Chapter 4

Open youth participation – A key to good governance in the 21st century

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Our representative democracies in Europe are, with a few exceptions, regulated by an "electoral threat potential" (von Winter 1997). The right to vote gives citizens the possibility to choose (and hence, also to choose not to vote for) parliamentary representatives who can ensure that decision-making processes respect voters' interests. Most young people under 18 in Europe do not have the right to vote. Their interests are thought to be represented by their parents or legal guardians. However, young people have their own specific interests that are not automatically shared by their guardians; they are linked with their living environments as young persons, for example in areas like urban planning, family and education policy focus on young people's leisure interests (Hurrelmann 2001). When it comes to issues such as the fair distribution of resources, government debt, pensions, climate protection, the internet and participation, there can be conflicts of interest between the generations.

With current demographic trends, even young adults with the right to vote do not have a sufficient "threat potential" as they are a decreasing minority. A Eurostat report (Eurostat 2017) notes that the total population of the EU-28 will keep growing until 2050, reaching 525.5 million. However, the share of children and young people will decrease from 33.5% in 2013 to 30.8% in 2050. This results in a deficit of representation for the younger generation, which does not have the same possibilities as older generations to introduce ideas, lifestyles and interests into the entrenched, if democratic, systems of which they are a part.

How then are young people expected to learn democratic behaviours if they are unable to have the positive experience of bringing their interests into established decision-making processes? The effects of this are already visible, with a decline in the number of young people involved in political parties or elections. A Eurobarometer survey from 2012 indicates that only about one in two young people thinks elections are among the most valuable ways of expressing political preferences; only 47% of 15- to 24-year-olds and 50% of 25- to 34-year-olds believe that voting is one of the two best ways to ensure that their voices are heard by decision makers.[22]

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22. Signing a petition was the second most effective means, according to respondents, though this had a far lower score (14%).

Additionally, only 13% of young people support the statement that joining a political party is an effective way to channel their interests. A democratic society needs to establish new forms and methods of youth participation that are accepted and used by young people, and that support them so that their voices are heard by decision makers and established political structures.

The continuous and increasingly rapid development of information communication technologies (ICTs) over the last few decades is a distinct feature of modern societies. In the digital age, ICTs play a key role in creating and exchanging knowledge and information around the globe. ICTs affect the everyday lives of citizens in many fields – at school, in the workplace and in the community. New ways to communicate, new spaces to share cultural experiences and new methods to make people's voices heard have been introduced and have become a normal part of life, especially for young people. In the context of the digitalisation of our living environment, there is no distinction between the offline and online communication (and life) of a young person today.[23] Interaction with the local environment takes place via mobile devices and online platforms, participation in social life, going to school or to work, and taking part in training and other non-formal activities.

If young people understand technology to be a normal part of their everyday communication and engagement, they also transfer some of their experiences of the digital sphere into the real world. This refers especially to the possibilities of non-hierarchical relations, to direct peer-to-peer communication and to a positive attitude towards sharing and collaboration within the community: these are forms of interaction that are not the core characteristics of established political structures.

If we want to keep democracy alive, we need to open up governmental structures to make participation the "new normal" and not the exception; we need open methods to make decision-making processes and participation transparent and accessible for all and we need to be open to the realities of young people. Taking participation seriously means sharing power, knowledge and resources in a more collaborative way than traditional hierarchical structures have offered to date. In this regard, we have to see open youth participation as key to good governance in the 21st century.

In order to analyse these issues and challenges, we will look at the findings of two projects focused on improving youth participation. The projects also resulted in recommendations and guidelines on youth participation and on the role youth work plays in helping young people acquire competences useful for their engagement in society and in decision-making processes. Our conclusion points to the need for youth work to have a stronger role in the connection between young people and decision-making processes.

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23. For Germany, see DIVSI (2014). However, European surveys tend to conclude that there is a digital divide among youth: "The digital divide is still a reality for excluded young people who are not attending school or further education" (LSE Enterprise 2013: 14).

MULTILATERAL PEER LEARNING TO IMPROVE YOUTH PARTICIPATION

In 2011, the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth adopted a new approach towards international co-operation. It created multilateral co-operation projects to function as cross-border think tanks to provide input for current youth policy topics. To this end, the concept of peer learning – essentially, a reciprocal learning activity – offered an ideal framework as one of the EU Youth Strategy's strongest instruments for promoting youth policy co-operation in Europe.

Youthpart[24]

The project Youthpart, a multilateral co-operation project by the International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany (IJAB), was established to start an international dialogue on how more young people can be encouraged to participate in decision-making processes in today's digitalised society. The project has produced a set of guidelines for successful eParticipation by young people (IJAB 2014).[25]

The work began in December 2011 and ended in April 2014. During this time, project partners attended four international workshops to develop the guidelines and organised two events to gather feedback from European experts and young people. The process also included input from national advisory councils and reflected the views of a range of stakeholders including young people, youth organisations, researchers, administrative bodies, software developers and youth workers. The guidelines for successful eParticipation by young people provide those who plan an eParticipation process for young people with a set of factors they should take into consideration to make the process more effective. They were designed as a reference framework to support initiators of eParticipation processes.

Participation was defined by the project partners as a process of sharing, becoming involved and taking action. This implies that citizens choose to actively participate in and contribute to public decision making at different levels. In the case of eParticipation, this involvement and participation in decision making takes place electronically through the use of online information and internet-based technology. Two dimensions of participation were distinguished:

▶ transitive participation: political decisions are influenced directly and structural links to political decision-making processes are enabled;

▶ intransitive participation: intransitive activities reach out to the public and encourage citizens to support certain issues and positions. In return, they also contribute to the development of political opinions and democratic

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24. The following section has been taken from the "Guidelines for successful e-participation for young people" (IJAB 2014) and has been slightly edited.

25. IJAB produced the guidelines with the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth, the British Youth Council, the Spanish Institute for Youth (INJUVE) and the Finnish Development Centre for Youth Information and Counselling (Koordinaatti), with the support of the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture (Youth Unit).

citizenship. This includes activities that are designed to encourage and empower young people to participate in political matters.

Both dimensions, which are inseparable and complementary, include activities created by young people, youth organisations and youth work structures, and also educational and citizenship projects and participation processes that are initiated by institutions and decision makers.

The structure of participation processes may vary depending on the intensity of the decision makers' involvement:

▶ consultation and information, through consultative processes;

▶ co-determination, through decision-making processes with equal voting rights;

▶ self-determination, through agenda-setting (meaning that young people are involved in deciding what issues get to the political agenda) and decision-making processes with exclusive decision-making powers (meaning that the decision is entirely up to the young people, who do not need to consult others).

The guidelines also include principles considered necessary for successful eParticipation processes:

▶ alignment with young people's realities: eParticipation 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, in order to ensure their continuing involvement;

▶ applicable within current administrative procedures: if a structural link to political decision-making processes is to be implemented, eParticipation processes need to be practical. This relates to matters such as time management, compliance with legal requirements and authorisations, staff training, expectation management, and overall political strategies and acts on national or international levels promoting youth participation;[26]

▶ resources: eParticipation processes require sufficient resources such as expertise, time, funding and technology, as well as staff to provide guidance and advisory services;

▶ effectiveness and direct influence: eParticipation processes need to have an outcome. A structural link to decision-making processes is essential;

▶ transparency: the overall process 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;

▶ end-to-end involvement of young people: young people need to be involved in all stages of the process. This includes a feedback option in all phases of the process.

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26. Besides national youth policy regulations on youth participation, the EU Youth Strategy and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are important documents to ensure youth participation in decision-making processes.

Ideally, all types of eParticipation processes should have the following phases (Figure 12):[27]

- ▶ a development phase, where the general parameters and common principles of the process are defined;
- ▶ an implementation phase, where the general parameters are put into practice;
- ▶ an access and information phase, where the tools and information are made available to the target audience;
- ▶ an input and dialogue phase, focusing on the topic at hand and the associated discussions;
- ▶ an output and outcome phase, focusing on the results of the process and how these results can be made visible for the participants and a public audience;
- ▶ an evaluation phase, with an assessment of the eParticipation process to improve the quality of future processes.

Figure 12: Phases of an eParticipation process
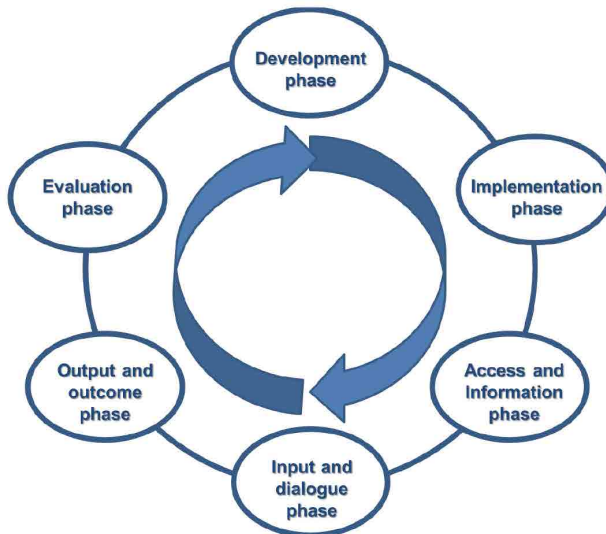
Participation of Young People in the Democratic Europe

This multilateral co-operation project was a common two-year effort by partners from Israel, Lithuania, Poland, the United Kingdom (represented by the British Youth Council) and Germany. It aimed to answer the following:

- ▶ how can apolitical young people and those with fewer opportunities be reached to increase their participation in the democratic system?
- ▶ what are the new forms and new spaces of youth participation and what will be their role in the future?

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27. These phases may also be visualised at www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rjaIQHYI1U, accessed 21 September 2017.

- ▶ what innovative methods and forms of civic education and youth participation exist that function to foster young people's participation?

Partners explored new challenges in youth participation and learned from each other's experience, knowledge and good practice during three peer learning seminars, meetings of the co-ordinators and a final conference. The project resulted in a number of recommendations to "amplify the participation" of young people (Jugend für Europa/Butt-Pośnik 2015).[28] These were based on the findings of the Reflection Group on youth participation of the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth.[29]

The recommendations call on European institutions, national, regional and local governments and administrations, and civil society to support the following five areas:

- ▶ participation takes place in various forms and arenas: understand and embrace the diversity of ways in which young people participate. It is necessary to use and spread those examples that lead to a real impact and sharing of power, such as Young Mayors (United Kingdom) or Students Budgets (Italy, Portugal, France, Germany). The Austrian model of the Youth Check is supported as a possible legislative way to make youth participation a legal obligation;

- ▶ learning to be a democratic citizen is key. There is a need for lifelong learning of democracy in all areas of formal, non-formal and informal education, so that young people can experience deliberations and practise democracy at an early age;

- ▶ it takes a whole society to rear a democrat! As part of good governance in the 21st century, a change of attitudes is required in politics and administration – participation has to be explicitly welcomed and made possible. The limits of participation also need to be communicated frankly. Further effort is required to reach underprivileged and excluded young people;

- ▶ there are many good projects and approaches – make use of them! What is still needed is peer learning to exchange good practices and the dissemination of the knowledge and experiences that already exist and can be used elsewhere. The problem is not the lack of practical experience or tailored methodology; it is in the first place a lack of political will to provide space for youth participation;

- ▶ further research is needed to better understand the new and alternative forms of participation that exist today.

During a public presentation at the Permanent Representation of the Federal Republic of Germany in October 2015 in Brussels, these recommendations were handed over to the representatives of the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. The presentation was organised in the framework of the final conference, Make me Heard, which had approximately 80 participants from 13 countries. The brochure with recommendations was published in collaboration with Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities for Youth (SALTO-YOUTH)

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28. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUHpGEEEHSM&feature=youtu.b., accessed 21 September 2017.
29. See http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/reflection-group?inheritRedirect=true, accessed 21 September 2017.

Participation and the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth. It was translated into German, too, and distributed to stakeholders active in the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy. The recommendations have been subject to discussions in the Knesset of Israel, a public workshop with representatives of the British Government in London and the Bund-Länder Working Group in Germany.

CONCLUSIONS FROM BOTH PROJECTS

Both projects came up with the following conclusions, which can serve as food for thought for all those involved in participation processes or willing to engage further.

Open government

There is a need for real sharing of power – funding nice lonely islands of participation is not enough. The participation of those who are affected by political decisions is not only fair, but rational: early participation of those who will use services and/or premises, or will be affected by changes, can reduce objections later, and even costs. This goes beyond the idea of "making politics" of the 20th century, when it was ideally a single leader or a small elite of decision makers who were perceived as capable of making the right decisions for all. In many areas, citizens are now accustomed to being asked for their input, to having influence or co-creating (for instance, Wikipedia). Furthermore, politics as it exists today is incapable of facing up to the challenges of a complex, interconnected future. We need a new form of "good governance" in the 21st century in order to have citizens participate in decision making and to create opportunities for young citizens to enter decision-making processes. In some cases, a direct influence has to be possible – most probably at the local level, but also at regional, national and European levels. Support and resources have to be allocated, especially to support the participation of those who are underprivileged and excluded.

Open method

This different mode of governance has to be accompanied by suitable methods to enable (young) citizens to participate offline and online. It requires thinking about 360-degree processes of consultation, deliberation, implementation, evaluation and follow-up, so that those who give their opinion in the first place get to know what happened to their ideas and which of them were realised. It is necessary to understand various forms of protest as new ways of dialogue about the society we want to live in. This requires us to transcend our "filter bubbles", both online and offline, and listen.

Open for all

What is there to decide upon – and what is restricted to the decision making of elected parliamentarians? Transparency is required to make the open space for participation visible, and identify the limits of participation as well. Political or civic education is

necessary in this context to enable young members of society to understand and assess critically the functioning of democracy. It takes a special effort (comprehensive language, interactions of young people with politicians, etc.) to reach those young people who feel disconnected from politics.

Open to young people's realities

Using youthful gadgets to reach young people is not enough! If we really want young people to be involved, we have to take into account their different needs, the tempo at which they operate, the language they use and the places they meet; not everything fits into the template of decision-making processes. This requires investment in something in between, namely in youth work. We consider that youth work has a lot of potential in this respect and we will now explore its role and the ways in which it can support young people's involvement in decision-making processes and in democratic societies in general.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF YOUTH WORK?

The Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention in 2015 emphasised that youth work plays an important role in advancing democracy, citizenship and participation. The common understanding of youth work in Europe was expressed as follows:

> Youth work is about cultivating the imagination, initiative, integration, involvement and aspiration of young people. Its principles are that it is educative, empowering, participative, expressive and inclusive. Through activities, playing and having fun, campaigning, the information exchange, mobility, volunteering, association and conversation, it fosters their understanding of their place within, and critical engagement with their communities and societies. Youth work helps young people to discover their talents, and develop the capacities and capabilities to navigate an ever more complex and challenging social, cultural and political environment.[30]

Youth work can play the role of connector and translator in the field of youth participation in both ways: with and for young people, and in close connection to decision makers at local, regional, national and European levels. Youth workers have to take a decisive and self-confident stand as political players and advocates for young people – that is, as catalysts. They link the various realities of young people with the world of politics and administration that affects young people's lives, and vice versa. Youth workers therefore need to include political and civic education, and competences to empower young people and knowledge about online and offline methods of participation, in their professional portfolio. Youth workers need to be "political educators",[31] which means that they should be able to explain, for example, that disappointment with democracy can be an inherent part of how democracy functions. They may have to explain why it takes so much time in a democracy to take decisions and why the interests of young people might not always be taken on

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30. See http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/8529155/The+2nd+European+Youth+Work+Declaration_FINAL.pdf/cc602b1d-6efc-46d9-80ec-5ca57c35eb85, accessed 22 September 2017.

31. Using this term here does not imply any idea of political indoctrination, of course.

board. They may have to explain to young people that it is sometimes only possible to gain political solutions that are "probably just disappointing in a different way, but not less disappointing" solutions (Hedtke 2012). And they need to strengthen their position as partners for political stakeholders.

Youth work has to support and initiate activities that enable transitive and intransitive participation processes, but it also has to strengthen the participation competences of young people (EU–Council of Europe youth partnership 2015).[32]

Transitive participation activities that are supported or initiated by youth work in co-operation with decision makers:

- ▶ information activities: projects that offer youth-friendly information and data as a precondition to taking part in decision-making processes;
- ▶ consultation processes: activities to gather expertise, opinions or votes for specific topics, decisions or planning processes;
- ▶ co-operation processes: forms of participation that are directed at the development of mutual solutions in the framework of governance structures leading to political decisions.

Intransitive participation activities supported or initiated by youth work:

- ▶ creating transparency, adding value: the provision of information about the activities of governmental or non-governmental institutions, of individuals, or about socio-political issues;
- ▶ activism, campaigns or lobbying: forms of participation that aim to develop public awareness or support socio-political issues and positions, and thus contribute to the formation of political will;
- ▶ petitions and complaints: participation processes that allow direct suggestions or complaints to decision makers with the aim of influencing concrete political decisions.

These different forms of projects and activities have to fulfil specific criteria to create successful and youth-friendly participation processes. This implies that young people:

- ▶ have to be involved at all stages (for example shaping the goals and the implementation of the project);
- ▶ can change the existing situation and create something new;
- ▶ can actually decide on something;
- ▶ enjoy their participation rather than being passively entertained;
- ▶ determine their democratic structures by themselves;
- ▶ can understand the results because the decisions and goals were transparent;
- ▶ observe the close time limit between planning and implementation.

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32. In this sense the key messages of the Symposium on Youth Participation in a Digitalised World organised by the EU–Council of Europe youth partnership in Budapest 2015 reflects on the role of youth work in a digitalised world: youth work should activate young people in the digital sphere, provide education about participation and e-participation and become a hub for different stakeholders.

In addition to supporting and initiating different forms of transitive or intransitive participation processes that fulfil the criteria mentioned above, youth work has the role of empowering young people and strengthening their participation competences. This means that young people get to understand the possibilities for participation and can assess their chances of success in concrete situations. Through participation competences, young people can frame their opinions and interests in relation to socio-political questions, and reflect on them so they can advocate for them in public, and take part in current discussions as active citizens. In this regard, three dimensions of participation competences are relevant for youth work and have to be improved.

Knowledge

Young people need knowledge about political and societal structures, decision-making processes and possible modes of participation. This could be called political literacy: to have a basic understanding of how democracy functions, who is responsible for which political decisions, and how these decisions can be influenced. It is useful to know that various binding national and international documents exist, too, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the EU Treaty of Lisbon, the Europe 2020 strategy or the EU Youth Strategy, which offer a good basis for open youth participation. Beyond this, knowledge about current tools, like eParticipation technologies or new methods of offline participation and how to use and implement them, is needed to initiate participation processes. In short, knowledge is required about societal and political communication structures, means and techniques in order to use them to raise public awareness and motivate others to take part.

Reflection

For young people to achieve critical engagement in their communities and societies, they have to learn how to take a critical stance and form their own positions and interests, challenging current political and societal conventions. They have to evaluate the established decision-making processes of the political system. Furthermore, it is important that young people – as active citizens – are able to advocate for their interests, evaluate different forms of participation and introduce their views into decision-making processes. Disagreement with established political positions should not be a reason for punishment or exclusion in schools, universities or the leisure and working spaces of young people.

Action

As a third dimension, the active use of different tools, methods and communication techniques must be supported. Young people need to have a positive experience with different forms of transitive or intransitive participation processes to initiate their own activities according to their positions and interests. Beyond this, they need to identify the potential of everyday life communication tools and engagement for successful political participation.

If youth work actively takes over this role as an advocate and agent for empowerment of young people it could find itself in a position of pressure from public authorities,

sponsors or political bodies. These institutions may well feel that the role of youth work is limited to keeping young people out of trouble, helping those who are already in trouble and opening the doors of local youth centres from time to time so young people can entertain themselves.

Neither the current state of democracy in most European countries nor the general state of the EU (unfortunately or not) allow us to reduce youth work to such a role. We might say it's time to get political.

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