
Youth participation agency and social change

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“No democracy without participation”

(European commission, White paper, 2001)

■ Aims

- Analyse the conditions of young people’s participation
- Understand to what extent young people feel active as citizens

■ Study of the tensions between

- Formal forms of participation within societal institutions
- More informal forms of participation

■ Which forms and conditions

- Are attractive for young people?
 - Contribute to their recognition and position as co-citizens?
 - Are likely to increase their influence on their own lives in the context of their communities?
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Youth participation in Europe

■ Methodology

□ Panel

■ 5 countries

□ Austria, Ireland, Italy, France, Slovakia

■ 4 different welfare regimes

□ Employment centred, liberal, under-developed and post-communist

□ Material

■ A coordinated action > secondary analysis

■ 2 local case studies per country in medium-sized cities

■ Emerging issues (under-researched and innovative)

- Definition of youth participation (1)

- All levels from

- the local to the global
- Informal settings to formal structures

- Various forms

- Voluntary and non-voluntary
 - Bottom-up, top-down or in cooperative form
 - Active or passive
 - Conscious or unconscious
 - Socially or institutionally sanctioned, conforming versus non-sanctioned, challenging, « bad participation »
 - Collective or individual
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- Definition of youth participation (2)
 - Need to distinguish
 - Degrees of participation
 - Initiators of the participatory processes
 - Different societal contexts and arenas
 - Political, social or associative, civic participation
 - User or consumer participation
 - Participation through education, employment...
 - An increase in the use of the term “participation”
 - A working definition
 - Any kind of young people’s action as long as they are carried out in or directed to the public
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Contexts of youth participation

- Objective
 - To present social contexts in which youth participation is embedded
 - Statement
 - A persistent gap between discourses and implementation
 - A general weakness of national youth policies and of youth sectors
 - 4 youth transition regimes
 - Have a significant influence on the shaping of notions
 - Youth, unemployment, disadvantage, focus of transition policies
 - Youth policy formation and delivery
 - tend to mirror the ideological foundations of the type of transition regime
 - But
 - A great variety of national and local situations
 - No evidence of the influence of the youth transition regime on the structure of youth sector and policies
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- On the contrary, a general disconnection
 - between discourse and implementation
 - Ex : the implementation of youth councils
 - Almost never the most appropriate way to foster young people's participation
 - Reasons
 - Usually educated young people
 - Consultation limited to youth issues
 - No guarantee concerning the integration of young people's recommendations
 - To overcome the diversity of situations and the gap between discourse and implementation
 - A particular attention to local practices
 - Life places of young people
 - Importance of youth work
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Youth participation under conditions of individualisation

- Implications and impacts of social change on young people's participation
 - A decrease of youth political participation in Europe
 - The result of the individualisation process?
 - Voting a much more deliberate act than in the past
 - New forms of participation
 - Such as anti-establishment mobilisations
 - Abstention as a protestation tool
 - No will to underline a presumed fault
 - To which extent do public authorities take into account the interests and preferences of young people?
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- Several factors of influence of the individualisation process
 - The insecurities young people experience shift the attention from social and political issues to personal coping strategies
 - The late entry into the labour market and the diversity of experiences reduce the traditional political socialisation via labour
 - The individualisation of transitions and lack of collectivist experiences undermine the visibility of collectivist politics
 - Young people's attitudes to participation need to be differentiated according to different levels
 - Young people attract considerable but questionable attention since the decline in participation is often attributed to them
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Participation and learning

- Youth usually being referred to as a life phase characterized by the preparation for citizenship
 - In this constellation, young people face the following postponement
 - First learn, then participate
 - Which raises the following questions
 - How can participation be learned and taught and how is it actually learned?
 - What are the hidden messages of the education for citizenship discourse?
 - Is learning possible without participation?
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- Learning and training for participation on several levels and by different means
 - Formal citizenship education at school
 - Cognitive learning about democracy
 - “Learning by doing”
 - Providing the structures for young people to have a real influence in the decision making process
 - Non-formal learning for citizenship
 - Youth work
 - Programmes related to participatory youth policies
 - Most educational programmes attempt at adapting young people to institutionalised forms and norms of participation
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Participation and youth culture

- To which extent does youth culture influence the forms of youth participation?
 - 3 fields
 - Youth counterculture
 - Ten case studies on youth cultural scenes
 - Description of their main characteristics
 - Common elements
 - They find way to express their concerns and they produce and distribute their own media
 - They make themselves visible in public
 - The more political oriented ones have a more participatory approach
 - Exception
 - Cork Skaters who do not share the same political attitudes
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■ Urban riots

- Some subcultures do not have an explicitly political self-understanding
 - This aspect emerge from conflict with authorities and other groups
 - To what extent do urban riots are a case of youth participation or not?
 - Young people in countercultural scenes use different ways of participation
 - Traditional and non-traditional ones
 - A usual practice
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- Internet and informal forms of political participation
 - Impact and effects of Internet on informal political participation
 - Internet as a new arena for political participation?
 - The digital world permit to
 - network on contingent problems
 - See in short the effects of their action
 - A virtual circle between action and engagement
 - Countercultures have a participatory character
 - They may be alternative, illegal
 - But they stick to the political agenda
 - Peace, freedom, environment, poverty, etc.
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Conclusions : youth participation and agency

- Institutional approaches are oriented towards implementing youth specific forms of representative democracy (e.g. *youth councils*)
- Institutional actors stress the importance of *organisations* being 'transmission belts' of participation
- *Youth work* is one important area of youth participation
- Case studies into *counter-cultures* suggest some differences in the ways authorities deal with the involvement of young people
- Participation in school is usually restricted to issues of school life
- Young people express themselves broadly in a dynamic third sector (rarely sustainable)

■ Crucial key policy factors

- ❑ The implementation of youth participation through a legal framework
 - ❑ The relationship between national and local level (under the twofold point of view of balance and dialogue)
 - ❑ The national profile of youth policies
 - ❑ The representations of youth (e.g. through the models of youth transition regimes)
 - ❑ Young people's access to welfare
 - ❑ The organisation of school systems
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■ General policy recommendations

- ❑ to foster links between youth policies (in particular soft ones) and welfare systems
 - ❑ to promote forms of learning to participate
 - ❑ to increase public actors' and decision makers' knowledge on youth culture
 - ❑ to acknowledge young people's activities in or directed to the public as potentially participatory and to investigate motivations and interests before stigmatising or criminalising them
 - ❑ to reinforce a more positive vision of young people
 - ❑ to encourage youth policies that focus on providing space for dialoguing and understanding choices and actions rather than classifying, stigmatising and criminalising ones.
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