youth participa

B.   Purpose of the reflection group on youth participation

Against this background the purpose of the reflection group is to gather what we know about youth participation, what we do not know (knowledge gaps), to identify the essential key findings and conclusions of existing material (from policy, research and practice) and to explore what are recommendations towards policy, research and practice.

The aim is to draft an analytical paper (or papers which will be connected or gathered into one single product) on the state of affairs in the discussions, emerging patterns in participation, identified challenges and possible solutions which will be discussed in the reflection group of experts from various backgrounds (kind of think tank) 30 June to 2 July 2014; following this reflection a policy briefing paper will be drafted which draws conclusions and provides recommendations on new and broad forms of youth participation.

C.   Results of the discussions and the exchange in the preparatory group

The discussions can be clustered around 5 key questions, all against a concept of current social changes (i.e. "participation in the 21st century"):
1. Why participation?
2. What is participation?
3. How do we learn to participate?
4. What do we know about participation? (and what do we not know?)
5. What do we want to show and make visible?

THE NEVER-ENDING STORY OF DEMOCRACY – this can be the summary of discussions and the title of the reflection group meeting end of June / beginning of July.

1. Why participation?

What is the motivation of policy makers, (democratic) institutions, economy, etc. and young people themselves to participate? It is to promote the democratic values of societies, to foster social integration of young citizens, to support individual development and to manage social change.... Starting from the perspective of young people as actors of social change we first need to know what is changing and why?

It is about knowing more about the changing role of traditional organisations and institutions such as religions and churches, trade unions, political parties, youth organisations, the role of old and new social movements, the information and communication technologies and the change in communication cultures, the demographic development and changing age pyramid, the economic crisis and its impact on young people's life, the increasing cultural diversity in societies, the growing need of mobility, etc.?

It is also about knowing what is to "protect" (safeguard), to promote, to further develop and what leads to a rather normative dimension of values, human rights, rule of law and to the *never ending story of democracy*, and the fact that it needs to further develop with and by each single generation, also in fight against supposed authoritarian "alternative" solutions?

2. What is participation?

When talking about (youth) participation we mean political and social participation of all groups of (young) people / citizens in all areas in which they live: civil society, neighbourhoods, communities, education and training, work places, leisure time activities.... We know about traditional forms of participation, in elections and representative democracy, in youth parliaments, in school and student councils, youth and apprentice representation in enterprises, in "old" social movements such as trade unions or religious bodies, in long-standing youth NGO's, etc. We also know about new forms of youth participation, in youth initiatives or in voluntary activities, new social movements, in social media, amongst others.

We can identify various fields of participation according to the areas in which young people live (see above), various cultural dimensions that impact participation (and the way how participation is expressed) such as social classes, ethnic dimensions and gender; and we need to distinguish the various forms of participation in accordance with the age of young people (considering that participation must start at a very early age, in families, via child care and kindergarden, in various types of schools, high schools and universities, in the work place...). Further it is crucial that young people should have the right to choose and shape the ways they participate.

We also need to accept that participation is not a one-dimensional act of communication; it is rather a dialogue in form of communicating tubes and an interplay between young

people's views and those of institutions / society. It sees various forms and practices. The *structured dialogue* in the European Union and the *co-management system* in the Council of Europe are prominent and proved models of participation, as new models are such as peer-learning projects and bar-camps (a kind of new and enlarged model based on the Open Space Technology).

In this section it has also to been asked what works and what does not work (e.g. specific tools, e.g. to increase voting and lowering voting age, reaching out through social media and Internet, opportunities and limits of youth initiatives, private, public, civic delivery of services and projects) and a link to the debate about values (former cluster 1) and the learning dimension (see next cluster 3) must be made.

3. How do we learn to participate (and how do we teach it)?

We learn to participate in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Formal means rather intentional, based on curricula, obligatory and in formal structures (e.g. schools and universities) and procedures. Non-formal means as well intentional and often based on curricula, but on a voluntary basis and in non-formal settings out of school (such as in youth work). And informal learning means by doing and in an experiential manner in everyday activities, including formal and non-formal learning / education settings.

In all these settings youth participation should be an issue and start at an early age, in families, pre-schools, schools, out-of-schools, etc. In formal settings - as in schools - teachers play a key role in not only teaching about participation and citizenship but as well in making it a principle of the curricula; this also refers to teacher training which is crucial to promote new or alternative forms of democratic learning and teaching approaches.

Also (youth) NGO's and youth work have a crucial role to play in this respect, in non-formal education / learning foremost, but as well as cooperation partner in formal education approaches and settings.

With regard to the learning dimension, we ought not to omit the link to youth information and new media.

The historical and normative dimension of participation should also be kept in mind.

As a matter of principle it was suggested that the key aims of education & training should be the core of the protection of democracies and human rights, promoted by critical citizens and consumers rather than patriotic ones.

4. What do we know about participation? (and what do we not know?)

In this section it was proposed to start mapping the knowledge that exists in terms of
- political documents (European Union and Council of Europe, as well as potentially their member states),
- academic / scientific work (research), (including for example the LSE study on youth participation and the work provided by Eurofound) and

- practical and experiential findings (good practices, showcases, projects) (as for example identified by the Finnish Youth Research Network in the study "Youth Participation Good Practices in different forms of regional and local democracy").

This section should particularly refer to factors and impact of participation in its various forms. The emphasis should be on finding additional research results and knowledge from practice on different existing tools and methods.

5. What do we want to show and make visible?

The analytical paper(s) and the work of the reflection group should lead to conclusions and recommendations that can be addressed to policy makers, to youth work practitioners and others, such as research. The recommendations should be rather concrete and focus on subjects identified above, e.g. teacher training and change of school curricula and educational approaches; role of non-formal and informal learning; impact of peer learning and youth initiatives, on participation tools that work... It should lead to promotional activities and a broad transfer of results and feed the political agenda of the coming years. In so far results could be used by upcoming EU-Presidencies or CoE Committee of Ministers chairmanships. Also a broad presentation and discussion in upcoming related events should be envisaged (e.g the seminar on "Participation in Europe and Israel", 9/2014, SALTO Participation in cooperation with National Agencies), World Forum for Democracy (11/2014, Council of Europe) or the 2nd Youth Work Convention (4/2015, under the Belgian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe).

D.   Practical issues

The clusters 1-3 as discussed should become the core structure of the envisaged analytical paper(s); a call for experts to draft the paper(s) should be published shortly (week 17 following Easter). It will be proposed to create pairs of research and practice for drafting the papers in order to enlarge perspectives. Deadline for submission of the papers will be mid June; after consolidating the papers one coherent document will be provided to experts / participants of the reflection group that meets 30 June – 2 July. The authors of the analytical papers will be invited to present their work in the reflection seminar. The call for participants for the reflection seminar will be published beginning of May. It will invite representatives of research, policy and practice. In the follow-up the conclusions and recommendations as elaborated in the reflection seminar will be largely distributed.

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