Zulmir Bečević
Björn Andersson   *Editors*

Youth Participation and Learning

Critical Perspectives on Citizenship Practices in Europe

Young People and Learning Processes in School and Everyday Life

Volume 7

This book series provides analyses of contemporary issues and questions related to being young and becoming an adult in a global educational landscape. It examines education pathways in relation to characteristics of transitional processes that are part of this transformational and developmental process, as well as sociocultural aspects. It investigates areas such as education, everyday life, leisure time, family, subcultural affiliations, medialization, work and intimacy.

The series highlights the following areas:

- Contemporary challenges in education and the educational system.
- Young people's experiences and varying living conditions and its influence on academic performance.
- New emerging social and existential identities in relation to education.
- Challenges for education – Inclusion and exclusion in terms of risk behaviours, psychological distress and social unrest.
- Theoretical renewal and a conceptual adaption to education, and the societal and cultural challenges of contemporary school systems.
- Digitalisation, technology and media in modern education. Educational pathways for specific groups.
- Contextual challenges for educational ambitions, such as poverty, politics, war and exclusion of groups.

The series introduces ground-breaking interdisciplinary works in the area of education, challenging the orthodoxies in this field of research, and publishes works on the globalization of education. Furthermore, it introduces research on youth, thus advancing current knowledge on education in relation to the young person's everyday life, nationalities, socio-economic backgrounds and living conditions. In addition, it presents new methodological and theoretical approaches to this research field.

Please contact Astrid Noordermeer at Astrid.Noordermeer@springer.com if you wish to discuss a book proposal.

More information about this series at https://link.springer.com/bookseries/15702

Zulmir Bečević • Björn Andersson
Editors

Youth Participation and Learning

Critical Perspectives on Citizenship Practices in Europe

🐎 Springer

Editors
Zulmir Bečević
Department of Social Work
University of Gothenburg
Gothenburg, Sweden

Björn Andersson
Department of Social Work
University of Gothenburg
Gothenburg, Sweden

Editors' Preface

This book is about youth participation and learning. Being interdisciplinary in its nature, it brings together scholars from different national contexts and disciplines, such as educational sciences, child and youth studies, social work, sociology, and political science. The overarching focus of the anthology is on exploring participation and learning processes as they take shape outside traditional socialization settings such as the school and the family. The different chapters delve into the connections between the two concepts and critically interrogate learning and participation as interrelated phenomena. From an array of theoretical vantage points, the chapters search for and bring about novel insights regarding the complexities and struggles of young adulthood.

Most of the chapters build upon empirical data from the research project *Spaces and Styles of Participation. Formal, non-formal and informal possibilities of young people's participation in European cities*, in short, PARTISPACE. This project was carried out between 2015 and 2018 and financed by EU's Horizon 2020 research program. Research teams from eight cities were involved: Bologna (Italy), Eskişehir (Turkey), Frankfurt (Germany), Gothenburg (Sweden), Manchester (United Kingdom), Plovdiv (Bulgaria), Rennes (France), and Zürich (Switzerland). All cities, except for Plovdiv, are represented in the book.

As editors, we feel privileged for being provided the opportunity to work together with colleagues whose talent, hard work, and generosity has made this book into a truly collective achievement.

Gothenburg, Sweden   Zulmir Bečević
September 2021   Björn Andersson

Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction: Youth Participation and Learning

Zulmir Bečević and Björn Andersson

/.../ pedagogy is a political and moral practice that provides the knowledge, skills, and social relations that enable students to explore the possibilities of what it means to be critical citizens while expanding and deepening their participation in the promise of a substantive democracy.
Henry A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy,* 2020.

But in youth the tables of childhood dependence begin slowly to turn: no longer is it merely for the old to teach the young the meaning of life. It is the young who, by their responses and actions, tell the old whether life as represented to them has some vital promise, and it is the young who carry in them the power to confirm those who confirm them, to renew and regenerate, to disavow what is rotten, to reform and rebel.
Erik H. Erikson, *Identity,* 1968.

Abstract In this introductory chapter, some key points of departure for the book are introduced. The issue of youth participation has for a number of years attracted the interest of significant actors in the fields of research, policy making and youth work practice. A basic assumption for this volume is that youth participation should be studied as a social and situated practice and that this always contains a complexity of learning processes. The concept of participation has a quite indeterminate character and can be connected to a multitude of interpretations and meanings. The activities investigated in the different chapters of this book are often not defined in terms of "participation". Still, through these efforts young people involve themselves in important contemporary issues of political and public nature, thus demonstrating a participatory commitment to societal concerns. Learning is connected to this engagement in multiple ways, giving young people new insights about themselves and the social contexts of which they are a part. Most chapters of the book use empirical material that was gathered as part of the research project PARTISPACE. This was an

Z. Bečević (✉) · B. Andersson
Department of Social Work, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden
e-mail: Zulmir.becevic@socwork.gu.se; Bjorn.andersson@socwork.gu.se

EU-funded project that involved eight European cities and was carried out between 2015 and 2018. In PARTISPACE, a variety of research methods were used, and the results have been published in several articles and books. Finally, the chapters of this book are presented.

Keywords Youth participation · Learning · Social practice · PARTISPACE

Youth, Risk and Participation

Youth as a social phenomenon is often conceptualized as a dynamic life phase characterized by intense processes of learning which occur both in formal educational settings and everyday life. Both sociology of youth and sociology of education have explored learning as it takes place through socialization and participation in a range of settings, activities and pedagogical spaces (such as the family, nursery, school, peer group) characterized by different levels of institutionalization and formalization. Within the interdisciplinary field of youth studies, *participation* and *learning* thus stand out as key concepts and central analytical tools in understanding and unravelling the multilayered meanings and complexities of growing up in a late modern age characterized by de-industrialization, globalization, digitalization, protracted transitions from school to employment, marketization (and massification) of education and fragmented conceptions of identity (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Furlong, 2009, 2013; Cieslik & Simpson, 2013; Kelly & Kamp, 2015; Wyness, 2019; Johansson & Herz, 2019; Walther et al., 2020a, b).

   Through their sociological diagnosis of the late modern condition, theorists such as Bauman (2002), Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) have analysed this corrosion of tradition, modernity and identity, conceptualizing it in terms of rapid change and heightened processes of individualization, risk, reflexivity and alternative lifestyles. One of the consequences of these historical transformations and trends is an ontological insecurity which forces young people to constantly interpret and reflect upon themselves and their choices in search of stability and coherent life biographies in a world increasingly characterized by fluidity and fragmentation. Multidimensional processes of structural change are directly connected to changed living patterns and a differentiation of experiences and lifestyles. Answers to basic questions of an existential nature connected to identity formation, expectations and demands imposed on the individuals from family, friends, school and society at large are no longer as easy to predict as during the industrial era.

   The late modern shift towards individualization, differentiation and risk, however, does not mean that divisions and inequalities based on class, gender, ethnicity and race have diminished as major predictors and determinants of life opportunities. As Furlong and Cartmel (2007: 143) write, overemphasizing "the ways individuals interpret the world and subjectively construct social realities" leads to the obscurement of inequalities and the "epistemological fallacy" of late modernity:

> Individuals are forced to negotiate a set of risks which impinge on all aspects of their daily lives, yet the intensification of individualism means that crises are perceived as individual shortcoming rather than the outcome of processes which are largely outwith the control of individuals. In this context, we have seen that some of the problems faced by young people in modern societies stem from an attempt to negotiate difficulties on an individual level. Blind to the existence of powerful chains of interdependency, young people frequently attempt to resolve collective problems through individual action and hold themselves responsible for their inevitable failure. (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007: 144)

Individualization is thus not the same as *equalization* of life opportunities which, even though de-standardized and individualized, remain strongly conditioned and structured by a social order built upon (and reproduced through) class, gender and racial inequalities, dominance and exploitation. In fact, young people today are living in an age of growing social and economic inequalities which are undermining fundamental principles of social justice and citizenship that underpin democratic societies (Wilkinson, 2005; Piketty, 2015; Milanović, 2016; Therborn, 2013, 2018). If we are to avoid the epistemological fallacy and illusion of disconnected and unconstrained subjects, we need to situate and analyse young people's lives and practices in relation to political, social and historical conditions of which they are always a part.

This is particularly important in relation to the somewhat enigmatic concept of youth participation, which has attracted significant attention from researchers, policymakers, youth work practitioners and the public since the institutionalization of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The heightened awareness of the adult world regarding how young people participate in the political, economic and social processes of societies in which they live is often understood in terms of a general "de-standardization of the institutionalized life course and of youth transitions in particular" (Pohl et al., 2020: 1). Following the neoliberal turn, the welfare systems of European nation states have undergone significant transformations during the last decades. Principles of universal welfarism have been gradually dismantled and replaced by political and economic policies which have eroded and weakened the very foundations of state-facilitated welfare, replacing collective responsibility with market logic (Brown, 2005, 2017; Harvey, 2007; Fraser, 2019). The distinct shift towards neoliberal governance in capitalist societies has hit young people particularly hard. Discourses about anti-social youth as the new dangerous "underclass" unwilling and unable to participate in educational, political and employment arenas offered by traditional society have been on the political agenda since the 1990s (Mingione, 1996; MacDonald, 1997). During the new millennium, discourses which conflate youth with exclusion from mainstream society have been increasingly ethnified and racialized (Wacquant, 1999, 2007; Dikeç, 2007; Schierup et al., 2014). Poverty, low educational attainment, precarious working conditions, long-term unemployment, discrimination and bleak prospects for groups of young people have led to the erosion of substantial citizenship rights and thereby concrete opportunities to act and participate in society as full citizens (Bečević & Dahlstedt, 2021). Even Beck (1992: 35) acknowledges that risks and insecurities follow a class pattern, but, as he writes, "only inversely", meaning that

"wealth accumulates at the top, risks at the bottom". Risks thus strengthen the class society, and, in a society dictated by principles of market logic, winners are young people with access to economic, social and cultural resources and losers are those without. This means that participation, as an empirical phenomenon, needs to be understood as structured by unequal and resource-based power relations which give rise to distinct practices, experiences and life chances for groups of young people based on their social location. Participation, as an abstract principle of democratic citizen involvement – and as an everyday practice – is conditioned by class, gender, ethnic and racial divisions which tend to be transmitted across generations, making participation "unequal at the starting line" (Verba et al., 2003). This is one of the essential characteristics of participatory practice in urban areas across Europe.

Being in a dynamic life stage characterized by transitions, intense meaning-making, uncertainty, changing behaviours and rebellion against conformities of both childhood and adulthood, young people are often ascribed seismographic qualities by the adult world, as having almost intrinsic capabilities to read the present and lead the way towards the future (Lalander & Johansson, 2017). The general state of youth is thus directly connected to the state and survival of democracy. This is evidenced by the active policy work of the European Union during the last 20 years (see European Commission White Paper on Youth, 2001; The EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering, 2009; EU Youth Report, 2015). Engaging young people and increasing their participation in the established institutions of the broader society are seen as key priority:

> Young people's human and social capital is one of Europe's greatest assets for the future. The European Union and its Member States need to invest in the potential that 90 million young Europeans represent in terms of skills, creativity and diversity. The economic crisis has hit young people particularly hard. It has widened the gap between those with more and those with fewer opportunities. Some young people are increasingly excluded from social and civic life. Worse still, some are at risk of disengagement, marginalization or even violent radicalization. This is why the Commission and the Member States continued working /.../ to improve young people's employability, their integration in the labour market, their social inclusion and participation. In the face of a growing socio-economic divide, policy must continue tackling the deep social problems that many young people are facing. We need to identify sustainable solutions to fight youth unemployment, strengthen social inclusion and prevent violent radicalization. (EU Youth Report, 2015: 8)

The new EU Youth Strategy, which makes up the framework for EU's youth policy cooperation for 2019–2027, has *participation* as one of its guiding principles, aiming "towards a meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural and political participation of young people". Fostering youth participation in "democratic life" in times of welfare-state retrenchment thus continues to be of central importance.

This emphasis on the importance of educating young people into becoming well-functioning and active citizens needs to be understood in relation to widespread, well-established and medially perpetuated representations of young people as self-centred and apolitical. Ideological concerns regarding the so-called "youth partici-patory deficit" resulting from young people's dissatisfaction with mainstream party politics, as well as the public institutions of liberal democracies, are key drivers of policy developments which succeed to only a limited extent in connecting with the

lived realities, experiences and struggles of contemporary youth (Loncle et al., 2012, 2020; Becquet et al., 2020). In popular discourse young people are often represented as disengaged, cynical, aversive and thus highly *problematic* and even responsible for the gradual dissolution of representative democracy. Viewing young people as primarily "becomings" whose most important task is to conform and adapt to the ways of the capitalist economy is an instrumental and cynical way of conceptualizing what participation, education and learning is and can be about. Planting a "participatory lack" with generations of young people who do not participate "enough", or "in the right way" according to the standards of the institutionalized order, pathologizes behaviours and practices of youth while leaving the political and economic power structures intact. This general stance of the adult world further neglects everyday realities, experiences, practices, dreams and ambitions of millions of youths who nurture a growing discontent with their general circumstances and constrained future outlooks. An impotent, global political order, evidently unable to adequately address the rampant political, economic and environmental crises significant of our times, is obviously yet another source of young people's aversion towards the ineffectiveness, bureaucratic conformity and growing authoritarianism of political systems across the world.

However, recent analysis of youth participation in European cities presents convincing evidence of youth organization, action and political engagement which question and challenge the existing state of affairs from different standpoints (Batsleer et al., 2017; Bečević et al., 2017; Rowley et al., 2018; McMahon et al., 2018). In research, this phenomenon is usually referred to as "the participatory paradox". While it is true that young people are generally sceptical towards and simply bored by established politics, they are simultaneously well attuned to specific issues (like global warming, racism, sexism, animal rights) as well as broader matters of social and political concern. The presumed "apathy" of youth towards politics thus simultaneously contains ideals of justice and equality and with that a visionary, political drive which has the power to radically redefine and regenerate politics in times of risk and crises (Pickard & Bessant, 2018).

At the same time, this principal discussion about the material embeddedness of participation points to the discursive ambiguity and elusiveness of the term. Its flexibility and general characteristics of being like an "empty vessel which can be filled with almost anything" (Theis, 2010: 344) can be understood as one of the reasons behind its enormous breakthrough and popularity. Due to this conceptual lack of substance, noted by political scientists and citizenship theorists already in the 1970s (see Pateman, 1970), "participation" often needs "ladders, degrees, levels, enabling environments and supporting adjectives, such as meaningful and ethical" (Theis, 2010: 344) to make any theoretical or empirical sense at all. Participation seems to be "a signifier without a signified" (Laclau, 2006), that is, a term always in motion and open to different interpretations and ascriptions of meaning. Participation can thus be equated with democracy, opportunity and justice, but just as well with tokenism, manipulation and control, which is evident by the many ways of understanding, conceptualizing and studying participation (see Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010; Pilkington et al., 2017). Within the overlapping fields of childhood

and youth studies, participation is commonly viewed either as young people's involvement in social and civic activities (e.g. culture, sports, associations) or as political engagement (e.g. in conventional party politics as well as in autonomous political movements):

> [...] we may distinguish two ways of looking at what goes on when children and young people 'participate': one that sees it in terms of social relations and another which sees it in terms of political relations. There is a discourse of children's participation that is predominantly social – that speaks of networks, of inclusion, of adult-child relations, and of the opportunities for social connection that participatory practice can create. Alongside this there is an alternative discourse that is more or less overtly political – that speaks of power, and challenge, and change. (Thomas, 2007: 206)

To boil it down: while participation in childhood studies tends to focus on relations between adults and children, pedagogical processes, power sharing, decision-making, dialogue and deliberation, measuring degrees of involvement and assessing its quality and outcome in terms of skills and learning, in research oriented towards youth, participation – even if it can involve all of the elements listed above – is more often related to political, civic and social engagement and questions concerning citizenship status, democracy, conflict and opportunity. The purpose of this book is not to provide the reader with rigid, lexical definitions of participation but to critically explore multiplicities of meanings ascribed to the term in relation to different contexts and practices of learning.

To avoid "conceptual confusion" (Ekman & Amnå, 2012) common in the interdisciplinary study of youth participation, we still think it is important to provide the reader with at least a broad theoretical platform from which more delimited, conceptual explorations in the upcoming chapters can depart. Following the general findings of an international research project about youth participation in urban Europe (which makes up the empirical foundation of this book and will be presented in short), the definitional point of departure implies that:

> /.../ potentially all actions (and therefore different *styles* of action) of groups or individuals carried out in and/or addressing the public (which is not homogenous but consists of a variety of formal, non-formal and informal *spaces*) can be interpreted as participation /.../ Such a broad concept of participation allows for the inclusion of actions by which young people articulate interest in being and aspiration to be part of society. These include actions which are normally not recognized as participation, such as youth cultural practices, conflicts with authorities /.../ and finally 'riots' and 'unrest'. (Pohl et al., 2020: 3)

The individual chapters, being different theoretically and empirically in their exploration of the interlocking terms *participation* and *learning*, converge around three basic, theoretical assumptions:

- Participation needs to be seen as *social practice* which means that participation is 'done' in complex interactions, negotiations and struggles.
- These social practices articulate, reproduce and transform *power relationships* inherent to processes of institutionalization and domination but also of coping with everyday life which may involve latent or manifest contestation and resistance.
- Finally, participation implies that social practices and power relationships emerge in *public spaces*, that is spaces where what is done is seen and heard by (if not always

> addressed to) others. They are practices which in some sense make public claims. (Walther et al., 2020a, b: 28)

Departing from this broad understanding of participation, the chapters in this volume will go about examining how participation is constructed through discourse, how it is institutionalized by local policies, how it evolves from a variety of practices embedded in social space, how it emerges in biographies of individuals and, not least, how it intersects with and relates to multidimensional processes of social learning (see also Walther et al., 2020a, b: 21).

Participation and Learning

> Participation is always based on situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world. This implies that understanding and experience are in constant interaction – indeed, are mutually constitutive. The notion of participation thus dissolves dichotomies between cerebral and embodied activity, between contemplation and involvement, between abstraction and experience: persons, actions, and the world are implicated in all thought, speech, knowing, and learning. (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 49f)

Learning in general has to do with how knowledge, skills and competences in a given society are recreated, generationally transmitted and renewed. With regard to the way children and young people acquire and develop knowledge they need to address the looming challenges of adult life, different traditions (such as behaviourism, cognitivism, neuroscience, pragmatist and sociocultural perspectives) conceptualize learning in different ways. Just like with participation, learning is a complex phenomenon and can mean different things depending on whether it is related to the domain of formal education, everyday practice, politics or research (Säljö, 2015).

Although learning comes in many modes and different people may have different understandings and expectations in relation to the term, learning within institutionalized pedagogical settings such as schools is probably the dominant way for most of conceptualizing what learning means and where it takes place. Learning in formalized contexts follows a curriculum and is systematically organized; it is based on content which is predefined and aims to create conditions for the acquisition of skills understood as necessary for young people's development and functioning in society, it is teacher-led and builds on explicit (as well as implicit) expectations and demands and the outcomes of the pedagogical activities are frequently measured through standardized tests and a grading system assumed to be an objective indicator of intellectual progress and growth. Operating under the broader mechanisms of capitalist, market logic, this mode of learning is highly individualized, competition driven and, thus, in line with the marketization of education and reproduction of divisions and inequalities (Giroux, 2003; Dahlstedt & Fejes, 2018). This kind of learning is seldom spontaneous or incidental; it is de-contextualized, both materially (learning activities are located in buildings and classrooms set apart from other public and private spaces) and figuratively (the knowledge children and young people are expected to internalize is poorly related to their everyday lives,

experiences and domains of practical action), which leads to processes of passivation and estrangement, a problem that the philosopher-educationalist John Dewey (1999/1916) addressed over a century ago.

In this book, we conceptualize learning as emerging in social, situated practice in which participation in social interaction and construction of meaning are the fundament and source of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The notion that human beings learn through active participation in different social contexts and settings is not new. Historically, learning through practices of everyday life has been the most important way of knowledge transmission and development of skills, a process without which modern societies could not have evolved. Before the rise of modern education systems, participation in everyday interaction was for most human beings *the only* source of learning (Säljö, 2015: 15). Viewing human beings as active subjects who interact and engage with economic and political circumstances by which they are simultaneously constrained, and, like Marx says, "make their own history", is a basic sociological insight in materialist theorizing of social relations. That "all social life is essentially practical" (Marx, 1888/2003, in Liedman and Linnell p. 119) implies that social life is a *participatory* life, a process which consists of both "action and connection" (Wenger, 1998: 55). From a situational perspective on learning, participation is synonymous with:

> [. . .] the social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises. Participation in this sense is both personal and social. It is a complex process that combines doing, talking, thinking, feeling, and belonging. It involves our whole person, including our bodies, minds, emotions, and social relations. (Wenger, 1998: 55–56)

The educational theorist Paulo Freire, borrowing from Hegel and Marx, calls this person-world relation *praxis*, denoting a process of critical reflection and action. According to Freire, collective organization, activism and pursuit of social change are enabled by a radical pedagogy which builds on participation in activities aimed at "awakening of critical consciousness", which further enables "people to enter the historical process as Subjects /. . ./" and "enrolls them in the search for self-affirmation /. . ./" (Freire, 1970: 10). Participation in the social world, and learning that is connected to it through the awakening of a critical mind, is a humanizing process which makes it possible for people to emerge as knowing and acting subjects (in contrast to objects, "which are known and acted upon", ibid.) and participate in the construction of the world to which they are dialectically bound. Participation is thus "a learning process in which individuals gradually develop their capabilities to participate through practice" (Percy-Smith et al., 2020: 196). Participation *implies* social learning, which reversely puts emphasis on "learning as participation in the social world" (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 43). From a situated perspective on learning, participation as a social practice then inevitably *leads to* different processes of multidimensional learning, which means that the two terms presuppose one another:

> [. . .] learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world. Conceiving of learning in terms of participation focuses attention on ways in which it is an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations; this is, of course,

> consistent with a relational view, of persons, their actions, and the world, typical of a theory of social practice. (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 49f)

Even if the "communities of practice are everywhere" as Wenger (1998: 6) writes, a small remark is in its place: the participatory contexts analysed in the chapters of this anthology are not to be understood as subsumed under a model of economic production (where apprentices in different settings through a gradual process of knowledge acquisition move from peripheral to legitimate participation in the economic production) but rather as communities of practice characterized by different levels of formalization and voluntariness. Without attempting to capture the extremely different contexts of youth participation under one conceptual banner, we can say that the participatory contexts analysed in the book can be understood as "mini-polities" (Flanagan, 2013), signalling that young people's learning and "becoming" citizens are firmly rooted in the relationships of everyday life:

> /.../ it is through their experiences in these local, proximal contexts [mini-polities, our remark] that teens formulate ideas about their membership, rights, and obligations as citizens in the broader polity. In other words, adolescents' concepts of themselves as citizens, as members of the body politic, are built up via their memberships in groups and institutions – peer groups, schools, community-based institutions – spaces where they enact what it means to be part of a group, that is, exercise the prerogatives and assume the responsibilities of membership in the group or institution. (Flanagan, 2013: 18)

Even though "learning" in a sense is an abstract phenomenon, it is also – regardless of how it might be analytically conceptualized – concretely implicated in interactions and social contexts which are analysed in this book. Through their exploration of participation and learning processes which occur outside traditional socialization settings such as schools and family, the different chapters delve into the connections between the two concepts and, in various ways and from different perspectives, critically interrogate learning and participation as interrelated phenomena, bringing about novel insights with regard to the complexities of young adulthood. Being interdisciplinary in its nature (contributors to the volume come from disciplinary backgrounds such as educational sciences, child and youth studies, social work, sociology and political science), the volume provides an analysis of issues connected to youth participation and learning. The book brings together scholars from different national contexts, all firmly grounding their analysis in the life worlds of young people, putting focus on their voices, perspectives, practices and strategies.

The PARTISPACE Project

Most chapters in this book build upon empirical data and analyses from the research project *Spaces and Styles of Participation. Formal, non-formal and informal possibilities of young people's participation in European cities*, in short, PARTISPACE. This project was carried out between 2015 and 2018 and financed by the EU's Horizon 2020 research programme. In all, eight cities were involved in the research:

Bologna (Italy), Eskişehir (Turkey), Frankfurt (Germany), Gothenburg (Sweden), Manchester (United Kingdom), Plovdiv (Bulgaria), Rennes (France) and Zürich (Switzerland). The selection of cities was based on both similarities and differences. Within each country, the cities have common features with respect to dimension and urban status. However, in relation to Esping-Andersen's well-known model of welfare regimes and the youth transition regimes model developed by Walther, the cities represent different welfare arrangements and offer a fertile ground for empirical explorations (see Pohl et al., 2020 for further references). PARTISPACE was led by the Goethe University of Frankfurt am Main.

As already mentioned, one starting point for PARTISPACE was that youth participation in Europe is more widespread than is often assumed and that one important issue concerns recognition. If the understanding of youth participation is stretched beyond the traditional arenas of politics and specific institutional arrangements for participation, then new spaces of young people's political involvement are opened up. The aim of PARTISPACE was to investigate this social landscape and to phrase and analyse young people's experiences of inhabiting it. The research was especially concerned with young people's use of public space and used a three-parted model for distinguishing participatory settings. *Formal* settings are those specifically designed for youth participation (e.g. youth councils), *non-formal* settings are those in which participation is not the main goal (e.g. associations) and *informal* settings are about individual and collective everyday practice (e.g. peer groups).

The project gathered a vast amount of empirical data and used a number of research methods, for example, survey analysis, discourse analysis, action research and ethnography. As a start, a literature review and a policy analysis were conducted in each country in order to acquire an understanding regarding how youth participation and policy are generally articulated and organized, and then followed a number of individual and focus group interviews with experts, politicians and young people in each city. Biographical interviews and case studies were also carried out. Finally, action research projects were implemented together with groups of young people. An important starting point for PARTISPACE was to study young people's participation in practice. The project therefore worked with a qualitative research design, and much of the material collected consists of interviews and case studies. This provides opportunities to closely follow social processes and to analyse the practice of youth participation in depth. At the same time, the opportunities to make general and quantitative analyses of young people's participation based on variables such as class, gender, and ethnicity are limited.

The outcomes of PARTISPACE are manifold. The project was able to demonstrate a number of participatory settings and practices among young people. These broaden the understanding of young people's political participation and show that "democracy is learned by doing" (Batsleer et al., 2020: 21). Furthermore, the project has issued a number of policy briefs with research-based recommendations for policy and practice. A training module for professionals working with young people has also been made available. Finally, the project has published a number of articles

and books that deepen and enhance the theoretical discourse on youth participation (see www.partispace.eu for a complete list).

Presentation of Chapters

In the first chapter, *Erik Andersson* discusses major challenges to the political participation of young people. He identifies three important issues that have to be contested, and these are linked to questions about why, what and how. These concern reasons for involving young people, what democratic experience is supported and which methods can be used. The possibilities for youth participation are dependent on adult decision-makers, and Andersson presents how a "public pedagogical leadership" can be elaborated. Finally, he discusses how young people's political participation must be related to different types of participation and which pedagogical principles should guide such processes in order to enhance young people's possibilities of involvement.

The interplay between justice, conflict and recognition is the starting point for *Larissa von Schwanenflügel and Andreas Walther* to understand how participatory practice develops among young people and how this creates learning possibilities. They use a number of empirical cases from the PARTISPACE project to present different constellations of conflict and to show that it actually is in, and through, these conflicts that participatory learning can take place.

Doing volunteer work is a common way for young people to get involved in socio-political and cultural issues, and in their chapter *Berrin Osmanoğlu and Demet Lüküslü* give an overview of youth volunteering across Europe. They then turn to the situation in Turkey and describe how the candidacy for membership in the EU changed the conditions for volunteer work. They distinguish a process of professionalization and how new demands have been placed on young volunteers. Through a case study, it is shown how the interaction between politicians, youth workers and young people creates a project culture of skills and expectations.

In their chapter, *Alessandro Martelli and Stella Volturo* study the dynamics of youth participation in relation to the arenas of everyday life. They think of these as learning laboratories and highlight the importance of leisure activities in current times when traditional social bonds are weakening. A case study shows young people organizing and performing different cultural activities. Through these, the young people engage in a number of social activities like helping asylum seekers and regenerating urban space. Martelli and Volturo conclude that what we see is representative of what has been labelled "active minorities" and that the aim of such groups is to try out new ways of living in the city.

Volunteer work with people in exile is also at the centre of the contribution from *Patricia Loncle, Louise Bonnel and Zuwaina Salim*. They present an association whose main engagement is to make free language training available for people in exile. However, the young volunteers involved in the association enlarge their efforts to include several important areas of daily life. This leads to "turning points", that is,

learning situations and social relations carrying new knowledge for all parties involved. In this process, the young volunteers function as "cause entrepreneurs" who help to raise awareness about socio-political matters.

Practices of a group of young people engaged in theatre work is the focus of analysis in the chapter by *Björn Andersson and Zulmir Bečević*. The group is in a process of becoming independent from the support of an educational organization, and the goal is to set up a play of their own. This proves to be a complicated task which affects the relations within the group. The play is never realized, but the group members are satisfied with their achievement since it is associated with socio-political participation and learning connected to personal experience as well as social relations in the external world.

In her chapter, *Ilaria Pitti* deals with activism of social movement organizations. This kind of engagement often rests on the assumption that activists are driven by a "call" and pure commitment. However, Pitti uses two empirical cases to show that there are certain skills involved in the running of these organizations and that activist training is mediated through specific mechanisms. On the one hand, the young activists imitate the behaviour of more experienced members, and, on the other, there are moments of shared confidentiality between the activists. The first type of learning is labelled "mimesis" and the second is called "sharing", and it is through processes such as these that young people acquire the necessary skills to participate in the activism of social movement organizations.

In contrast to this, *Alexandre Pais* discusses learning processes in formal settings of youth participation. The empirical vantage point of the examination is a number of youth councils and student committees that are part of the PARTISPACE data material. Pais concludes that a general trait of these organizations is that they are exclusively organized and led by adults, leaving the young participants with little space for disagreement and possibilities to bring up issues of their own. A rather strict protocol guides all performance and passivates the delegates. At the same time, being a member of a youth council can be seen as a possibility for self-enhancement and a way to invest one's time in productive activities for a thriving future. In this way, engagement in formal settings may teach young people to accept and indulge in the current state of affairs.

From this we turn to new social movements among young people. *Magnus Dahlstedt* writes about youth living in urban peripheries of Swedish cities. For a number of years, these residential areas have seen different kinds of protests against the segregation and social exclusion that young people experience. The new movements organize a resistance on a collective basis, being explicitly inspired by the Black Panther Party. Their activities include, for example, free breakfast for children and study circles. As individuals, young residents describe strong feelings of belonging and cohesion in their area. In relation to mainstream society, they feel they are judged as undesirably different and that it is up to them to care for their civil rights. Young people in the urban periphery are engaged on both a collective and an individual basis in constant politics of re-framing their social circumstances.

Finally, *Yağmur Mengilli*, *Christian Reutlinger and Dominic Zimmermann* investigate the educational landscapes of the city. This perspective underlines that

learning processes are active everywhere and that the presence of educational experts is not a prerequisite for learning to take place. The authors also emphasize the importance of space and describe the spatial practices of graffiti writers and parkour runners. These practices are closely linked to processes of self-education and participation. The analysis of how young people engaged in graffiti and parkour use urban space shows that there are important places of learning which are not formally structured or organized but rather function as educational landscapes for young people themselves.

References

An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering. (2009). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0200:FIN:EN:PDF

Batsleer, J., Ehrensperger, K., Lüküslü, F., Osmanoğlu, B., Pais, A., Reutlinger, C., Roth, P., Wigger, A., & Zimmermann, D. (2017). *Claiming spaces and struggling for recognition. Comparative Case Study Report*. Partispace.

Batsleer, J., Walther, A., & Lüküslü, D. (2020). Struggle over participation. Towards a grounded theory of youth participation. In A. Walther, J. Batsleer, P. Loncle, & A. Pohl (Eds.), *Young people and the struggle for participation. Contested practices, power and pedagogies in public spaces*. Routledge.

Bauman, Z. (2002). *Det individualiserade samhället*. Daidalos.

Bečević, Z., & Dahlstedt, M. (2021). On the margins of citizenship: Youth participation and youth exclusion in times of neoliberal urbanism. *Journal of Youth Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2021.1886261

Bečević, Z., Liljeholm Hansson, S., Forkby, T., & Andersson, B. (2017). *Youth participation: National country report*. Partispace.

Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society. Towards a new modernity*. Sage.

Becquet, V., Kovacheva, S., Popivanov, B., & Forkby, T. (2020). Discourses of youth participation in Europe. In A. Walther, J. Batsleer, P. Loncle, & A. Pohl (Eds.), *Young people and the struggle for participation. Contested practices, power and pedagogies in public spaces*. Routledge.

Brown, W. (2005). *Edgework. Critical essays on knowledge and politics*. Princeton University Press.

Brown, W. (2017). *Undoing the demos. Neoliberalism's stealth revolution*. Zone Books.

Cieslik, M., & Simpson, D. (2013). *Key concepts in youth studies*. Sage.

Dahlstedt, M., & Fejes, A. (2018). *Skolan, marknaden och framtiden*. Studentlitteratur.

Dewey, J. (1999/1916). *Demokrati och utbildning*. Daidalos.

Dikeç, M. (2007). *Badlands of the republic. Space, politics, and urban policy*. Blackwell Publishing.

Ekman, J., & Amnå, E. (2012). Political participation and civic engagement: Towards a new typology. *Human Affairs, 22*, 283–300.

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity. Youth and crisis*. W.W. Norton & Company.

EU Youth Report. (2015). *Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the Implementation of the Renewed Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field 2010–2018*. http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/library/reports/youth-report-2015_en.pdf

European Commission White Paper on Youth. (2001). *A new impetus for European youth*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52001DC0681

Flanagan, A. C. (2013). *Teenage citizens. The political theories of the young*. Harvard University Press.

Fraser, N. (2019). *Det gamla dör och det nya kan inte födas*. Hägersten.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Penguin Books.

Furlong, A. (Ed.). (2009). *Handbook of youth and young adulthood: New perspectives and agendas*. Routledge.

Furlong, A. (2013). *Youth studies. An introduction*. Routledge.

Furlong, A., & Cartmel, F. (2007). *Young people and social change. New perspectives*. Open University Press.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age*. Polity Press.

Giroux, H. A. (2003). *The abandoned generation. Democracy beyond the culture of fear*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Giroux, A. H. (2020). *On critical pedagogy*. Bloomsbury.

Harvey, D. (2007). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.

Johansson, T., & Herz, M. (2019). *Youth studies in transition: Culture, generation and new learning processes*. Springer Nature.

Kelly, P., & Kamp, A. (Eds.). (2015). *A critical youth studies for the 21st century*. Brill.

Laclau, E. (2006). *Emancipation(s)*. Verso.

Lalander, T., & Johansson, T. (2017). *Ungdomsgrupper i teori och praktik*. Studentlitteratur.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning. Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Loncle, P., Cuconato, M., Muniglia, V., & Walther, A. (2012). *Youth participation in Europe. Beyond discourses, practices and realities*. Policy Press.

Loncle, P., Cuconato, M., Tuorto, D., & Andersson, B. (2020). Do youth policies matter? National and local youth policies as contexts of youth participation. In A. Walther, J. Batsleer, P. Loncle, & A. Pohl (Eds.), *Young people and the struggle for participation. Contested practices, power and pedagogies in public spaces*. Routledge.

MacDonald, R. (Ed.). (1997). *Youth, the 'underclass' and social exclusion*. Routledge.

Marx, K. (1888/2003). Teser om Feuerbach. In S. E. Liedman & B. Linnell (Eds.), (2003). *Karl Marx. Texter i Urval*. Ordfront.

McMahon, G., Percy-Smith, P., Thomas, N., Bečević, Z., Liljeholm Hansson, S., & Forkby, T. (2018). *Action research with young people. Comparative report*. Partispace.

Milanović, B. (2016). *Global ojämlikhet. Nya perspektiv i globaliseringens tidevarv*. Daidalos.

Mingione, E. (Ed.). (1996). *Urban poverty and the underclass. A reader*. Blackwell Publishers Ltd..

Pateman, C. (1970). *Participation and democratic theory*. Cambridge University Press.

Percy-Smith, B., & Thomas, N. (Eds.). (2010). *A handbook of children and young people's participation. Perspectives from theory and practice*. Routledge.

Percy-Smith, B., Thomas, N. P., Batsleer, J., & Forkby, T. (2020). Everyday pedagogies: New perspectives on youth participation, social learning and citizenship. In A. Walther, J. Batsleer, P. Loncle, & A. Pohl (Eds.), *Young people and the struggle for participation. Contested practices, power and pedagogies in public spaces*. Routledge.

Pickard, S., & Bessant, J. (Eds.). (2018). *Young people re-generating politics in times of crises*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Piketty, T. (2015). *Kapitalet i tjugoförsta århundradet*. Karneval Förlag.

Pilkington, H., Pollock, G., & Franc, R. (Eds.). (2017). *Understanding youth participation across Europe: From survey to ethnography*. Springer.

Pohl, A., Batsleer, J., Loncle, P., & Walther, A. (2020). Contested practices, power and pedagogies of young people in public spaces. An introduction. In A. Walther, J. Batsleer, P. Loncle, & A. Pohl (Eds.), *Young people and the struggle for participation. Contested practices, power and pedagogies in public spaces*. Routledge.

Rowley, H., Pitti, I., Mengilli, Y., Bečević, Z., Martelli, A., Martin, C., Osmanoğlu, B., Percy-Smith, B., & Popivanov, B. (2018). *Styles: Young people's participation as lived practice*. Partispace.

Säljö, R. (2015). *Lärande. En introduktion till perspektiv och metaforer*. Gleerups.

Schierup, C.-U., Ålund, A., & Kings, L. (2014). Reading the Stockholm riots. *Race & Class, 55*(3), 1–21.

Theis, J. (2010). Children as active citizens. An agenda for children's civil rights and civic engagement. In B. Percy-Smith & N. Thomas (Eds.), *A handbook of children and young people's participation. Perspectives from theory and practice*. Routledge.

Therborn, G. (2013). *Ojämlikhet dödar*. Arkiv Förlag.

Therborn, G. (2018). *Kapitalet, överheten och alla vi andra. Klassamhället i Sverige – det rådande och det kommande* [Capital, authorities and the rest of us. Class-society in Sweden – The current and the coming]. Arkiv Förlag.

Thomas, N. (2007). Towards a theory of children's participation. *International Journal of Children's Rights, 15*(2), 199–218.

Verba, S., Burns, N., & Lehman Schlozman, K. (2003). Unequal at the starting line: Creating participatory inequalities across generations and among groups. *The American Sociologist, 34*, 45–69.

Wacquant, L. (1999). Urban marginality in the coming millenium. *Urban Studies, 36*(10), 1639–1647.

Wacquant, L. (2007). *Urban outcasts. A comparative sociology of advanced marginality*. Polity Press.

Walther, A., Batsleer, J., Loncle, P., & Pohl, A. (Eds.). (2020a). *Young people and the struggle for participation. Contested practices, power and pedagogies in public spaces*. Routledge.

Walther, A., Pohl, A., Loncle, P., & Thomas, N. P. (2020b). Researching youth participation – Theoretical and methodological limitations of existing research and innovative perspectives. In A. Walther, J. Batsleer, P. Loncle, & A. Pohl (Eds.), *Young people and the struggle for participation. Contested practices, power and pedagogies in public spaces*. Routledge.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice. Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.

Wilkinson, R. G. (2005). *The impact of inequality. How to make sick societies healthier*. Routledge.

Wyness, M. (2019). *Childhood and society*. Red Globe Press.

Zulmir Bečević is PhD in Childhood Studies and Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the Department of Social Work, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Björn Andersson is Associate Professor and Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the Department of Social Work, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Chapter 2
Three Major Challenges in Young People's Political Participation and a Pragmatic Way Forward

Erik Andersson

Abstract Political participation of young people is important for a sustainable democratic society now and in the future, for a society with knowledgeable members and a good public health. But why is it that young people still do not have full opportunities for political participation? Why are they still not fully counted as democratic actors when it comes to shaping their own and other people's lives? Why are they, to a large extent, still denied civil rights and excluded from vital decision-making processes? For democratic revitalization in general, and survival of local communities in particular, youth political participation is a crucial pedagogical concern. The overall purpose of the chapter is to contribute knowledge that can be used to explore, understand, and improve young people's political participation in local democracy. To do this, three major challenges concerning young people's political participation in the public pedagogy practice of local democracy are discussed. A way forward to pragmatically deal with these challenges is offered in terms of a public pedagogical leadership approach. The approach is supported by a set of pedagogical principles for young people's political participation and the pedagogical political participation model (the 3P-M).

Keywords Political participation · Public pedagogy · Leadership · Democracy

Introduction

Young people's political participation in the struggle for how the society should be organized is not a new concern in Sweden nor in other Western countries. Despite this, municipalities, formal decision-makers, and young people themselves find it hard to engage in meaningful dialogues in which young people are given opportunities to contribute to collective decision-making, formation, conservation, and transformation of life in association with others as equals (i.e., democracy, Dewey,

E. Andersson (✉)
Örebro University, Örebro, Sweden
e-mail: erik.andersson@oru.se

1938/1997). With regard to young people's political participation: What do these difficulties consist of and how could they be understood and addressed? Which are the main challenges for improving young people's political participation in local democracy?

In this chapter it will be argued that political participation is always dependent on the approaches of formal decision-makers (teachers, politicians, officials, etc.). Young people's political participation is a matter of continually and critically examining and developing the political culture of the *public pedagogy practice*, broadly defined as various practices, processes, and situations and spaces of learning, socialization, and person formation which occur both within and beyond the realm of formal education settings. The task of democracy, and thus for public pedagogy, "is forever that of creation of a freer and more human experience in which all share and to which all contribute" (Dewey, 1988, p. 230). For democratic revitalization in general, and survival of local communities in particular, youth political participation is a crucial pedagogical concern.

It is often at the level of local municipality politics that young members of society are given the best opportunities to communicate, learn, and socialize together with elected representatives and other decision-makers. The municipality represents a variety of public spaces with potential to function as *democratic* arenas. However, it is only a handful of young people in Sweden who feel that they have a large or fairly large influence over political decisions, despite the fact that a significant proportion of Swedish youth express that they would like to be involved to a higher extent (Andersson, 2017b). From the perspective of formal decision-makers, one reason may be that young people's influence is seen as a matter of having to hand over power. Thus, maybe another way of looking at power is needed? Not as a matter of dominance and control, but rather as a matter of opportunity for action and collaboration? In such a perspective, power is not something that can be given away or be lost, or something that exists in limited quantities as if power was an economic zero-sum game. Power is rather seen as an opportunity to create something new which can only arise by acting together (Arendt, 1958/1998).

When viewing power as an act in concert, political participation becomes a matter of approaching young people as political subjects, advocating equal democratic value of all, regardless of age and personal ability. According to John Dewey:

> The democratic faith in human equality is belief that every human being, independent of the quantity or range of his personal endowment, has the right to equal opportunity with every other person for development of whatever gift he has. (1988, pp. 226–227)

Through research we know that political participation grounded in the principle of democratic faith is vital for young people as participants and members of society, both in terms of individual growth and for society in general.

Young people's political participation is fundamental for the survival of a democratic society. Youth participation is both an individual democratic right and a responsibility that contributes to social care for others, increased social action, and political participation as an adult (Andersson, 2015b, 2017b). It has been shown that young people's political participation is also important for civic knowledge as it

contributes to strengthened self-esteem and autonomy, social and cognitive development, critical thinking, cooperation, analysis, problem-solving, organizational and governance skills, and increased societal commitment. Young people's political participation is also important for sustainable public health and social prosperity as it has a direct relationship to increased health, creates social belonging, and reduces feelings and experiences of social exclusion. Political participation of young people is thus important for a sustainable democratic society now and in the future, for a society with knowledgeable members and a good public health. If we know all this, why is it that young people still do not have full opportunities for political participation? Why are they still not fully counted as democratic actors when it comes to shaping their own and other people's lives? Why are they, to a large extent, still denied civil rights and excluded from vital decision-making processes?

The overall purpose of this chapter is to contribute knowledge that can be used to explore, understand, and improve young people's political participation in local democracy. To do this, three major challenges concerning young people's political participation in the public pedagogy practice of local democracy are discussed. A way forward to pragmatically deal with these challenges is offered in terms of *a public pedagogical leadership approach*. The approach is supported by a set of *pedagogical principles* for young people's political participation and *the pedagogical political participation model* (the 3P-M).

Three Major Challenges Concerning Young People's Political Participation

The challenges which are discussed here have been identified as occurring dilemmas in a series of studies on young people's political participation and socialization in local democracy (Andersson, 2015a, b, 2017a, b, 2019, 2020). These challenges will be illustrated through empirical examples from mainly two studies in the field of public pedagogy and young people's political participation. The first one is a case study within a youth policy committee, which aimed at identifying young people's possibilities to influence municipal decision-making processes (Andersson, 2017b). The second study is a participatory action research (PAR) project in a municipality in Sweden. In this project four secondary and two upper secondary schools were included, alongside two youth recreation centers. Approaching schools and youth recreation centers as public spaces to influence common issues in the municipality, the stated aim of the project was to develop clear pathways for young people's political participation.

The challenges are defined as *pedagogical* challenges and discussed in terms of three main themes. *The why-challenge* has to do with purposes and ideological approaches to young people as political democratic participants. *The what-challenge* concerns what (educative) democratic experiences that is enabled and *the how-challenge* addresses the methods for participation. *The why-challenge* shapes the conditions for dealing with *the what-* and *the how-challenge*.

The Why-Challenge: To Approach Young People as Political Democratic Participants

A central problem in young people's political participation is that many adult decision-makers only use an adult-centered top-down approach in which young people are treated as objects for democratic and political fostering, as incomplete and incapable of making political decisions (Andersson, 2015a, 2017b). It is maintained that young people should learn about and conform to society, that they should internalize dominant societal norms. A young person is, therefore, often viewed as "something apart from society that must be shaped and guided by external forces to become a fully functioning member" (Corsaro, 2011, p. 9). This view could be called *the developmental approach* (Andersson, 2017b), *the citizenship-as-achievement approach* (Biesta & Lawy, 2006), or *the ideology of immaturity* (Scanlon, 2012). The argument goes: because young people are not yet fully developed, they should be assisted with values, norms, knowledge, and understandings that will prepare them for action as adults in the future. The logic is learning and socialization first and then – following from correct understanding, specific norms, and values – democratic agency and political action. Citizenship is viewed as a status, with specific claims that individuals as rights holders can achieve "only after one has traversed a particular developmental and educational trajectory" (Biesta & Lawy, 2006, p. 42). The principal objective is to preserve the existing society and protect it from newcomers, to maintain the social order, and to sustain society over time, in other words, to focus on the successful generational transmission of political culture. However, young people's political participation in a democratic society involves much more than the acquisition of a fixed political culture based on an understanding which positions youth as merely political *objects* and means for social reproduction.

Being a political democratic subject has to do with "the transformation of the ways in which young people relate to, understand and express their place and role in society" (Biesta, 2011, p. 14). Thus, an alternative perspective is to view young people as political subjects and democratic newcomers that are vital for societal renewal. This perspective can be called *the contingent approach* (Andersson, 2017b) or a *citizenship-as-practice-approach* (Biesta & Lawy, 2006), where citizenship is viewed as an inclusive and relational concept that assumes that everyone in society is moving through citizenship as a practice and is "routinely engaged in a continuous and thoroughgoing public dialogue" (p. 44). The logic is interruption and entanglement with a concern for the public quality of human togetherness, a pedagogy of undecidability and for creating opportunities in which "we come to know the world by acting in it, making something of it, and doing the never-ending work and play of responding to what our actions make occur" (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 56). Young people are approached as democratically equal members of the continually changing society.

In sum, how can adult decision-makers balance their approaches to young people as political democratic participants? Maybe the polarization below can give some ideas. On the one hand, young people are in the process of becoming; they are

developing and growing, in need of protection and support. On the other hand, they are also individuals capable of making their own decisions, solving problems, and controlling their own lives. At the same time, young people can be regarded as not yet full members of society with limited opportunities to act due to age and maturity. However, they are also members of society with democratic values and rights, here and now. We also know that young people are often less experienced than adults, which makes them less suitable for making decisive decisions. But, they also have experiences that adults do not have which could provide needed perspectives to make better decisions. Thus, on the one hand, an adult perspective on what is best for young people and how they think young people would like to have it is needed. On the other hand, young people's own perspectives are needed without being filtered, interpreted, and guessed by adults. Young people are both a means to the survival of democratic society and a goal in themselves with personal aspirations for themselves and for life in community with others.

The polarization above was clearly visible within the public pedagogy practice identified in the case study (Andersson, 2017b). One of the research questions explored the motives for why young people's political participation was considered important within the municipality youth policy committee. Three motives were identified. The first motive was that young people were a *means of promoting the interests of adult decision-makers*. They were a means for municipal growth and increased attraction value in which they were treated as advertising pillars and opinion resources in the form of advisory consultative bodies. The second motive was *democratic political fostering* in which young people were seen as objects for democratic and political fostering, as potential politicians and means for party political regrowth. They were considered as a political resource, in the future. The third and least common motive was to see young people's political participation as a *right and a value*. Young people were approached as resourceful members of society, as rights holders, interpreters of contemporary society and political democratic subjects.

The three motives reflect different approaches to young people as political democratic participants which entail specific information and communication logics. The first motive means that adult decision-makers *talk about* young people. The second motive means that adult decision-makers *speak to* young people. The third motive means that adult decision-makers and young people *talk with* each other. The three logics also involve three perspectives: adult perspective, youth perspective, and perspectives from young people in which young people are regarded either as political democratic *objects* or *subjects*.

Thus, *the why-challenge* has to do with the dilemma of balancing the transmission of existing political culture in society and to make room for change and renewal. It also includes balancing the approach towards young people as in need of support and help while at the same time letting them take place as political subjects. In all, it boils down to approaching young people as political democratic participants, here and now and for the future society. One central aspect of this challenge is to enable young people's educative democratic experiences, which is the objective of *the what-challenge*.

The What-Challenge: To Enable Educative Democratic Experiences

In many democratic societies, young people have rights and obligations to exercise influence over their school education. It is also stated that schools should and can function as prime sites for developing young people's capacities and skills to participate in democratic society (Black, 2011). John Dewey argues that "democratic social arrangements promote a better quality of human experience, one which is more widely accessible and enjoyable, than do non-democratic and anti-democratic forms of social life" (1938/1997, p. 34). Compared to other ways of life, democracy is:

> the sole way of living which believes wholeheartedly in the process of experience as end and as means ... and which releases emotions, needs and desires so as to call into being the things that have not existed in the past. (Dewey, 1988, p. 229)

Experience, which is a difficult and complex concept, can be defined as a process and product that consists of doing and undergoing (Dewey, 1938/1997, 1958/1998, 1958/1997). One side of experience is to act, to try to achieve something (do), and the other side is to withstand, suffer, and endure (undergo) what is happening. The connection between doing and undergoing determines the meaning and value of the experience, what the individual learns and comes to know about the world. Experiences make it possible for the individual to act with intention by continuously creating a relation with the environment and staying connected to reality – to know the world as a consequence of acting in it (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). In this way, experience could be defined as a type of *learning*, that is, a process of learning-by-doing while doing-by-learning, a human coordination with the surrounding social and physical world in order to achieve something or to adapt to changes, a meaning-making that takes into account prior experiences and the specificity of a particular situation which results in a new or modified repertoire for coordinating with the environment (Dewey, 1938/1997, 2013; Elkjaer, 2009; Östman et al., 2019). Accordingly, learning can be defined as a process in which we handle problems by reflecting, thinking, exploring, and creating relations with the world in order to extend our possibilities to act in an intelligent way.

Each experience affects not only the individual but also the quality of future experiences. Previous experiences can be actualized and gain significance in new contexts, which means that the past is always present as part of the future. Consequently, experiences become driving forces into the future, and their value can only be determined in relation to what they move toward and into (Dewey, 1938/1997). Experiences are therefore important in discovering the world (in new ways), with an openness to the way the individual lives and for changing the life situation in community with others. Using this definition of experience, education can be argued to function as a public space in which young people and adult decision-makers (e.g., teachers) democratically make decisions, deliberate as political equals, and act (do) as well as undergo the consequences of acting. In education, democracy can be a goal and a pedagogical method that functions to include young people in the

learning process and enable *educative democratic experiences*. Thus, extending and enabling rich democratic experiences, openings for actions, and different types of political participation that could lead to richer experiences in the future (Andersson, 2019). However, research findings and reports from young people themselves tell a partly different story.

In the PAR study (Andersson, 2019; and in Hammerin et al., 2018), it was clear that young people mainly experience that the main type of political participation within the context of school democracy is to listen, adjust, and make their voices heard (cf. the developmental approach). But, they lack influence. What students want instead is to be treated as equal democratic participants, increased joint decision-making through dialogue paired with a shared responsibility and clarity in what they can influence, and to be able to control their own school situation (i.e., be part of a pedagogical leadership). The question of young people's political participation in school is not simple. How should teachers and schools navigate to enable educative democratic experiences for all students?

On the one hand, education is an investment for the future. Educating young people to be able to function and contribute to a future society is important. On the other hand, education needs to be meaningful and of interest here and now and to make room for young people's current needs and actions. Young people need to learn about what democracy is and how democracy works in different contexts. They also need to experience democracy as a way of governing, organizing, and deciding on the common good with others. Thus, in one way young people are prepared and trained to be able to function as knowledgeable democratic members of society when they reach a certain age and maturity. In another way they also need opportunities to use and contribute with their knowledge, to develop as persons, and to grow democratic experiences here and now through action.

In school it could be argued that students should be able to work together with teachers in a communicative and concerted manner. If this does not happen, students' experiences of participation risk becoming *mis-educative* by distorting the growth of further democratic experiences, producing a lack of sensitivity and responsiveness and reducing the possibility of having richer experiences in the future (cf. Dewey, 1938/1997, 1958/1997). In another study, the leadership in school was shown to be characterized by "authoritarian governing, dominance, and a fear of losing control"; a lack of "openness to student initiatives, collaboration, autonomy, and responsibility"; as well as "an exchange of experiences and perspectives, knowledge-based supportive guidance, and independent actions" (Andersson, 2019, p. 157). The students were mainly positioned as informed and voiced political objects for democratic fostering, reducing young people's possibilities to grow through participation. An alternative, based on Dewey's understanding of democracy as a process "controlled by personal faith in personal day-by-day working together with others" (1988, p. 228), would be to advocate *education through democracy*, that is, to involve students in "the processes of democracy on a day-to-day and moment-to-moment basis" in order to ensure that "all future generations of citizens in a democracy understand their rights and are committed to fulfil their responsibilities" (Johnson & Johnson, 2015, p. 175).

For better or for worse, the experiences young people bring with them from different types of public pedagogical practices affect their knowledge and future attitudes toward political participation and democracy. Accordingly, *the what-challenge* is not about the absence of experience. The challenge is that young people's experiences tend to be misleading or wrong in the sense that the gained experiences do not create a connection to a desirable, democratic future. Since experience can be understood as a moving force, the challenge is to create spaces of opportunity for the type of fruitful educative democratic experiences that are needed in the present and that can continue to generate desirable (democratic) experiences in the future. Or to put it differently: the important question for democracy and political participation is not how democratic subjects should be produced but *what* (educative democratic) experiences that take place and what is needed to create "experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 47) which have the potential to enrich young people's capacities as political democratic subjects. Accordingly, participation is also about not having been a subject, about mis-educative experiences gained by not having had opportunities to communicate, influence, initiate, or contribute to activities in meaningful ways. A central aspect of enabling educative democratic experiences is *communication*, which democratic forms for communication that are used, how, and when. This is the objective of *the how-challenge*.

The How-Challenge: To Use a Variety of Democratic Forms for Communication

In Western democracies it is common to organize youth councils within traditional parliamentary structures, often with the purpose of including young people in public decision-making. These councils are often expected to contribute to a democratic society and serve as political breeding grounds for future politicians (Matthews, 2001; Ødegård, 2007; Harris et al., 2010; Taft & Gordon, 2013; Andersson, 2017b). Empirically, however, it has been shown that youth councils do not fully meet these expectations. Few young people are given the opportunity to communicate with formal decision-makers, and those who do are dependent on the goodwill of the decision-makers and find it difficult to initiate and process matters concerning youth. An alternative to youth councils is *youth organizations*, independent and non-profit organizations consisting of young people that often aim at changing societal power relations in the local community (Christens & Dolan, 2011). In these organizations social issues and interests are initiated and self-chosen; decision-making is pragmatic, with support from adults when needed. Youth councils and youth organizations illustrate *the how-challenge* which has to do with using a variety of democratic forms for communication, adjustable in relation to different norms, habits, needs, conditions, and interests of those involved.

To guarantee a certain quality of communication, and include as many people as possible in the process, adjustable democratic forms of communication are needed based on a willingness to cooperate, converse, and relate. However, an organization, or a particular form of communication, can never be an end in itself. The how (e.g., method, way of organizing) is only a tool for handling a specific issue or content (the what) and fulfilling certain purposes, aims, and interests (the why). Rather, a constant rebirth is needed, based on the specific time period of youth characterized by rapid change, exploration, and significant development of identity. Relying on traditional parliamentary democratic forms of communication (e.g., youth councils) which facilitate democratic processes but often without concrete outcomes risks creating false hopes for political influence, reducing trust, lowering motivation, and undermining young people's commitment to change society. These types of democratic forms of communication may, in exceptional cases, work well but must not be the only democratic forms of communication in local democracy. It is vital to create clarity and early participation in political decision-making processes that counteract false hopes of influence. A fruitful strategy for youth political participation is therefore to create appropriate democratic forms and constellations in which young people and adult decision-makers take joint responsibility and communicate. To ensure young people's participation in political decision-making processes, it is thus necessary to create adaptable infrastructures and common and situational democratic forms of communication with a clear idea of how and when feedback should take place.

A flexible organization with a clear organizational framework can create spaces for various activities, democratic meeting places, and groups that are adapted to situations and interests. In the case study (Andersson, 2015b, 2017b), it was shown that the youth policy committee, its program, and the way it was organized constituted a framework for different and situation-based democratic forms of communication. The arrangement enabled participants to adjust the need for communication in relation to situation, to listen and to be receptive, and to adjust their participation in relation to the issue being up for decision and different preferences and needs. In the creation of public forms for communication, young people highlighted the importance of these to be cozy and welcoming. It was important that the rooms for meeting, physically and symbolically, provided security, convenience, openness, and adaptability.

An example of variation in communication forms in the current case was the frequent use of social media to discuss, make decisions, plan activities, disseminate information, and provide feedback (Andersson, 2015b, 2017b). Other examples had to do with having coffee (fika), doing workshops and visits, arranging the so-called democracy days at City Hall, doing collaborative project-oriented development work, and arranging formal network meetings between young people, officials, and politicians. The overall organization of the youth policy committee and its program functioned as needs and interest-responsive and framing network area for joint work in appropriate constellations. It had flexible forms for communication jointly created by the participants and offered opportunities to shape the type of democratic space needed to address issues at hand.

Thus, the objective of *the how-challenge* is to utilize a variety of democratic forms for communication adjustable in relation to different habits, needs, conditions, and interests of those involved. If the aim is to include "all" young people in decision-making, it could be argued that adjustable and situation-based forms of democracy are needed at a system level, forms that build on mutuality and trust, rather than domination, exclusivity, and majority opinion.

A way forward in dealing with the three challenges is to establish practices characterized by a *pedagogical leadership for young people's political participation*, a discussion to which I now turn.

A Pragmatic Way Forward: Public Pedagogical Leadership for Young People's Political Participation

What do the three challenges have in common? They are all pedagogical concerns addressing three fundamental questions: that of purpose (why), content (what), and method (how) in relation to young people's political participation.

Pedagogy as a practice qualitatively transforms the ways in which we think and act in the world and, while doing this, also changes the world. It provides opportunities and enables new things to happen, as a process of continuation, emergence, and change, and supports new ways of knowing, feeling, and being in the world. Or to put it differently, pedagogy as a practice is about understanding and creating opportunities and conditions for learning, socialization, and person formation (subjectification). When a practice is pedagogical, the participating subjects are shown to change their way of acting in more appropriate ways, expanding the opportunities for rich, desirable, and new experiences, developing a will, desire, and curiosity to know more and continue to act in ways that work. Adding the concept of *public*, which signifies that everything that appears in public "can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity" (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 50), we can then understand young people's political participation as a public pedagogical concern.

It is, as Arendt (1958/1998, p. 50) puts it, the presence of others "who see what we see and hear what we hear" that "assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves." When we leave our private sphere and confirm our individuality by acting and engaging in common affairs, the appearance constitutes our reality and creates a common world in which humans are gathered and relate to each other. The permanence of our common world, its civility, human flourishing, and belonging, is dependent on the extent to which it is public. In other words, our common world is dependent on the public quality of spaces and places and our human togetherness in becoming public (cf. Biesta, 2012). Consequently, *public pedagogy* becomes a vital concern for the continuation and transformation of society in that public pedagogy is about learning, socialization, meaning making, and person formation that occurs both within and beyond the realm of formal educational institutions (cf. Sandlin et al., 2011). According to Giroux (2010, pp. 494–495), public pedagogy is a

political and moral practice that illuminates "the relationships among power, knowledge, and ideology, while self-consciously, if not self-critically, recognizing the role it plays as a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced within particular sets of social relations."

Public pedagogy as a political and moral practice, and its societal function in terms of continuation and transformation, actualizes the dimension of leadership which is the creation of direction, alignment, and commitment (Hull et al., 2020). Leadership, as a process of adaptation, connection, collaboration, and coordination of actions, is a way forward to deal with the three challenges.

Public Pedagogical Leadership

A basic starting point in understanding leadership is that it is a normative concept engaging our values. It is a collective process of social influence which emerges in interactions between participants in a group and their environment (Heifetz, 1994; Hull et al., 2020). It is a relational, dynamic, processual, power-sensitive, and contextual phenomenon that engages our values and mobilizes collective creativity, for example, involving "respecting conflict, negotiation, and diversity of views within a community; increasing community cohesion; developing norms of responsibility-taking, learning, and innovation" (Heifetz, 1994, p. 26). According to Hull et al. (2020, pp. 61–62), leadership occurs when stakeholders "agree on a direction for their efforts, align their resources as needed to achieve that direction, and commit to delivering those resources as well as supporting each other," that is, direction, alignment, and commitment must be present for leadership to occur. *Direction* includes a sense of purpose that "provides the ongoing capacity to generate new possibilities" (Heifetz, 1994, p. 275), aspects of shared goals, and agreement on what is to be accomplished. *Alignment* is about coordinating efforts, time, and resources and using experience and expertise wisely. *Commitment* means a willingness to sacrifice some parts of personal interest, invest own resources, take responsibility for the success and well-being of the group, and trust one another. In this way, leadership also requires collaboration, connectivity, learning, and innovation.

The different functions of leadership actions performed by the participants emerge and acquire meaning in the individual-environment configuration, that is, in *transaction* in which people and the environment (whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to achieve or create something, e.g., community, organization, physical setting) transform and are transformed by each other (Dewey, 1938/1997; Andersson, 2020). In this way, processes of *leadership* emerge as adaptive solutions to environmental changes and various organizational and group challenges – a type of a group learning process of experimentation, discoveries, and adjustment toward new capacities (Heifetz, 1994). In exercising leadership formal leaders are vital for coordinating group action, directing attention, framing the issue and generating its urgency, maintaining order and norms, allocating resources, planning, organizing, and supporting the

work of the group, for example, by building trust and relations, belonging, and cooperation, to listen, reflect, and analyze, support initiatives and new ways of thinking. However, from a pragmatic perspective (Cherryholmes, 1999), it is important to add that there is no guarantee that appointed leaders will have these functions or that their personal ideas are true, ethical, or effective or that they will successfully lead toward stated objectives. In complex social situations where learning is required to handle problems and create new solutions, as in the case of wicked problems such as climate change, trusting a single leader is hardly sufficient. Excluding other participants from defining and solving complex problems which should be addressed together "risks developing an incomplete solution or a solution to the wrong problem" (Heifetz, 1994, p. 118).

If appointed leaders do not have valid guarantees for the consequences of their ideas and actions and only can contribute a limited perspective, it is reasonable to allow others to express their ideas in order to enable exploration of a plurality of ideas and perspectives. The ideas of others may turn out to be more appropriate. Accordingly, what is needed is a democratic and pluralist approach to leadership, a leadership that enables all participants to become involved and take responsibility, one which facilitates communication and critical group inquiries. This will increase the possibility of finding more and perhaps better ideas and solutions instead of leaving all to the appointed leader. Leadership is an improvisational process of learning in which all participants engage in facing challenges, adjusting values, changing perspectives, and developing new habits and norms. A pragmatic approach to leadership opens up possibilities for both young people and adult decision-makers to lead and learn together, instead of adults pointing the finger at young people telling them what to do.

In an ever-changing society, we need to be open to new solutions, constantly explore possible actions, create new knowledge, and solve problems together. To act in what Dewey would call an intelligent way, leadership requires that we "do not block the road to inquiry," that we constantly try to find out what works best at the moment by acting and reflecting on the consequences. Accordingly, *public pedagogical leadership* becomes a collective process with a shared direction, alignment, and commitment that include and support learning both within and beyond the realm of formal and informal educational institutions. For young people and adult decision-makers to lead and learn together, pedagogical principles are helpful.

Pedagogical Principles for Young People's Political Participation

Pedagogical principles can be understood as value-based points of departure in public pedagogical leadership that over time have proven to be good and functional in guiding actions in support of desirable learning, socialization, and growth (cf. Atjonen et al., 2011). The advantage of pedagogical principles is that they

point out desired goals and values without prescribing how it is to be achieved. The methods, working techniques, and actions (the how) that are needed to transform these principles into concrete practice must always be decided and designed in relation to the current problem, context, and situation.

Based on Andersson (2015a, b, 2017a, b, 2019) and other research findings within the field (e.g., Keddie, 2015; Hammerin et al., 2018), four pedagogical principles suitable for promoting and empowering young people's political participation in local democracy have been identified:

- Equal participation
- Communicative responsibility
- Co-learning
- Openness

Equal participation is based on everyone's equal value, the value of freedom, self-esteem, and respect for the individual – that all participants are important and should be treated with dignity. The aim of this principle is to contribute to active recognition of all participants as unique and that everyone should be given opportunity to participate politically in local democracy regardless of ability. In practice it means that different forms of communication and joint decision-making are made available, that the choice of meeting and working methods are adapted to situation and context, and that participants treat each other as mutually dependent who actively engage in creating equal conditions for participation.

Communicative responsibility is based on the values of responsibility, reciprocity, and dialogue. The aim of this principle is to create a continuous dialogue, to integrate the participants in the political decision-making process, and to ensure that young and adult decision-makers together take initiative, listen, act, and follow up on the processes, that is, the participants should act on the basis that responsibilities are of mutual concern and that everyone should work together to achieve common goals. The principle also puts emphasis on the continuous building of trust and support.

Co-learning is based on the values of exploring, knowledge, adaptation, and continual improvement. The aim of the principle is to maintain a common frame of reference regarding knowledge, skills, and values, as well as to align and use each other's experiences and knowledge as resources to adapt, make joint decisions, and act accordingly. It aims to create a sense of willingness and courage to try new things, to make mistakes, to evaluate, and to learn something from it, that is, to use learning in order to improve things together by, for example, introducing new ways of conducting meetings and evaluations, doing needs-based education activities, and participating in various networks. It is about *doing* together, about *undergoing* the consequences of these practices and building joint educative experiences which are used in the maintenance of a fruitful democratic environment.

Openness is based on the values of listening and valorization of perspectives and possible directions. The aim is to support joint action on the basis that it is neither inevitably predetermined nor fundamentally indeterminate, to be open for what happens, and to be able to act accordingly. It can be about adopting a nonjudgmental

attitude, listening, encouraging different perspectives, questioning, and exploring assumptions and habits. It involves a willingness to listen to each other's views, to learn new things, and to dare challenge prevailing norms and change them if necessary.

Together, these pedagogical principles contribute with a valued direction regarding young people's political participation in local democracy.

The Pedagogical Political Participation Model (3P-M)

The 3P-M is a tool for understanding and applying different types of participation in public pedagogical arenas where formal decision-makers and young people interact (Andersson, 2017a). The model makes it possible to adjust forms of communication regarding political participation in order to enable a broad range of democratic and educational experiences. In other words, it is a tool for pragmatically dealing with the what- and the how-challenge based on the different approaches to young people as political participants described in the why-challenge.

The model is based on three main assumptions. Young people's political participation:

1. Is always dependent on adult decision-makers (A) having decision-making mandate over young people (B)
2. Must be understood qualitatively by approaching power as an opportunity for action that can only arise by acting in concert
3. Depends on adult decision-makers' attitudes towards young people as democratic participants

The five types of participation in the typology below lead to different consequences, which does not necessarily mean that one type is by default better or worse than another. What eventually becomes valued as positive or negative experiences of a certain participation type will depend on the situation. The arrows and the circle show the information and communication logic within each type (Fig. 2.1).

The characteristics of each participation type are presented and further elaborated in Table 2.1.
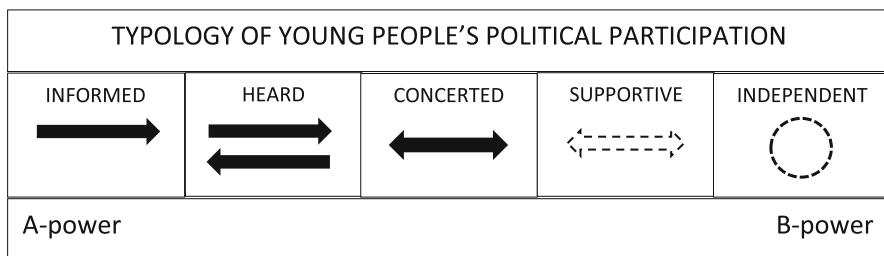
Fig. 2.1 Typology of young people's political participation. (Andersson, 2017a, 2019)

Table 2.1 The participation characteristics of young people's political participation

Type	Informed	Heard	Concerted	Supportive	Independent
Position of A	Dominator and controller. Commands, instructs, and makes all decisions. Low degree of individual and social responsiveness	Controller. Decides in advance what B may comment on and makes all decisions. Elements of letting the group be involved, elements of individual and social responsiveness	Manager. Making joint decisions with B. Joint work, communication, independence, shared responsibility, space for individuals' needs, and high social responsiveness	Tutor. Making decisions together with B when asked for. Situational, needs- and group-adapted actions with cooperation, independence, place for individuals' needs, and high social responsiveness	Withdrawn and absent
Position of B	Listener, information, and instruction recipient who adapts and follows decisions	Listener and opinion deliverer with unreliable opportunities to influence. Must adapt and follow decisions	Participant. Leading and making decisions together with A. Shared responsibility in self- and group management	Initiator and leader, making decisions with the support of A when needed. Responsibility in self- and group management	Initiator, controller, and leader making all the decisions (within the group)
Logic regarding social interaction, communication, and learning	Transfer of information from A to B. Individual learning	Interaction and transfer of information between A and B. Individual learning with elements of joint meaning-making and information exchange	Interaction through mutual communication, meaning-making, and learning between A and B	Interaction through mutual communication, situation- and needs-oriented joint meaning-making and learning between A and B	Interaction, communication, meaning-making, and learning within the group B

In *informed* political participation, B (young people) lack opportunities to influence and A (adult decision-makers) have control. B are informed about what is going to happen or has happened, what applies, and so on, and B thus have no opportunity to influence decision-making.

In *heard* political participation, B are given the opportunity to make their voices heard and A are in control. A define what B can do and express. Certain co-learning and influence are offered, but without a predictable influence in the decision-making. Either A take note of what B say and B influence decision-making, or the statements of B are only used as an insurance for A to have listened to B (commonly known as sham democracy).

In *concerted* political participation, B and A govern jointly; both parties have influence through mutual exchange of opinions and responsibilities. Co-learning is made possible by working together, in which different experiences and knowledge become resources in joint communication, meaning-making, and decision-making.

In *supportive* political participation, it is mainly B who control and have influence, while A have a more withdrawn and needs-based role. B define, create, and maintain most of the space for action. Co-learning between B and A is limited as necessary resources from A may be lacking. The influence from outside the group is limited and decision-making is mainly controlled by B alone.

In *independent* political participation, it is B who control and have influence over their own group process; A are absent. There is no co-learning and exchange of experiences across generational boundaries and B make all the decisions.

Thus, each type of political participation is based on a specific information and communication logic and democratic relation between young people and adult decision-makers. Each type also leads to a particular set of consequences in relation to young people's learning, experience, and growth as democratic participants.

Conclusions

The overall purpose of this chapter has been to contribute knowledge usable to explore, understand, and improve young people's political participation in local democracy. Based on the purpose, three important conclusions are drawn.

First, youth political participation is dependent on the approaches of adult decision-makers and the continual and critical examination and development of the political culture of public pedagogy practice. How decision-makers approach young people concerns the very conditions of young people's citizenship, because, as Biesta (2011, p. 16) writes, "these conditions define the context in which they will learn what it means to be a democratic citizen." The important task of local democracy is thus for adult decision-makers to promote democratic processes in which young people take part in the maintenance and renewal of society.

Second, political participation and democracy need to be learned and experienced in action. Action, in turn, needs to be *educative*, extending and enabling richer democratic experiences and learning in the future. The process of participation should contribute to a feeling and a desire of wanting to learn more in which the individual becomes more aware of the environment and can act in appropriate ways, with a greater moral responsibility. This means that adult decision-makers must create openings for action and a variety of different types of political participation (cf. the 3P-M) which imply young people as political subjects, enabling them to influence and participate in decision-making while at the same time strengthening their capacities to act collectively and, thus, helping them learn how to practice democracy.

Third, a public pedagogical leadership is needed. Young people's political participation requires action at all societal levels, in activities that involve and should involve them, in the joint management of life. Leadership should enhance conditions for young people and adult decision-makers to learn together and lead in joint directions, to coordinate efforts, and to use each other's competences and experiences in order to take mutual responsibility for the sake of the society.

Our continuously changing society and existence as humans requires joint ideas about what kind of society we want and toward what we should hope and strive for. In times of uncertainty, existential anxiety, climate change, and pandemic death, this becomes especially evident. Complex times require inquiry and adaptation in which all parties engage to work out new, creative ways of being together, making experiences, learning, and growing as equal members of society.

References

Andersson, E. (2015a). Situational political socialization: A normative approach to young people's adoption and acquisition of political preferences and skills. *Journal of Youth Studies, 18*(8), 967–983.

Andersson, E. (2015b). *Nya portar? Ungas delaktighet i politiska beslutsprocesser på kommunal nivå*. Underlagsrapport, Ju Ku 2014:19. Demokratiutredningen.

Andersson, E. (2017a). The pedagogical political participation model (the 3P-M) for exploring, explaining and affecting young people's political participation. *Journal of Youth Studies, 20*(10), 1346–1361.

Andersson, E. (2017b). Young people's political participation: A public pedagogy challenge at the municipal level. *Young – Nordic Journal of Youth Research, 26*(2), 179–195.

Andersson, E. (2019). The school as a public space for democratic experiences: Formal student participation and its political characteristic. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, 14*(2), 149–164.

Andersson, E. (2020). A transactional and action-oriented methodological approach to young people's political socialisation. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, 15*(3), 243–257.

Arendt, H. (1958/1998). *The human condition*. University of Chicago Press.

Atjonen, P., Korkeakoski, E., & Mehtäläinen, J. (2011). Key pedagogical principles, their major obstacles and successful pedagogical events. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 17*(3), 273–288.

Biesta, G. (2011). *Learning democracy in school and society: Education, lifelong learning and the politics of citizenship*. Sense Publishers.

Biesta, G. (2012). Becoming public: Public pedagogy, citizenship and the public sphere. *Social & Cultural Geography, 13*(7), 683–697.

Biesta, G., & Burbules, N. C. (2003). *Pragmatism and educational research*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Biesta, G., & Lawy, R. (2006). Citizenship-as-practice: The educational implications of an inclusive and relational understanding of citizenship. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 54*(1), 34–50.

Black, R. (2011). Student participation and disadvantage: Limitations in policy and practice. *Journal of Youth Studies, 14*(4), 463–474.

Cherryholmes, C. (1999). *Reading pragmatism*. Teachers College Press.

Christens, B. D., & Dolan, T. (2011). Interweaving youth development, community development, and social change through youth organizing. *Youth & Society, 43*(2), 528–548.

Corsaro, W.A. (2011). *The Sociology of Childhood*. (Third Edition). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

Dewey, J. (1938/1997). *Experience and education*. Touchstone.

Dewey, J. (1958a). *Experience and nature*. Dover Publications.

Dewey, J. (1958b). *Demokrati och utbildning*. Daidalos.

Dewey, J. (1958/1997). *Demokrati och utbildning*. Göteborg: Daidalos.

Dewey, J (1958/1998). *Experience and nature*. New York: Dover Publications.

Dewey, J. (1988). Creative democracy – The task before us. In J. A. Boydston (Ed.), *John Dewey. The Later Works, 1925 – 1953. Volume 14: 1939–1941* (pp. 225–230). Southern Illinois University.

Dewey, J. (2013). *Logic. The theory of inquiry*. Read Books Ltd.

Elkjaer, B. (2009). Pragmatism: A learning theory for the future. In K. Illeris (Ed.), *Contemporary theories of learning* (pp. 74–89). Routledge.

Ellsworth, E. (2005). *Places of learning: Media – architecture – Pedagogy*. Routledge.

Giroux, H. A. (2010). Neoliberalism as public pedagogy. In J. A. Sandlin, B. D. Schultz, & J. Burdick (Eds.), *Handbook of public pedagogy. Education and learning beyond schooling* (pp. 486–499). Routledge.

Hammerin, Z., Andersson, E., & Maivorsdotter, N. (2018). Exploring student participation in teaching: An aspect of student health in school. *International Journal of Educational Research, 92*, 63–74.

Harris, A., Wyn, J., & Younes, S. (2010). Beyond apathetic or activist youth "ordinary" young people and contemporary forms of participation. *Young, 18*(1), 9–32.

Heifetz, R. A. (1994). *Leadership without easy answers*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Hull, B. R., Robertson, D. P., & Mortimer, M. (2020). *Leadership for sustainability. Strategies for tackling wicked problems*. Island Press.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. (2015). Cooperative learning and teaching citizenship in democracies. *International Journal of Educational Research, 76*, 162–177.

Keddie, A. (2015). Student voice and teacher accountability: Possibilities and problematics. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 23*(2), 225–244.

Matthews, H. (2001). Citizenship, youth councils and young people's participation. *Journal of Youth Studies, 4*(3), 299–318.

Ødegård, G. (2007). Political socialization and influence at the mercy of politicians: A study of a local participation project amongst young people in Norway. *Young, 15*(3), 273–297.

Östman, L., Van Poeck, K., & Öhman, J. (2019). A transactional theory on sustainability learning. In K. Van Poeck, L. Östman, & J. Öhman (Eds.), *Sustainable development teaching. Ethical and political challenges* (pp. 127–139). Routledge.

Sandlin, A. J., O'Malley, M. P., & Burdick, J. (2011). Mapping the complexity of public pedagogy scholarship: 1894–2010. *Review of Educational Research, 81*(3), 338–375.

Scanlon, L. (2012). 'Why didn't they as me?': Student perspectives on a school improvement initiative. *Improving Schools, 15*(3), 185–197.

Taft, J. K., & Gordon, H. R. (2013). Youth activists, youth councils, and constrained democracy. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, 8*(1), 87–100.

Erik Andersson   is Associate Professor in Pedagogy, Örebro University, Sweden.

Chapter 3
Learning to Participate in and Through Conflict

Larissa von Schwanenflügel and Andreas Walther

Abstract In democratic societies, participation is inseparably connected with the positive normative concept of justice. It is widely assumed that the struggles for recognition (Honneth) which have led to the emergence of modern democracies have been completed by the institutionalization of constitutional welfare states, thus establishing and securing social rules based on the value of justice. However, there is evidence that institutionalized forms of youth participation neglect existing social conflicts and hide inequalities of power, resources and recognition. The chapter starts from the question if and in what sense young people's learning of participation is structured by social conflict. What experiences of recognition or misrecognition of their actions in public space and the underlying aspirations of being a part of society do they make in their biographies? The chapter analyses situations observed in the framework of ethnographic case studies. In some of these situations, young people are acting out conflicts openly, in others potential conflicts are tamed institutionally, while others stand for young people avoiding conflict. Analysis reveals that young people's practices express ideas of justice and aspirations of being and taking part of/in society but lead to differing experiences – according to institutional contexts and social positioning. The chapter concludes by suggesting that conflicts need to be seen as an integrative element rather than an exception of democratic participation. Rather than educating young people towards avoiding conflicts, democracy education may start from reflecting that and what young people – by being involved in conflicts in public space – learn about democracy and participation.

Keywords Participation · Conflict · Recognition · Justice · Learning · Formal · Informal

L. von Schwanenflügel
Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Frankfurt am Main, Germany
e-mail: schwanenfluegel.larissa@fh-frankfurt.de; schwanenfluegel.larissa@fb4.fra-uas.de

A. Walther (✉)
Goethe University of Frankfurt am Main, Frankfurt, Germany
e-mail: a.walther@em.uni-frankfurt.de

We would like to have more influence in our neighbourhood because we are a part of it, for example that benches are simply dismounted . . . These benches are used by young people who chill outside. If you change a neighbourhood, you interfere with a territory of young people that is occupied and used 24 hours a day (group discussion youth centre, Frankfurt).

This extract from a group discussion conducted in the context of the PARTISP ACE research expresses the outrage of young men who feel disrespected as inhabitants of their city and co-citizens. It shows how the boundaries between everyday life participation and political participation are less clear cut than often assumed. In fact, we will argue in this chapter that participation and learning processes related to participation cannot be understood adequately without taking conflicts into account, especially conflicts associated with the use of public spaces, which always express claims of belonging and membership. The chapter starts from a critique of the dominant assumption that young people do not participate enough in society and therefore have to learn to participate in forms that are institutionally recognized as participation (cf. European Commission, 2009; BMFSFJ, 2017). In contrast, it suggests that conflicts involving young people in public space need to be understood as claims for justice and participation and that the subjective experiences they make in such situations nurture their learning of specific meanings, forms and effects of participation and justice. It will be argued that understanding conflicts as moments of participation may contribute to processes of "radical democracy" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001), especially if young people's learning is related to wider processes of social learning involving various actors.

We will first discuss the theoretical understanding of the relationship between conflict, justice and participation in the socialization and respective learning of young people. Then, three constellations of conflict involving young people in public spaces are elaborated from in-depth case studies of formal and informal participatory practices in the sample of the PARTISPACE sample. The emerging issues, forms and patterns of conflict are discussed with regard to their inherent claims for justice and learning processes in relation to participation. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the relevance of a conflict perspective for understanding young people's learning about participation and for perspectives of participation in terms of radical democracy in which individual and social learning depend on each other.

Justice, Conflict and Participation in the Socialization of Young People

Participation is a normative concept, inseparably associated with the negotiation and balancing of diverging interests and ideas of justice. In democratic societies, the prevailing ideology is that a state based on rights, welfare and representative democracy will ensure participation and justice. Consequently, young people are expected to prepare for democracy by learning how interests are negotiated in

institutionalized ways and thus will maintain the existing social order. This, however, neglects that rights to participation have historically resulted from 'struggles for recognition' (Honneth, 1995) by social movements and from conflicts around inclusion and equal access to resources and power which are to be seen as processes of social learning. As a phenomenon, the recent rise of populist movements suggests that the institutional order of modern democracies is far from having erased feelings of injustice. They can rather be interpreted as new struggles for recognition of those parts of the population who subjectively feel neither represented nor recognized by the institutionalized order (cf. Mouffe, 2018). In the following, we will develop a theoretical understanding of participation learning that starts from young people's experiences of recognition and from conflicts reflecting experiences of misrecognition.

A theoretical concept that relates justice, conflict and participation is Honneth's (1995: 1) concept of recognition which he conceptualizes as prerequisite for an 'undistorted relation to oneself' and thus for self-identity in modern societies. He distinguishes three modes of recognition: love as the recognition of individual needs as a human being, right as the recognition as a person with equal status and rights and esteem and solidarity as recognition as a subject with a personal contribution to community. In essence, these modes of recognition represent dimensions of justice, which in modern societies implies the right for a 'good life' characterized by self-realization. Following Miller's (1999) distinction of principles of justice, Honneth (2003: 214) relates esteem to the principle of achievement, right to the principle of equity and love to the principle of need, although acknowledging that love cannot be claimed to the same degree as right or esteem as it lacks a collective dimension. If one interprets social conflicts as struggles for participation and ascribes individuals' engagement in such struggles to experiences of misrecognition, Honneth's theory of recognition can serve as a framework for understanding the relation between participation learning and conflict.

Explicit theories of social conflict rarely refer to such fundamental social theoretical reflections but are more concerned with systematization. Galtung (1969) distinguishes symmetric and asymmetric, manifest versus latent conflicts, conflicts between persons, groups, institutions or basic societal conflicts as well as conflict attitudes and behaviours such as avoiding, neutrality, ambivalence and openness. Other scholars have been interested in the societal function (or dysfunction) of conflict. Following Parsons (1937), social conflicts for a long time were seen as dysfunctional for the stability and integration of groups and societies. In contrast, Coser (1956) and Dahrendorf (1988) interpreted conflict as a productive element in social life allowing to reconcile the stability of social order with competition and innovation. However, a problem with such approaches is that they are limited to forms of conflict regulation that stabilize social systems. Thus, conflicts are turned into 'mechanisms of adaptation of norms to new conditions' (Gronemeyer, 1974: 58) and into 'exappropriation, incapacitation, subordination and instruction of conflict subjects' (Bitzan & Klöck, 1993: 74), while it is neglected that many conflicts result from contradictions and conditions of social inequality. This is connected to the ways in which people place themselves in relation to others and eventually try to

change their social position on the basis of their identities. Contrary, conflicts need to be acknowledged as sources of 'information, social learning [. . .], the claiming of (constitutional) rights within social structures' (Gronemeyer, 1974: 61) and thereby as source of social learning (cf. Percy-Smith, 2006).

In youth research, concepts of justice and conflict at first sight play a marginal role. However, developmental psychology studies have revealed that young people's moral development and orientations of justice are complex. They do not only depend on cognitive development but also reflect contradictions in dominant societal ideologies of justice. In the study of Nunner-Winkler et al. (2006), a vast majority of young people saw both need and achievement as important criteria of justice. Following the authors, the simultaneity of apparently contradicting unconditional (need) and conditional (achievement) criteria of justice in young people's orientations reflects experiences in different areas of life structured by different norms of justice, especially family (needs) and school (achievement). This differentiation and fragmentation of orientations of justice is reinforced by the de-standardization of young people's transitions to adulthood, blurring boundaries between the areas of work, leisure and the private sphere and increasing competition for social inclusion (cf. Loncle et al., 2012). Consequently, it cannot be expected that young people appropriate norms that are relevant for adults without ambiguity and ambivalence. Following Pais (2008), one basic need and claim of young people in late modern societies is visibility as a resource of self-identity. Many youth cultural practices represent means to gain visibility and thus to mobilize recognition (like right and esteem). Sitzer (2010) and Sutterlüty (2017) even go further interpreting young people's acts of violence in public space as forms of coping with misrecognition or denied participation and inclusion. It is widespread to classify such acts as deviant behaviour, which reveals how social conflicts are addressed in terms of individualization and pedagogization. Through individualized ascription, social conflict is turned into a social problem to be addressed by pedagogical action and thus unequal power relationships are stabilized (cf. Gronemeyer, 1974).

The concept 'coping with life' (Böhnisch & Schröer, 2016) may serve as a bridging concept in this context because it interprets all action, including action labelled as 'deviant', as expressions of a search for belonging, recognition and agency (cf. Keupp et al., 1999). Where young people do not have access to recognized forms of coping with their life conditions, non-conformist practices are the only available possibility for action. The question arises if under conditions of social inequality and social change, claims of inclusion and participation are necessarily expressed by conflict. If at the same time institutional approaches tend to aim at taming and appeasing the resulting conflicts rather than acknowledging the underlying claims, this in effect implies a limitation of possibilities of participation. Here, Rancière's (1999: 30) concept of 'politics' referring to an 'open set of practices driven by the assumption of equality between any and every speaking being and by the concern to test this equality' is helpful. The 'conflict over the existence of a common stage and over the existence and status of those present on it' (ibid.: 26), i.e., the conflict about the division between those who are included in and those who are excluded from a shared social world, is the origin of the political. In contrast,

Rancière defines all those institutionalized mechanisms, normally referred to as politics, that contribute to an 'order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise', as 'police' (ibid.: 29).

In sum, we suggest to understand young people's learning of participation as emerging from experiences of recognition and justice. Social conflicts are social situations in which individuals express a lack of recognition and experiences of injustice and thus moments of participation. Not only do young people learn how other societal actors react to their claims, conflicts also represent opportunities for wider processes of social learning in which needs and perspectives connected to different social positions become visible and open for negotiation (cf. Percy-Smith, 2006).

Conflict as Struggles for Participation

This chapter entails an analysis of different constellations of conflict found in the local studies of young people's practices in public spaces conducted in the PARTI SPACE project, especially in the in-depth case studies of formal, non-formal and informal settings of participation. In the following, we will reconstruct the views of young people from the data of six ethnographic case studies of participatory settings, three from the Frankfurt sample which are each complemented by one more case from another urban context studied in PARTISPACE:

- *Youth and Student Forum (YSF) Frankfurt* is a city-wide forum representing young people with regard to school issues and thus a case of formal participation. It has been implemented by the city council and is regulated by regional law, which however is not binding for cities. In Frankfurt, there is no other youth representation which reflects that young people are mainly addressed as students. YSF is structured as a general assembly, consisting of two representatives per school who elect a board and a president, and is assisted by a voluntary adult counsellor appointed by the city council. Board members organize assembly meetings, 'sit in a lot of administrative meetings' (*biographical interview, YSF, Frankfurt*) and prepare campaigns, for which they also have a budget. A structural line of conflict for the YSF is balancing the expectations of on the one hand the city council, represented by the counsellor, and of their peers on the other. Members of YSF feel more and more at distance in relation to other students of the city: 'I would expect that 70, 80% do not really know YSF [...] and that's the problem' (ibid.).

- The *student committee (SC) Zurich*, the student representation of a private grammar school, is also a case of formal participation. Each class sends two representatives who elect a president and a deputy. However, as few students volunteer, there is pressure from teachers and peers to participate: '...and then it was democracy, I was quite involuntarily appointed' (*biographical interview, SC,*

Zurich). According to the rules, the committee serves to discuss 'student's issues' (mission statement), to link students and school, to 'be consulted before fundamental decisions that concern all students' and to organize 'once a year an event for the school in cooperation with the school management'. The mandate covers neither 'representing personal issues of students' nor speaking about individual teachers. Each session is attended and controlled by a teacher.

- The *girls group* (Frankfurt, Germany) is a group of six girls, aged 14–16 years. Some of them come from difficult family conditions, sometimes involving youth welfare services, and their transition into further education or training is uncertain. They attend a youth centre where they are more interested in the open space where young people can simply gather than in the organized activities like culture or sports: 'After school we come to the youth centre...always together...In principle, we are at home here'. Asked for their main activities, they say: 'Chilling,[1] [laughing], chilling, yeah...we smoke [weed], we talk, we drink, sometimes' (group discussion). They were studied as a case of informal participation because they stood out through their dominant and provoking behaviour towards other visitors (especially the male ones) and the youth workers, aimed at occupying the place. They constantly challenge and transgress the 'house rules', for example, by experimenting with drugs in the surroundings of the centre. The girls seem to perceive the youth centre as a space that is open for appropriation, allowing for experimentation with youth cultural practice and visibility, gender and sexual identity. They strive for visibility, belonging and recognition – in a safe space.

- *Lucha* is a self-managed social centre (*centro sociale*) in Bologna (Italy) developed from the squatting of an abandoned barrack. It was formed by a group of young left-wing activists and has, over the years, involved more than one hundred young people. It combines three main aspects: space for political debate and experimentation, social services for the neighbourhood and vulnerable groups (a free afterschool programme, a shelter for homeless people and refugees, a language course for migrants and a helpdesk for unemployed people) and open spaces for young people to meet in a free, safe and affordable way (a pizzeria, a microbrewery, a library, an organic garden, a bike-repair shop). Thus, the young people involved can be distinguished as activists, volunteers and users. The centre has undergone processes of institutionalization like campaigning for political referendums, establishing an NGO and even running in local elections, but these processes are neither linear nor comprehensive but combine protest and collaboration. By the end of our research, the centre, after several years of toleration, was violently evicted by the police.

- The *political cultural centre* (PCC) is a non-commercial, self-organized centre for left-wing and alternative political and cultural activities run by a group of young people between 16 and 35 years. They share with Lucha the aim of striving for an 'emancipatory society', but approach and constellation differ. Rather than

---

[1] Standing for 'hanging out'.

squatting, PCC rented a building that was free for demolition in a neighbouring city of Frankfurt (for a limited duration of 18 months). Here rents are lower and they also wanted to get away from 'the whole radical left-wing habitus like in Frankfurt' (biographical interview, PCC, Frankfurt), which they experienced as rather exclusive. Also their approach is specific: 'There are cultural projects, arts projects and political projects, but none that combines the three' (group discussion, PCC, Frankfurt). However, to pay the rent, they are constantly busy with organizing events and selling drinks. Apart from this, they want to be open to other groups and keep entrance thresholds low. Similar to Lucha, all decisions are taken in a public assembly. From a field note documentation: 'The room was hot and stifling. Nevertheless, 15 persons were sitting together for one hour and a half, highly concentrated without any negative mood or signs of stress or discontent'.

- The *Street Musicians* are a group of young men who came to Eskişehir (Turkey) for higher education. Some of them are still studying, some recently graduated. In their leisure time – but also to earn money – they make music on the streets. Most of them are of Kurdish origin, an ethnic group suffering from repression and discrimination in Turkey. Their repertoire covers songs from Anatolia and the Middle East in Turkish, Kurdish, but also in Armenian, Arabic or Persian language merging Kurdish music with modern folk or jazz. Their preferred spots to perform are the most popular und crowded streets in the city centre. When they started making music on the streets, it was exciting, because they experienced great approval and support from people; they almost felt becoming 'symbols of the city' (group discussion). Making music became a way of '*opening a space*' (ibid.) and bringing people together: 'If you play indoors, your audience is always the same [. . .] If they come together to listen, they may react in the same way, but they don´t do it on purpose, it is a foundation, it is a great thing' (ibid). At the same time, they made the experience that they were not welcome in all parts of the city. It needs being said that the group is not discrete, their music is loud and they attract a lot of attention and seem to have a significant audience.

In analysing these case studies, 'conflict' emerged as a central category when coding the empirical material. We have identified three constellations of conflict which can be seen as ideal-typical inasmuch as they represent different positions on the continuum between manifest and latent conflict (see above).

Open Conflicts: Visibility as Concern of Youth Cultural Practice

The first two exemplary cases represent a constellation in which young people explicitly question existing rules and transgress boundaries, thus marking difference in a – more or less – conscious way. Their cultural practice expresses that they do not expect that, in the existing frameworks, their claims will be recognized and respected.

The conflict analysed with regard to the *girls group* results from their transgressive behaviour and their striving for dominance in the youth centre. During the group discussion they say: 'We do all we want [. . .] we have the house completely under control', but they seem to legitimize this claim for power with regard to their rights and status as co-citizens:

> We live in this neighbourhood, the youth centre belongs to us . . . We have shut up long enough, we have accepted everything, I mean, the youth workers have much more to say than we have, but in fact, we are the young people, it is our youth centre.

The conflict escalates in a struggle related to the 'girls' day' (when the youth centre is closed for boys who, however, are one of their key incentives for visiting the centre): 'We sat together with the staff and said to them, we do not want the girls day any longer, we don't do nothing there' *(group discussion)*. However, as a result of this attempt of participation, the girls' day was turned into a 'project day' with access only for registered project participants and a reduction of the opening hours of the 'open space'. This space is, however, the most important part of the centre for the girls, partly because it is where they meet the boys. For the girls this change is unjust: 'as if they cared about us [yeah, they don't do] and then they do not take us serious'.

In an expert interview, the director of the centre presents the conflict in the following way:

> I don't know what they want. They criticized the house so massively . . . and yet they came, that's the way they are. But when they called us 'sons of bitches' . . . we had to exert a one month ban . . . They are really difficult to motivate [. . .] despite the opportunities the house offers.' He would like 'to motivate young people that it is worth engaging in something more sustainable' like 'a theatre play . . . with a stable group performing in residences for the elderly or palliative care departments.

Also the director takes a position of justice expressing disappointment with the girls because he had expected some gratitude from them. He attributes this situation to individual deficits on the side of the girls. The result is a constellation of mutual non-understanding and alienation expressed in this quote from the girls:

> The staff, they hate us . . . The people chilling here are the complete opposite of the workers . . . we live in two different worlds.

In sum, this conflict appears as the result of the discrepancy of expectations between the youth workers and the girls regarding the implementation of youth work. At the same time, it reveals a contradiction between the welfare rights of equal opportunities and participation, at least concerning how these are practiced at this youth centre.

If we then turn to the social centre *Lucha*, the conflict analysed here reflects the necessity, especially identified by the group of activists, in continuing with protest as a core activity of the social centre. According to them, this is ultimately confirmed by the fact of the eviction. They state that 'a break in conformity provoking the city' and an 'element of anomaly' in the local political scene is necessary to change 'what already exists in an experimental and shattering way' (*Lucha's first public statement*). Following a statement documented in a field note, the ambition is 'not being the good guys or the bad guys. It is about being the good and bad'.

This implies to:

> . . . seep in the innovative and countercultural elements of radical activism into institutions and the capacity for concrete change of volunteering, and seep in the political power to solve things beyond the here and now into volunteering.

The aim of reconciling political protest and social volunteering keeps the conflict with the urban society open and is reflected by the fight with authorities against eviction. However, this conflict occurs also within the centre, especially between activists and volunteers who are engaged in the kindergarten and the shelter, as activists are critical against the intensity and frequency of involvement by volunteers. There is constant debate, and volunteers are expected to understand themselves as parts of a political process as documented in another field note:

> From my perspective, what we do every day inside the dormitory is immediately political. We are changing our and other people's lives. That's politics.

Both the girls group and the social centre do not only question but also transgress existing rules and boundaries by occupying and using public spaces for their own goals. This involves violating existing rules: laws related to property, narcotics or youth protection and organizational rules like the house rules of the youth centre and the authority of professional staff, or hegemonic purposes of public (and private) spaces. The transgression of boundaries, however, also expresses a constellation in which young people lack accessible spaces. Apart from this, they do not trust that institutional actors may recognize their claims of belonging and of visibility. Obviously, for the young people such identity issues are urgent enough to justify transgressing boundaries and the risk of being sanctioned. For the girls, the articulation of conflict ensures individual and collective identity by drawing a line between 'in' and 'out'. In the case of the social centre, collective identity results from the aim of changing society at least within the boundaries of the centre. This must therefore be maintained and defended towards internal and external contestation. However, the activists' competence of balancing opposition and cooperation also reflects older age. As regards learning processes, the girls seem to identify youth work as a space where they can raise claims but only in a specific range. The youth workers seem to miss the opportunity to learn about the needs of the girls behind their transgressive behaviour. In Lucha, young people learn that their social and political engagement is not recognized by society and that they need to mobilize recognition among themselves. For the activists this confirms their insisting on an antagonistic position.

Conflicts Within Institutional Frames: Boundary Work in Formal Representation

The following two situations relate to a constellation of conflict that is connected to classical forms of youth participation aimed at representing young people's views in public and political institutions and providing them a space of democracy education (see the chapters by Pais and by Pohl and Reutlinger). These forms express an

institutional view, addressing young people as carriers of the right to be heard in 'all matters affecting the child', which, however, in most cases is limited by the condition 'in accordance with the age and maturity of the child' (cf. Article 12, UN Convention of the Rights of the Child). Such settings are referred to as 'adult-led' because they are derived from the pedagogical intentions of adults and because involvement requires acquiring an adult citizenship habitus (Lüküslü et al., 2020).

The situation of the young people engaged in the *Youth and Student Forum (YSF) Frankfurt* is characterized by a constant dilemma to prioritize either expectations of authorities or credibility among their peers. Consequently, they try to broaden their own agenda and include youth cultural issues beyond institutionalized school politics. One of these issues is the engagement for the yearly 'school's out party', taking place informally in a public park. This event is contested by local residents due to noise and litter, and the council of the city district has invited YSF for mediation. In a board meeting, the adult counsellor criticizes that Franz, the president of YSF, has accepted the invitation. The conflict is documented in a field note:

> Tommy and Alfred are upset. They argue, the event is only once a year and a tradition. Franz says there will be another meeting in the YSF premises involving also people from the city council. The adult counsellor interferes again: For years the city has tried to find someone to be made responsible and now tries to involve YSF. He says, it was a mistake to attend and even to organize another meeting . . . Franz murmurs, he will do it anyway. Also, Tommy and Alfred say, one should get involved exactly because being the YSF . . . Franz says that members of the council have put forward strange ideas, such as obliging students from pre-final grades to tidy up the space next morning or to make students pay which results in disgusted laughter.

Understanding himself as mediator, the adult counsellor anticipates and represents institutional expectations towards the forum regarding 'reasonable' political action while the members of YSF want to represent their peers and the issues they see as relevant for them. The situation reveals the ambiguity of the legal position of YSF as the power to define what is relevant for students from their perspective is limited. The counsellor tries to convince the young people to stay within their official mandate in order to avoid that they will be instrumentalised and frustrated, but the representatives question the legitimacy of an institutional mandate that does not consider the interests of those to be represented. However, the limited mandate leads also to conflict among the young people themselves. A former member tells that in another situation they had the idea to support an informal student initiative for refugees, but this was blocked by the former president himself. He argued that this was done in order to prevent the image of YSF of being damaged, since he did not trust the organizers of the initiative. Also, there was a lack of information concerning the actors involved, and he therefore anticipated there would be objections from institutional actors.

Moving to the case of the *student committee (SC), Zurich*, the scope of agency seems to be even narrower as teachers supervise the meetings. Asked about their possibilities to act, some members, in a group discussion, express frustration, resignation and sarcasm:

Patrick: Yeah, changing things that are never changed … It's more giving teachers the feeling that students have influence – but they have not.

Anna: It doesn't have to do so much with politics. In the end, they [teachers] are a super power and we are overruled, if they do not agree … It's obvious, we are only there to provide ideas.

Lena: Because we cannot replace teachers.

Anna: Neither fire nor hire them … We can really only change what can be changed.

However, also these young people do not simply resign and accept the limitations but take the risk of entering into conflict. When school management planned an increase of exams given per week, the committee protested and mobilized the students. Despite risking negative consequences for overstepping their mandate, their protest in the end was successful and the proposal withdrawn. Yet, the president criticizes: 'Sometimes it's a fight only to be heard and taken serious'.

The young people in these cases have engaged in institutionalized forms of participation – due to different individual motives and expectations regarding efficacy. However, in the course of subjecting themselves to institutional norms and rules and an adult habitus (their learning according to the institutionalized, pedagogical intentions), their aspirations for making a difference grow. When these aspirations are countered, then rules are questioned and challenged – here are also learning processes. Further, the young people do not simply accept the institutional limitations of how representation is framed by their mandate. Instead, they try to negotiate the room for action, making it more compatible with their life world perspective. Also, when young people are conscious of unequal power and restricted possibilities to act, they try to balance institutional and youth cultural perspectives. These struggles – often mediated by adult staff – reflect that young representatives are expected to position themselves somewhere between adults and young people. This structural dilemma cannot be solved by learning – either young people accept adopting an adult habitus and distance themselves from their peers, or they withdraw from formal participation as was the case with one of the interviewed YSF board members (cf. Lüküslü et al., 2020).

Avoiding or Shifting Conflicts to Internal or Individual Coping

The following two examples stand for a constellation of anticipating conflicts with the 'outside' and then shift them to the 'inside'. This participatory practice is characterized by attempts to avoid conflicts through internal or individual coping strategies.

One example of this constellation was observed in the *Political Cultural Centre (PCC), Frankfurt*. Their approach towards social criticism is not characterized by open opposition (like in the case of Lucha) but by experimenting with an alternative model of living and at the same time adapting to external conditions. The objective of being open to different groups puts high demands on the participants. An 'awareness team' was established for events, and this was responsible for dealing

with potential conflict situations and securing respectful behaviour. Nevertheless, the team cannot prevent every uncertain and challenging situation. During a field visit, the researcher is told about a participant:

> . . . who had repeatedly behaved in an unpleasant way. I [researcher] think, ‚it's tricky, being open for all and exclude such people'. . . Petra says, now the situation is ok. Another participant says, this guy had been sexually intrusive and she had wished someone to act like a doorman. (extract field notes, PCC, Frankfurt)

The consensus within the centre, not to call the police in such situations, expresses both a critical attitude towards the state and an ambition to act within a horizon of justice. There are intensive debates concerning, 'where exclusion starts. Of course, it is a hard thing to say, ok, one person has a ban, but if. . .other persons. . .do not feel well in the house this is also exclusion' (*group discussion, PCC, Frankfurt*). The enormous time and energy the participants invest in organization and internal communication is constitutive for the centre. Obviously, the group is conscious of this dilemma, as illustrated in this field note:

> During a forthcoming retreat it shall be discussed if there is a future for the joint project, if and who wants to continue and how. Conflicts are latent and scarcity of personnel, time and resources are big problems.

The whole group process seems characterized by collective learning on how to handle difficult situations without raising conflicts. This is also reflected in individual processes of biographical learning as one of the founding members reflects during an interview:

> It's a problem, how far you go in fighting for an emancipatory society without falling by the wayside yourself . . . It's hard to find the balance between self-exploitation and self-realization in such projects, a contradiction that is probably not possible to resolve.

Turning to the *street musicians in Eskişehir*, their case is characterized by a double ambivalence. On the one hand, the group members express feelings of being torn between their aspiration of expressing their cultural identities and creating an own style of music mixing different tunes, lyrics and stories. In a group discussion, they state, 'we didn't want music to be just a matter of entertainment' and play 'what the audience wants, because their reactions can be tough'. On the other hand, the city administration sometimes invites them to municipality events and sometimes makes them aware of their 'unaccepted, unauthorized existence on the streets'. This latent conflict is not limited to authorities but extends to experiences of discrimination by parts of the population: some people leave when they sing in other languages than Turkish, others talk in derogatory ways behind their backs and at times there are 'angry people yelling at us'. They still 'feel timid, we cannot transfer all our emotions'. From the group's point of view, their main problem is the current political situation in Turkey, which 'affects us directly'. In consequence, they do not feel as a part of the city: 'We never felt like we really own this city [. . .] [it] is only a temporary place for us [. . .] we're still strangers [. . .], it's like being the guest child in someone's house and keeping quiet to not break anything'. The pressure to adapt to the political and cultural climate results also from their need to earn

money through street music. One of the musicians, Azad, in a biographical interview explains how he has solved this dilemma for himself: 'I believe that among different forms of arts, the most reachable one is music. . .there is no place music cannot reach. . . .Music is like water; it can run through any crack it finds. And that is why music is a different world for me'.

These two very different groups have positioned themselves in a field of potential conflict, but they try to avoid to make it open, partly by anticipation, partly by learning to react flexibly to emerging disagreements. PCC have adopted a collective communication strategy characterized by consensus, openness, transparency and inclusiveness as well as a space of safety and comfort for themselves. The street musicians are prepared to renounce to their own aspirations and to play the music the audience appreciates. Thus, dealing with conflicts turns into a learning programme of individual and collective self-optimization. In the case of PCC, the goal is to 'improve constantly' in their communication and inclusiveness; in the case of the street musicians, it is about balancing the expectations of the majority society and performing their hybrid style which includes incorporating a habitus as musician. In both cases, this learning process is balanced by critique towards others: PCC activists distance themselves from both the mainstream society and the exclusive radical left-wing scene, and the musicians distance themselves from the urban society with its prejudices and racist attitudes resulting from the current political situation in Turkey. Both groups prefer to act silently rather than in a provoking way. This is best expressed by reference to the water running through the 'cracks' in terms of finding points of least discrimination and control. This reminds of de Certeau (1984), according to whom tactics using the cracks of the social system are the art of the weak.

Comparing the Potentials of Young People's Participation and Learning in Conflicts

What are the commonalities and differences in these constellations of conflict in public spaces; in what sense do they carry potentials for participation and learning by young people?

First, none of these groups move 'by accident' in public space. It is part of their coping with everyday life, and they position themselves in this respect, yet in different ways. Besides, also the concept of public space covers different places: the city, outdoors – 'in the presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear' (Arendt, 1958: 50) – public institutions as well as formalized spaces of the political. *Visibility* is a vital resource for coping with life and a cross-cutting theme in all constellations (Pais, 2008; Böhnisch & Schröer, 2016). This is obvious in open conflicts like in the case of the girls group. They strive for visibility in relation to each other, to their peers and – yet in distinction – to the youth workers. The youth centre serves as a 'rehearsal stage' allowing them to balance visibility with other

needs. Yet, also in latent conflicts visibility is not irrelevant. The PCC has not vanished from the left-wing scene but presents itself as a 'different' left-wing platform in social media. In institutional participation contexts, the issue of visibility seems ambivalent. On the one hand, young people use a formal stage that provides them with power and recognition from adult actors. On the other hand, they disappear from the urban, youth cultural 'outside'. Their conflicts with institutional actors reflect the attempt to present themselves both as credible young people towards the 'outside' and as competent representatives to the 'inside'. Striving for and getting visibility leads to both expected and unexpected experiences of (mis) recognition as consequences of acts of self-presentation and thus contributes to learning with regard to the own positioning in public space and wider society.

This is connected to processes of *identity* (Keupp et al., 1999; Isin & Wood, 1999). Young people's coping with everyday life means they have to deal with external ascriptions and expectations while being in search for recognition and belonging. Depending on their social positions, different practices in public space prove to be subjectively and collectively relevant and result in different constellations of conflict. The search for recognition of personal needs (love) and belonging is in particular central to the practice of the girls group, who expect being accepted even if transgressing the rules. Engagement in formal representation like YSF or SC is associated with the search for recognition as a subject of rights. However, this is also reflected in the girls' claim for ownership of the youth centre or the street musicians' claim to perform their diverse style of music. The latter, however, represents also a search for recognition in terms of esteem. The activists of Lucha refer to a meta-level of legitimacy and justice beyond the existing legal order, which they perceive as unjust. At the same time, similar to PCC and formal youth representations of YSF and SC, they expect recognition for their competence in applying institutionalized rules and organizational practices. However, the groups differ in how they judge conflict. The girls group actively explore and arrange conflicts; they seem to seek them as part of their identity work. To some degree, also for activists of Lucha, conflict has a positive connotation since their vision of a just society beyond the existing social order implies developing practices corresponding to this utopia in their everyday life. Young people in formal youth representation evaluate conflicts as clearly negative. However, their role of mediating between their peers and adult institutional actors necessarily creates conflict. While aiming at conflict solution, the experience of conflict also provides collective identity in terms of distinction from the adults. Finally, activists of PCC and street musicians avoid positioning themselves in conflict by developing competencies as musicians or organizers, and this becomes central for their identities.

The issue of identity is connected to issues of *space*, in terms of both sufficient space (like the case of PCC) and of specific or 'ideal space' (cf. Batsleer et al., 2020). Here contradictory life situations can be dealt with in a subjectively coherent way, i.e. spaces that combine visibility, safety and belonging, and where it is possible to 'chill'. For Lucha, these spaces mark an opposition towards hegemonic spaces while at the same time being open for exchange with the neighbourhood. For the girls group, as well as for the YSF representatives, these are spaces with flexible

boundaries between inside and outside; for the street musicians, these are spaces where they are allowed to perform their particular style of music. During their collective practice, young people learn to move in, but also to cultivate, these spaces according to their identity work (see the contribution of Mengilli et al., Chap. 11, in this volume).

Norms and rules, to which young people have to abide, against which they resist or which they try to negotiate, is the fourth line of conflict. Lucha, as well as the girls group, explicitly question norms and rules of urban space, of property and of the youth centre and do neither contend with negotiation nor compromise. They identify a discrepancy in relation to their interests and needs but do not ascribe themselves sufficient power to extend influence through negotiation. The groups in latent conflict constellations like street musicians and PCC are also critical towards existing norms and rules. However, the consequence they draw from their disadvantage in the power play is avoiding conflict. In contexts of formal representation, young people subject themselves to institutional norms and rules, however, not without questioning their interpretation and implementation when these lead to dilemmas of representation and when they feel disempowered (cf. Butler, 2015). Thus, conflicts represent power struggles but also *boundary work* in terms of questioning, negotiating, transgressing or subverting existing rules in order to increase spaces and possibilities for visibility and identity. All these constellations of conflicts are asymmetric, and young people are in the weaker position, even when they accept formally institutionalized norms and rules.

The different forms of boundary work and struggles for power inherent in the different constellations reflect different social positions of young people and participatory settings. First, the groups and their practices differ according to age, gender, social background, education and institutionalization; they are endowed with different recognition of their ability to participate in a proper way. Second, in some constellations there are concrete adversaries with whom conflicts need to be acted out. In formal and non-formal institutions, pedagogical actors such as youth workers, teachers or the counsellor of YSF invest their power in terms of pedagogization: conflicts are interpreted as a sign that the young people have 'not yet' understood and learned what 'real' participation means and implies. Outside institutions, adversaries like the municipality and the police are relevant especially in the cases of Lucha and the street musicians. In latent conflicts like in the case of PCC, concrete adversaries are not present or only imagined in a personalized way: the real estate market, capitalism, the city, the ethnic majority, etc. While conflicts in pedagogical institutions refer to particular norms and rules, conflicts outside apply to general norms and normality. A third line of differentiation is the issue of representation: who is represented by the groups and as who are they being addressed by others? The girls first of all represent themselves, their particular interests and needs, yet referring to the generalized difference between staff and visitors of the youth centre and legitimizing their position as 'young people of the neighbourhood'. The mandate of the representatives of the student committee and of the YSF seems obvious when reflecting the limiting interpretation of representation by adult institutional actors. The attempt of re-appropriating this mandate reveals the discrepancy between the

students' life world and their institutional role creating a dilemma of legitimation. Both the social centre Lucha and PCC claim to represent not only themselves but more or less all members of society suffering from injustice and lacking autonomy. The same applies to the street musicians, whose ambition to represent the Kurdish people is balanced by their self-presentation as musicians.

Conclusions: Learning Participation in and Through Conflict

The aim of this chapter was to analyse if and how conflicting practices of young people in public spaces can be understood as the expression of claims of belonging and what potentials of learning related to participation they involve. We have shown that the themes articulated and the lines of conflict aroused vary depending on the ways in which practices are recognized by institutional actors. By being active in public space, young people position themselves in fields of conflict, even if they are not always aware of this. The experiences of conflict they make contribute to processes of learning in which young people develop ideas of justice and an understanding of themselves as participants in public space. This seems most obvious where young people transgress formally established rules and make 'noise' to be heard (cf. Rancière, 1999). In this process, however, they experience their weak and marginal position. Young people understanding themselves as political activists aim at optimizing their engagement by constant reflection of their positioning. Whether they present this positioning as a balance between opposition and cooperation to external actors or keep this balance rather inside depends on their experiences with being active in public spaces and how they reflect these. In contrast, formal representatives position themselves within the existing order and are recognized as competent participants. Yet, some of them make the experience that functioning as 'citizens in the making' (Hall et al., 1999) in this context implies losing the possibility of making 'noise' and claiming changes to this order.

Following Rancière (1999), both open and latent conflict behaviours can be interpreted in different ways. Not only as expressions of experiences of injustice but also as a dissensus on the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and as an attempt to find out who has the legitimacy to speak: 'who speaks on behalf of whom and what it is all about' (Ahrens & Wimmer, 2014: 194). This means that conflicts are not only potential sources of individual, but also collective, learning. Breaking existing rules can be experienced in terms of self-efficacy and power but can at the same time provoke experiences of powerlessness if they fail to achieve their goals. At the same time, the institutional actors involved in these conflicts – youth workers, counsellors or representatives of authorities – miss the opportunity to learn about the needs of young people and to contribute to social learning by expressing and negotiating their own needs and constraints in these constellations. Where youth participation involves, and conflict results from, occupying and shaping their own spaces, young people learn what it means to run a space according to own values and

norms of justice but also that resources and power are limited when these spaces need to be defended legally or illegally. Institutional actors, in these cases, miss the opportunity to support spaces addressing existing social needs – places where young people can meet, but where services also are provided – but, as well, to learn to trust in the self-organization of young people.

Is learning to participate interpreted in terms of adaptation to institutionalized participation or of participatory innovation? According to the concept of *radical democracy* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) in plural societies, these processes are necessarily individualized and fragmented. Therefore recognition, inclusion and justice necessarily imply constant social conflicts (or 'antagonisms'):

> '. . . there is no plural and radical democracy without renouncing to the . . . assumption of a privileged point of access to 'the truth' of a limited number of subjects . . . Juridical institutions, educational system, labour relations, discourses of the resistance of marginal populations construct original and irreducible forms of social protest, and thereby contribute all to the discursive complexity and richness on which the programme of a radical democracy should be founded. (ibid.: 192–193)

This means to understand social conflicts not (only) as deficits of the individuals or groups involved, who have not sufficiently internalized existing norms and rules, but as expressions of attempts to reconcile these norms and rules with securing inclusion in an unequal and increasingly diverse social reality. In these movements, both individuals and society as a whole could learn who is there to participate with which needs, interests, claims and agendas – or what society is about and that this has to be constantly (re)negotiated (cf. Percy-Smith, 2006). This means that young people's learning of participation goes hand in hand with – or depends on – society's learning of the relationships of which it consists. Consequently, learning to participate, or participatory learning, requires spaces where conflicts become visible and manifest, where they are accepted and not neglected and where those with less power are not rejected and stigmatized but recognized and empowered to raise claims of belonging and participation.

References

Ahrens, S., & Wimmer, M. (2014). Das Demokratieversprechen des Partizipationsdiskurses. In A. Schäfer (Hrsg.), *Hegemonie und autorisierende Verführung. Zum Verhältnis von Politischem und Pädagogischem* (S. 175–200). Schöningh.

Arendt, H. (1958). *The human condition*. Chicago University Press.

Batsleer, J., Walther, A., & Lüküslü, D. (2020). Struggle over participation: Towards a grounded theory of youth participation. In A. Walther, J. Batsleer, P. Loncle, & A. Pohl (Eds.), *Young people and the struggle of participation. Contested practices, power and pedagogies in public spaces* (pp. 199–219). Routledge.

Bitzan, M., & Klöck, T. (1993). *'Wer streitet denn mit Aschenputtel?'. Konfliktorientierung und Geschlechterdifferenz – eine Chance zur Politisierung Sozialer Arbeit*. SPAK.

BMFSFJ (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend). (2017). *15. Kinder- und Jugendbericht*. BMFSFJ.

Böhnisch, L., & Schröer, W. (2016). *Social work – A problem-oriented introduction*. De Gruyter.

Butler, J. (2015). *Notes towards a performative theory of assembly*. Harvard University Press.

Coser, L. (1956). *The functions of social conflict*. The Free Press.

Dahrendorf, R. (1988). *The modern social conflict: An essay on the politics of liberty*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. University of California Press.

European Commission. (2009). *An EU strategy for youth – Investing and empowering. A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities*. European Commission.

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research, 6*(3), 167–191.

Gronemeyer, R. (1974). Leerstellen der Konfliktsoziologie: zum konflikttheoretischen Bezugsrahmen für Gemeinwesenarbeit. In H. E. Bahr & R. Gronemeyer (Hrsg.), *Konfliktorientierte Gemeinwesenarbeit – Niederlagen und Modelle* (S. 46–74). Luchterhand.

Hall, T., Coffey, A., & Williamson, A. (1999). Self, space and place: Youth identities and citizenship. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 20*(4), 501–513.

Honneth, A. (1995). *Struggle for recognition. The moral grammar of social conflicts*. Polity Press.

Honneth, A. (2003). Redistribution as recognition. A response to Nancy Fraser. In N. Fraser/A. Honneth (Eds.), *Redistribution or recognition? A political-philosophical exchange*. Verso, pp. 110–198.

Isin, E., & Wood, P. (1999). *Citizenship and identity*. Sage.

Keupp, H., Ahbe, T., Gmür, W., Höfer, R., Mitzscherlich, B., Kraus, W., & Straus, F. (1999). *Identitätskonstruktionen. Das Patchwork der Identitäten in der Spätmoderne*. Rowohlt.

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and socialist strategy. Towards a radical democratic politics* (2nd ed.). Verso.

Loncle, P., Cuconato, M., Muniglia, V., & Walther, A. (Eds.). (2012). *Youth participation in Europe. Beyond discourses, practices and realities*. Policy Press.

Lüküslü, D., Pais, A., Tuorto, D., & Walther, A. (2020). "This is a compressed political system." Ambivalences of formal youth participation. In A. Walther, J. Batsleer, P. Loncle, & A. Pohl (Eds.), *Young people and the he struggle of participation. Contested practices, power and pedagogies in public spaces* (pp. 67–82). Routledge.

Miller, D. (1999). *Principles of social justice*. Harvard University Press.

Mouffe, C. (2018). *For a left-wing populism*. Verso.

Nunner-Winkler, G., Meyer-Nikele, M., & Wohlrab, D. (2006). *Integration durch Moral. Moralische Motivation und Ziviltugenden Jugendlicher*. Springer.

Pais, J. M. (2008). Young people, citizenship and leisure. In R. Bendit & M. Hahn-Bleibtreu (Eds.), *Youth transitions. Process of social inclusion and patterns of vulnerability in a globalised world* (pp. 153–179). Budrich.

Parsons, T. (1937). *The structure of social action*. Free Press.

Rancière, J. (1999). *Disagreement. Politics and philosophy*. University of Minnesota Press.

Sitzer, P. (2010). Entwicklungspfade der Gewalttätigkeit männlicher Jugendlicher aus anerkennungstheoretischer Perspektive. *Soziale Passagen, 2*(2), 183–196.

Sutterlüty, F. (2017). Riots: Jugendlicher Protest gegen die Verletzung staatsbürgerlicher Ansprüche? In W. Kühnel & H. Willems (Eds.), *Politisches Engagement im Jugendalter. Zwischen Beteiligung, Protest und Gewalt* (pp. 196–220). Beltz Juventa.

Larissa von Schwanenflügel is Professor of Social Work, Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Andreas Walther is Professor of Social Pedagogy and Director of the research centre Coping and Education in the Life Course at Goethe University of Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Chapter 4
Professionalization of Youth Volunteering in Turkey: A Case Study

Berrin Osmanoğlu and Demet Lüküslü

Abstract This chapter discusses the professionalization of youth volunteering, based on empirical research in a youth center in Eskişehir, Turkey. Studies on youth volunteering majorly focus on macro-level factors, such as value change, youth unemployment, or ideological shift, in explaining its changing character. However, sector-specific needs and requirements due to the professionalization of the civil society sector appear to be more determinant in explaining new features of youth volunteering. In this perspective, the chapter identifies and explores the conditions of development of three different aspects of a professionalized form of volunteering in the making, based on ethnographic research. The study demonstrates how volunteering requires certain skills, helps to get a paid job, and is dissociating itself from politics.

Keywords Professionalization of volunteering · Youth volunteering · Youth participation

In this chapter, the professionalization of youth volunteering is discussed, based on an ethnographic study that was realized in a youth center in the city of Eskişehir, Turkey. Focusing on what is expected from young volunteers, it has been attempted to define some aspects of a professionalized form of volunteering. In democratic societies, where it is widespread, volunteering has been recognized as a form of civic engagement and a remedy for enabling the participation of citizens in civic life. However, more recently, some of the major aspects indicating this association are being interrogated in the scholarly literature (Eliasoph, 2009; Hustinx, 2010). Despite the increasing number of volunteers, studies have been emphasizing that

B. Osmanoğlu
Centre de Recherches Sociologiques et Politiques de Paris-CRESPPA, Paris, France

D. Lüküslü (✉)
Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Sociology Department, Yeditepe University, Istanbul, Turkey
e-mail: dlukuslu@yeditepe.edu.tr

this increase is more particularly observed in the episodic type of volunteering and arguing that the "nature" of volunteering has changed. Accordingly, values attributed to volunteering, such as activism, idealism, and altruism, are being replaced by instrumentalism, individualism, and careerism (Eliasoph, 2009). More specifically for young volunteers, it has been argued that they perceive volunteering as a job training experience, or something to put on their CV while looking for a job, and even as an activity to earn some money (Vachée & Dansac, 2019). There have also been attempts to attribute an adjective for this type of volunteer, such as "plug-in volunteer" or "business-style volunteer" (Hustinx, 2010, 2014). Usually, these transformations of volunteering are associated with changing social, economic, and political conditions, such as increasing youth unemployment, value change, or ideological shift; however, they are also due to changes in the civil society sector and, more particularly, to its professionalization.

Scholars have identified a professionalization trend in the civil society sector in many countries, including Turkey, but usually with a weak focus on its consequences on volunteering. Yet, with an increase in paid staff and with the predominance of a managerial culture in civil society organizations (CSOs), conditions have significantly changed for volunteers. Studies usually mention, as a repercussion, the disaffection of volunteers, especially for societies where volunteering is widespread. Among the few studies focusing on its consequences on the conditions of volunteering, it has been argued that expectations from volunteers have actually changed: the sector needs and asks for skilled volunteers. Since administrative and management duties have become more complex, and some volunteering duties have turned more specialized, associations need, and are looking for, a more "professionalized volunteering" (Bernardeau, 2020; Bernardeau-Moreau & Hély, 2007). What is demanded from a volunteer is no longer to be a devoted and passionate amateur but to be qualified for the task (Ferrand-Bechmann, 2000, 2011). More precisely for the Turkish case, since volunteering is a recently developed form of civic engagement and still not widespread, the academic literature has mostly discussed its development and the low rates of volunteering (Kalaycıoğlu, 2002; İçduygu et al., 2011; Zencirci, 2014; Akboğa, 2017) rather than its changing features. In this study, it was attempted to fill this gap and describe the mechanisms that produce a professionalized form of volunteering in Turkey. Based on empirical findings, three features of this professionalized form of volunteering have been identified; this new form of volunteering requires skills, provides job prospects, and is dissociated from politics.

The youth center subject in this chapter was studied within the framework of the Partispace research project. As one of the six case studies in Eskişehir, besides participant observations at the youth center, group discussions expert and biographical interviews have been conducted.

Professionalization of Civil Society and Changing Volunteering

Professionalization in the civil society sector in most established democracies has been triggered by changes in resource structure and organization management, starting in the 1980s. Instead of the volunteer-based form of organization predominant in the sector, new sources of funding coming from the corporate world or governmental agencies have enabled the hiring of more permanent paid staff and increased expertise in CSOs. At the same time, this change in resources has led to new management techniques, which are also called managerialism (Dansac et al., 2012; Hwang & Powell, 2009; Kreutzer & Jäger, 2011). These techniques, including methods of evaluation, accounting, and documentation, have infiltrated the structure and discourse of CSOs. For example, demands from funders have resulted in an increased use of strategic planning, financial audits, and quantitative program evaluations in nonprofits (Friedman, 2008). Moreover, as part of the managerialist discourse, effectiveness, needs of the stakeholders, and innovation start to appear as legitimating accounts for CSOs (Meyer et al., 2012). It has been argued that these techniques introduce efficiency, transparency, and accountability (Friedman, 2008). It is the opinion of some scholars that this is a positive characteristic of professionalization, notably when compared with classic voluntary associations for which a lack of diversity or a paternalistic distance between volunteer and recipient is identified (Eliasoph, 2009). However, for others, imported management culture is at odds with volunteering culture and values (Smith, 1996). Furthermore, as a consequence, a considerable part of the CSO activities have become administrative work, consisting of resource chasing and reporting to funders, which also increases alongside the competition over resources.

Several implications of this professionalization of volunteering have been identified. The majority of these is the disengagement of volunteers with regard to paid staff. This seems to be due to the diminishing need for volunteers or is caused by a feeling of exclusion felt by volunteers (Dansac et al., 2011). Furthermore, it is highly related to a hierarchy or a tension that emerges between the volunteers and paid staff (Ferrand-Bechmann, 2011). Moreover, studies have revealed that the commitment of volunteers to an association is rarely motivated by a desire to ensure administrative tasks, such as fundraising or reporting to funders (Dansac et al., 2012), especially not in a context with more pressures due to a growing scarcity of funds. However, if problems with financial resources are not new to civil society, the difficulty to find young volunteers is (Dansac et al., 2012). Studies have also revealed that, with the changing profile, volunteers, coming randomly during their free time, do not have the chance to create a strong connection to the cause (Dansac et al., 2012). Especially since there is little opportunity for discussion and reflection, volunteers do not learn about the structural reasons for the problems. In addition, they do not have the occasion to build substantial ties with the other volunteers or recipients either. Eventually, short-term volunteering would even have a detrimental influence on the recipients, because the latter learn to not trust the volunteers. Furthermore, run by

paid staff, organizations not only lose their mobilization power, but the sector also loses its radical character in relation to social change. As radical interventions are usually the work of volunteer-based CSOs, professionalism is negatively associated with these forms of engagement (Epstein, 1970; McAdam, 1982).

However, the constituents of civil society sectors shape volunteering more deliberately than just experiencing the repercussions of professionalization on volunteering. While the number of volunteers is decreasing, those who are volunteering are expected to be more qualified. Due to the increasing complexity of the activities in the sector, CSOs look for skilled volunteers who will be subjected to a rationalized management approach (Bernardeau-Moreau & Hély, 2007). This means to not just perform administrative work but to also fulfil classical volunteering duties, such as animation or accompaniment in a more professional way. Studies have revealed that there is an increase in college graduates among volunteers and that professional work experience is highly valued, even almost indispensable for volunteering (Vachée & Dansac, 2019). Like a job, volunteering enhances competencies and experience. Instead of multiple affiliations, volunteering in one association and having more responsibilities has become more frequent among volunteers. In order to carry out relatively more important responsibilities in an organization as a volunteer, being qualified for the job has become almost a requirement, which consequently limits the access of young volunteers to positions with responsibilities (Prouteau et al., 2008), especially in long-standing organizations. Moreover, the link between volunteering and professional activity has become more explicit (Bernardeau, 2020). CSOs promote the acquisition of skills and experience, not only through discourse but also through mechanisms and instruments created to validate and certify competencies that a volunteer supposedly has acquired through his/her experience, such as volunteer cards or a "volunteer passport" (Dansac et al., 2012). In addition to this, there has also been an increase in the number of paid volunteers (Bernardeau-Moreau & Hély, 2007), which some associations use as an opportunity to meet their need for human resources.

The Context of Professionalization of Youth Volunteering in Turkey

Concerning the Turkish case, professionalization of civil society is related to these very same factors (change in resources and organization), but its evolution follows a different path. The professionalization trend appears in the aftermath of the democratization wave of the 1990s, which started earlier in Southern Europe and Latin America and followed by Eastern European and sub-Saharan countries. Following the collapse of prior authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, international organizations fervently promoted civil society as a major agent of social and political change. This perspective was based on the idea that a strong state could only be overcome by a vibrant civil society. Consequently, during this period, civil society enjoyed significant attention from international donors (Kuzmanovic, 2010). In the case of Turkey,

it was the EU candidacy that provided a significant transfer of resources and practices, notably in the form of projects, training, and mobility opportunities from EU institutions. The 1990s and the 2000s were identified as a period of growth for Turkish civil society, with an increase in organizations in various areas, such as human rights, women rights, and environment, as well as minority and religious rights (Toprak, 1996). It was also in this very same process that aspects of professionalization in Turkish civil society began to be observed, consequently to the transfer of resources and practices. In this context, volunteering began to be promoted too, more particularly among Turkish youth. In relation to the EU candidacy process, partnership in various programs of youth volunteering was established, such as the European Voluntary Service, Youth in Action, and Erasmus (Bee & Kaya, 2017a, b).

A particular setting where youth volunteering has been specifically promoted is youth work. Youth policies and youth centers in Turkey are mostly the product of a politically centralized decision-making process, but the influence of the EU on the youth policy and institutions has been remarkable. The main national body responsible for the youth policy and youth work is the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In 2013, in the process of the EU candidacy of Turkey, a National Youth and Sports Policy document was published, which stated that Turkey needs to adopt a youth policy. It was during this period of change that the Ministry created youth centers that employed professional youth workers. When compared to European youth centers, which are more focused on disadvantaged youth, the priority of youth centers in Turkey is to provide support to middle-class youth. They organize complementary courses for education, prepare young people for the job market, and provide leisure time activities within which volunteering is promoted as well. In addition to this top-down way of establishing youth centers, at a local level, municipalities and nongovernmental organizations also practice youth work. In these settings, EU institutions and resources seem to have a more horizontal influence, notably through direct cooperation in terms of youth worker training, mobility, or projects. It should also be noted that municipalities that have established youth centers and youth work are almost exclusively run by political parties that oppose the party in government. In other words, youth work, which has only been a recent development, is also a field for political competition (Lüküslü & Osmanoğlu, 2018).

These developments have increased levels of volunteering in Turkey, and this increase has been almost exclusively among young people. However, it should be noted that the level is still significantly low. Based on the 2014 ISSP results (International Social Survey Programme: Citizenship II – ISSP), Erdogan and Uyan-Semerci show that only 6.2% of the adult population in Turkey volunteers, the second lowest rate among the countries in the list, just above the Russian Federation with 5%, while at the top there is Denmark with 57%, followed by others such as the Switzerland with 52.6%, Germany 48.7% or Sweden 40.5% (Erdogan & Uyan-Semerci, 2020). Most of the studies on volunteering in Turkey are focusing on explaining these low rates of volunteering. If some of the developments in civil society and youth work in Turkey indicate aspects of professionalization, their influence on volunteering or a professionalization of volunteering have not been explored.

Case Study: A Youth Center in Eskişehir

To investigate this issue, fieldwork was conducted in a youth center in Eskişehir, a student city that neighbors the capital of Turkey, Ankara. This youth center is situated close to a big university campus, and most of its users are university students. There are also some high school students, but the center has very few non-student users. In addition to providing a space for socialization and a study room, the center offers a large range of activities, such as leisure time and post-education classes, charity event organizations, travel activities, and access to a youth council. The most popular and "efficient" activity in the center is the wide range of free courses, which range from foreign language and yoga to music and computer programming. The long queues for application at the time of inscription were perceived as a "visible" success of the center. Its focus on post-education, which would eventually contribute to job search, is connected to the many student users but also to the structure of youth centers in Turkey. This particular center was founded by the district municipality. It is financed and controlled by the municipality and run by employed youth workers. When established a decade ago, the center had only one youth worker but acquired more space and staff when the number of users increased. As the municipality is willing to allocate only limited resources, the youth workers are pushed to diversify their resources. On the one hand, they use EU-related funds and opportunities, while on the other, volunteers have become a major resource.

Volunteers have a significant place in all activities in the center. Not only has the center adopted a volunteer-based ideology, but due to the limited number of staff and resources, the center also depends on volunteers. There are different types of volunteers in the center, such as those who volunteer as a requirement for a course at university, those who come for free classes, and those who spend almost all of their free time at the center. They also vary in skills, such as those who are doing training, those who sell tickets for events, those who play at the theater for charity, those who organize barter markets or movie theater, those who give guidance to Erasmus students, those who help to prepare city guides, etc. At the center, all users who regularly frequent the premises, even if it is mostly for socialization, are called volunteers. Every one of them will someday take part in volunteer work, with large or minor responsibilities.

From the fieldwork conducted at the youth center, three aspects of volunteer professionalization were identified. The first was that volunteering **requires some skills**. Not only does the center need skilled volunteers, due to its limited resources, but the applied volunteer management technique involves the volunteer having or acquiring some specific skills. At the center, and more generally in the Turkish civil society context, the experiences of the volunteers are shaped by the predominance of a project culture. This is used here to refer to a set of rules and relations, which are used to regulate civil society activities and are mostly organized in the form of projects, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section. The second aspect of professionalization that was identified was that volunteers seem to believe

that **volunteering help to get a paid job**. On the one hand, some volunteers would become youth workers or professionals in civil society, while on the other, volunteering is perceived as a training experience for specific skills, which eventually result in a paying job. Finally, the last aspect is **the dissociation of volunteering from politics**. The change in the resource structure in the non-profit sector has not only changed the radical character of the sector regarding social change but also seems to have changed the political aspects of volunteering. Political engagement in civil society instead appears in the form of rights advocacy, which is defined by rights advocates as a way to protect and promote rights that are above politics, in other words, universal human rights, including, in this particular case, youth rights.

Volunteering for a Project Requires Skills

> Researcher: How did you start volunteering for the youth center?
> K: They had a project. . .I was donating costumes to their project. . .then I started to help to their project, they were organizing events for kids suffering from leukemia. . . I wanted to support their project because I actually work with children, this is my job, I am an animator for kids. I was thinking of how I can help with the project. . . I started to organize events for them. . .then I became part of the project team, one of the three members of the team. . . . (Interview with volunteer Kenan)

At first sight, the quotation above seems to describe a quite typical way to start volunteering and how the center recruits a volunteer for a very conventional cause. Except that every step of this account was framed as part of a project, and this was not a random vocabulary choice. In Turkey, designing and implementing a civil society activity in the form of a project was mostly induced by the promotion of Western international donors and policy institutions (Kuzmanovic, 2010). Assigning a significant role to civil society regarding social and political change, international donors, and policy institutions has been given particular interest in funding projects but, consequently, has also led to the transfer of project management techniques. This has introduced, as mentioned earlier, professionalization in the Turkish civil society sector, which also includes a project culture for volunteering. A project has a specific focus and a determined time frame but also constitutes a particular form of acting together. As a frame for social interactions, the project governs the activities of those who prepare and take part in them. For a volunteer, besides having skills specific to the task, taking part in a project is a learning process, on the one hand, and a particular form of social interaction, on the other. There is some technical knowledge involved, such as writing a project, applying for funding (learning about funding institutions), and managing a project. Application procedures are complex and require a considerable amount of time, in addition to specific skills, such as knowledge of a foreign language, computer skills, networking, and experience. There are conditions for eligibility and carrying out a project. A project also has a specific vocabulary such as "stakeholders" or "monitoring." There are even private

companies and experts on applications for project. Moreover, there are also ideological elements involved, such as funding, which is attributed to projects that adopt principles:

> Researcher: Are you planning any new projects these days?
> K: Actually, this is a priority in our minds and our work plan.
> Researcher: Writing a project?
> E: Yes, yes, we really put effort into doing this all the time…but…this is not something that you can do very quickly, you need to spend significant time on that. (Expert interview with youth worker Emre)

The youth center studied here, in particular, and, more generally, youth work in Turkey have been influenced by this project culture. In this specific field, the incorporation of the project culture is mostly due to the transfer of funding and practice from EU-related agencies. EU projects are prestigious, especially since they involve international cooperation. Youth workers, as most civic activists in Turkey, often discussed in the scholarly literature, are eager to work on a project, take part in a project, or design a project (Kuzmanovic, 2010). However, an important motive for youth workers in the current case to apply for EU resources is the limited resources allocated by the municipality. In order to secure their job, youth workers create new activities at the center and design them as projects and then apply for funding. This, however, creates some sort of a cycle. Notably, a specific EU project unit was created at the center, and a qualified youth worker expert in the subject was hired for the job. However, the hiring of new staff creates even further financial constraint. Consequently, with limited funding, youth workers are compelled to design more and more projects, and activities to secure their jobs, and they allocate a considerable amount of their time for this.

This project culture not only involves fundraising management but also volunteer management. In a relatively new center and in an environment where volunteering is not widespread, volunteer management is not a well-established practice. Under these current conditions, youth workers organize volunteers around projects, wherein the volunteers are expected to design projects, to take part in projects, and to carry them out. This can be a barrier to some potential volunteers, notably due to language or skill requirements or unattractive administrative work. For others, this is a way to acquire skills, notably under conditions of high unemployment. Volunteers who take part in a project feel like they learn some specific knowledge, earn a certain skill that is not something that just anyone can do and which they can eventually put on their CV. Since these projects also involve other institutions as partners, this enables volunteers to also expand their network, social or professional, including governmental agencies, institutions, or other CSOs.

For volunteers, to conceive volunteering in terms of projects and having a project training happens at different levels. They either participate in project writing classes or join projects prepared by youth workers. They may take part in every stage of a project, starting from its writing phase. Among the various free classes of the center, "project writing" is one of the most promoted by youth workers. Moreover, volunteers are also inculcated that a project should be creative from a particular ideological perspective. They are taught that they should "think outside of the box" and

volunteering is in its essence realized through a project. On the one hand, this is a way to include volunteers in all phases. On the other hand, due to the lack of resources, youth workers need volunteers to propose "new ideas" for activities that can eventually be included in:

> They [the volunteers] were always proposing the same classical ideas for activities, we [the youth workers] were a bit bored of that, we wanted to do new things…and we wanted them to be part of the process [of creating new things]…we prepared a questionnaire [they are asked to propose an activity to volunteer for, and to formulate their ideas by responding to the following questions: what?, where?, when?, how?, for whom?, by whom?, and how much?]…and we asked those who participated in the meeting to fill out the questionnaire for the next meeting…around 100 people were present at the meeting and we gave them training about how to fill out the questionnaire…. (Expert interview with youth worker Emre)

This excerpt from an interview with a youth worker about the annual volunteer recruitment meeting, realized at the beginning of each academic year, shows how the volunteers are received at their first encounter with the center. Youth workers ask the participants about their ideas for creating an activity, not only expecting them to be innovative but also giving them training in order to receive their answer in a particular way. Not all of the participants at this meeting will continue to volunteer at the center, but for those who stay, this is in some way their first project training.

Another instance that reveals the influence of project culture is the youth council established by the center. The youth council, which will be focused on in the last section, discusses dissociation from politics, as a consequence of professionalization, and is also shaped by the project culture of the center. Planned to eventually become independent from the center, the council was established through the initiative of youth workers and with the participation of volunteers at the center. Their activities, as well as their deficiencies, are identified in relation to a project culture:

> They [the volunteers of the youth council] realized many projects during last year. Some of them were social responsibility projects, actually all of them… for example, they renewed the beds at the child oncology department of a public hospital. Their current project is to create a simulation for preparing volunteers for job interviews". (Expert interview with youth worker Emre)
>
> They have troubles in developing projects. They have ideas, but they don't know how to convert them into projects. (Expert interview with youth worker Gamze)

It is usually the exclusion or the alienation of volunteers that is emphasized as a consequence of the professionalization of civil society. This is often due to the tension or hierarchy in relation to paid staff or the increase in administrative work. However, it was observed that expectations from volunteers, or the volunteering experience itself, seemed to create a distinction for volunteers, notably by earning some specific skills. This can be alienating for some young people, but for others, this experience is attractive, since youth unemployment is significantly high in Turkey (Çelik & Lüküslü, 2018). The skills and the experience in question are particularly valuable for getting a paying job, rather than to represent some sort of civic value.

How Can Volunteering Help You Get a Job?

The second aspect of the professionalized form of volunteering is that it is not uncommon to expect to earn money as a result of volunteering experience. Volunteering has been defined as a time that is given freely and without pay to any organization that has the aim of benefiting people for a particular cause. Thus, volunteers have no monetary reason for joining or staying with an organization. However, with a more professionalized form of volunteering, it is more common for a volunteer to expect to be hired, and eventually actually be hired, by the organization for which one has to volunteer. Moreover, the expectation is that the volunteering experience will help them to find a job in another sector. Both types were observed in the fieldwork herein. The first appeared in the form of expecting a job in youth work, social work, or civil society and, more specific to the case herein, in public service or politics. The second was to perceive volunteering as an opportunity to practice some skills, notably as volunteer trainers, which would qualify them for an eventual paying job. Volunteering was perceived as professional training in connection to formal education. This was not only due to high youth employment or the instrumentalization of volunteering by young people but because of the changing conditions in the sector as well.

Concerning an eventual job in youth work, social work, and in civil society, in the Turkish context, these are sectors that have developed recently. Professionals in these sectors do not enjoy high social or legal recognition. Most of the current staff is self-taught, since formal education programs for professionals have only recently been established. Even if the number of observations is necessarily limited, some of the youth workers at the youth center were actually former volunteers. Starting with participation in free courses; taking part in various activities, including volunteer training; as well as being a member of the youth council, they eventually became youth workers. Such employment was motivated by the view that it is better for a youth worker to have volunteering experience, as that young person would also be better at understanding young people and their problems. In this particular case, due to the relationship to a public institution, another job track was also perceived in the field of public service or politics. No such case was observed during the fieldwork herein, but the perception itself was significant. Equivalent to being, for example, a member of the youth branch of a political party, volunteering in a municipality youth center was perceived as a first step for engagement in politics or working in public service:

> I would like to, I don't know, when I am like 50 years old, become a mayor or something. That's what I tell myself, because I want to learn the job from the bottom and then serve... I mean, that's my dream... I always had it in my mind, even before I started volunteering. (Expert interview with Tolga, former volunteer, youth worker)

The second path to a job is to understand volunteering as professional training for particular skills. This is usually identified as the instrumentalization of volunteering. It may be about putting the experience on the CV for an eventual first job, but it is also to practice a specific skill, mostly during a period between jobs. At the youth

center, this was represented by the figure of the volunteer trainer. There was a wide spectrum of free courses at the center, ranging from foreign language and photography to guitar classes and Photoshop. Due to the limited resources of the center, most of these classes were provided by volunteer trainers. Regarding the latter, as most of them were students, they found this opportunity attractive. Since training opportunities are not well-established and part-time jobs not well-paid, a volunteer training job appears to be a good investment. Many of them will volunteer until they find a full-time formal job, but some will continue even after getting a job:

> Since there are lots of students here in Eskişehir, they are working for like 2–2.5 liras per hour. Instead of this exploitation, I mean that's my personal opinion, coming here, volunteering and developing some extracurricular skills is more important. He/she will work for hours and earn like 16 liras under unhealthy conditions. There are many students from the faculty of education, and since they will become teachers, they use this as an opportunity; it's a good opportunity for them. Some of them are giving classes here as volunteers and they can work as a private tutor later for like 40 liras per hour. We don't know it as a fact, but sometimes parents ask for some guidance and I give them names [for private tutoring]. I don't see any problem with that. (Expert interview with youth worker, Emre)

Indeed, the only motivation of volunteer trainers is not training, though it may be so initially. They also seem to enjoy the more conventional benefits from volunteering, such as socialization, satisfaction, and giving back. They do not just come and go to the center for classes. Before and after class, they hang out with the youth workers and other volunteers, socialize with them, and may become friends:

> I have three days off per week. I take one day for myself, to rest, and the two others I am at the youth center, volunteering as a trainer. . . . Actually, I gained a lot from this, mostly in terms of self-development. Because, ok, I've studied theater, I have experience, but I've learned how to teach. I mean, I've started to look from an educator's perspective, I have become more professional. Earlier, I took on to the stage, repeated the script by heart, acted and stepped off the stage. Now I can do the backstage very easily, I teach stuff, I give something to people. It's an advantage to develop myself and transfer what I know to other people. . . I think, I can do that until I have to go to my military service. (Interview with volunteer trainer Kenan)

Another observation in this particular youth center setting, regarding the impact of this aspect of professionalization on volunteering, is that being a volunteer trainer emerged as the most valuable form of volunteering at the center. This was not only among the volunteers themselves but also the youth workers and supervisors at the municipality. Free courses are seen as the most meaningful, visible, and measurable activity. Providing courses by volunteers is even ex post rationalized by the municipality and the youth workers, as well as by the volunteers and users. It is a peer education system that satisfies the volunteers and makes the users feel more at ease. It attributes additional qualification to volunteering and also creates a sort of hierarchy among the volunteers (between the volunteer trainers and the volunteers).

Politics vs. Youth Rights Advocacy

> That's one of the very first rules, one of the first things we tell the first-time comers; everyone has a different political opinion, and there are actually people here with very different political opinions, but you don't speak about that under that roof (the youth council). I've never seen that (political discussion) happening, neither in small nor big meetings…the objective is [youth] rights advocacy. (Expert interview with youth worker Emre)

The last aspect of professionalization we identified in our fieldwork is about the relationship between volunteering and politics, namely, the dissociation of volunteering from politics. It has been argued in the scholarly literature that professionalized CSOs have begun to lose their radical character regarding social change; professional staff would be reticent to engage in radical interventions (Epstein, 1970), or donors would have a disciplining effect via implicit or explicit threats to withdraw funding if their activity became too radical (Bloodgood & Tremblay-Boire, 2016). However, at the same time, some CSOs have started to focus specifically on rights advocacy. Schmid et al. (2008) defined rights advocacy as "attempts to change policy or influence the decisions of any institutional elite, government and state institutions through enhancement of civic participation to promote a collective goal or interest" (Schmid et al., 2008: 581). The rights in question involve human rights with their various subcategories, including, notably in this case, youth rights. However, since rights advocates position the rights that they defend above politics, the relationship between rights advocacy and politics is complicated. Among other things, decisions about human rights are increasingly transferred from the sphere of democratic contestation to that of legal experts. The extract above concerning youth rights advocacy in the youth council is quite representative of the perspective regarding this relationship.

However, according to rights advocates or scholars for whom this changing relationship to politics is not an issue, rights advocacy is a positive consequence of professionalization, even if it is a small part of the civil society sector which is dedicated to it. But at the same time, the development of rights advocacy in the sector is also undermined by factors related to professionalization. Limited resources and the lack of appropriate skills to engage in rights advocacy appear as the major factors. Furthermore, it has also been argued that rights advocacy is not result-oriented enough and too difficult to measure to satisfy the CSO professionals of today, who expect quick results from their activities, which is an expectation that is imposed on them by funding institutions as well (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014). In the case herein, both factors, those promoting and those undermining rights advocacy, were present. The very reason why the municipality decided to support the engagement for youth rights advocacy, aside from the various activities of the center, was related to the professionalization of youth work. In a political structure, as it is in the Turkish case, where young people do not have significant influence over decision-making processes, youth workers of the center, as professionals, have the appropriate skills to support youth rights advocacy within the framework of

the center. Moreover, since the municipality is a political establishment with a responsibility to be inclusive, rights advocacy becomes an appropriate form of engagement, that is, defending rights without being explicitly political. However, experience has shown that rights advocacy may require other conditions as well.

A specific space for youth rights advocacy was created within the framework of the youth center: the youth council. Turkey has a highly centralized political and administrative structure, and youth councils are quite new institutions. It was by the end of the 1990s, again under the influence of the EU candidacy, that they began to be established (Gökçe-Kızılkaya & Onursal-Beşgül, 2017; Kurtaran, 2014). In this particular case, the youth council was created by a local municipality, within the framework of a youth center and under the guidance of its youth workers. A space for the council was allocated within the youth center and the youth workers helped the council to organize it. During the fieldwork conducted herein, the youth council had around 50 members who were under 30 years of age. Even if a principle of representativeness in terms of diversity among youth was adopted, due to the conditions of the establishment of the council (with the initiative of a youth center in which users are almost exclusively university students) in its early phase, its members were mostly university students, that is, they were volunteers from the center who joined the council due to suggestions from the youth workers:

> The first thing we (the youth workers) did, was to decide who could be involved, who could do what, and how. We first encouraged our own volunteers. Afterwards, those who were interested went directly there [to the council]. We publicized it. Then, after many hours, we established the status of the council. There have been serious conflicts about it. Voices have been raised. After the status was established, we left them with the organization. However, they still see us as youth leaders, whenever they are stuck, they ask for our opinion. (Expert interview with youth worker Gamze)

The youth workers expressed that they were also influenced by the EU in their engagement with youth rights advocacy:

> From the very beginning of the council, we [the youth workers] tried to do things as mediators/facilitators. We were inspired a lot by the White Paper of the EU, which deals with youth rights, determines strategies. . . . (Expert interview with youth worker Emre)

Thus far, the youth council does not seem to have reached the objective set by the youth workers. Participation is low and the council does not function without the support of the youth workers. Instead, the council experience turned into a learning process about rights advocacy for the council members rather than advocacy itself. According to the youth workers, young people are not interested enough in advocacy, and more importantly, they do not know much about their rights:

> The council is not there yet, still immature, but after a while we expect them to advocate on issues such as problems of the youth, or youth constitutional rights. (Expert interview with youth worker Emre)
>
> Rights advocacy is the objective, but we decided to start with social responsibility projects first. . .they need experience first. . .they are not ready. They first need to work together, to know each other. Then rights advocacy will come. (Expert interview with youth worker Gamze)

>   They have never thought about that [youth rights], when you talk about rights, they just stare at you. (Expert interview with youth worker Emre)
>
>   I think one of their major problems is that they still look at this [council experience] like homework for school. They are short-sighted. We try to help them to see things, at least a bit, from a different perspective. [They are] use social media, different tools. They have the energy, but [they need] a bit more courage. As a member of the youth council, one can talk to any political personality. We remind them of the importance of being organized. If they appear more determined, politicians or public institutions will take them more seriously. (Expert interview with youth worker Emre)
>
>   They need support to access/reaching some contacts or for communication. When they need access to the municipality or other external sources, we intervene as intermediaries. (Expert interview with youth worker Gamze)

However, aside from lacking the skills of volunteers, there are other factors undermining the development of the council. These are institutional factors that are also related to professionalization. Even if the municipality is eager to have a youth council, they do not have time for a long-term return. Consequently, the youth workers also have time-related issues. Although they are genuinely engaged in the establishment of the council, they have to respond to their superior and secure their jobs. Moreover, on the one hand, they do not want politics to be discussed at the council, but on the other, they blame the council members for not being interested or informed enough. Concerning the skills or profile of the volunteers, most of the volunteers frequenting the youth center, including the council members, did not seem to be interested in politics, nor were they actively engaged in politics in other ways. Some of them vote regularly, while others do not, and some participate in manifestations, while others do not. They express their support of various political parties, but most of them seemed to believe that the parties are ineffective institutions. If rights advocacy should be dissociated from politics, it seems that a lack of interest in politics does not help for rights advocacy either.

Conclusion

Professionalization in civil society is changing the nature of volunteering, and a professionalization of volunteering needs to be explored in detail. The fieldwork conducted in a youth center in Eskişehir enabled the identification of some important features of the professionalized form of volunteering (in the making), the first of which was the acquisition of skills through volunteering. In this specific context, it was in the form of a project culture. As non-formal training, volunteers of the youth center learn how to be part of a project. Also related to this acquisition of skills, the second feature was the expectation to get a paying job after volunteering. Following the professionalization of civil society, a more explicit link between the non-profit sector and corporate work is usually mentioned, as well as volunteers instrumentalizing their experience. In the current case study, particular focus was placed on how the needs and conditions of the sector influenced the job expectations

of the volunteers. Finally, the last feature of the professionalized form of volunteering was the dissociation of volunteering from politics and its replacement by youth rights advocacy. This aspect was studied through the establishment of a youth council, which also showed that conflicting dynamics regarding professionalization and rights advocacy were at play.

References

Akboğa, S. (2017). The current state of volunteering in Turkey. In J. Butcher & C. J. Einolf (Eds.), *Perspectives on volunteering* (pp. 245–261). Springer International Publishing.

Almog-Bar, M., & Schmid, H. (2014). Advocacy activities of nonprofit human service organizations: A critical review. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 43*(1), 11–35.

Bee, C., & Kaya, A. (2017a). Determinants of young people's civic and political participation in Turkey. *Southeast Eur Black Sea Stud, 17*(1), 35–39.

Bee, C., & Kaya, A. (2017b). Between practices and demands: Ambiguities, controversies and constraints in the emergence of active citizenship in Turkey. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 17*(3), 301–324.

Bernardeau, D. (2020). Professionnalisation des bénévoles: compétences et référentiels, *SociologieS* [En ligne], Théories et recherches, mis en ligne le 13 mars 2018, consulté le 29 décembre 2020. http://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/6758

Bernardeau-Moreau, D., & Hély, M. (2007). Transformations et inerties du bénévolat associatif sur la période 1982–2002. *Sociologies Pratiques, 2*(15), 9–23.

Bloodgood, E., & Tremblay-Boire, J. (2016). Does government funding depoliticize non-governmental organizations? Examining evidence from Europe. *European Political Science Review, 9*(3), 401–424.

Çelik, K., & Lüküslü, D. (2018). Unemployment as a chronic problem facing young people in Turkey. *Res Policy Turkey, 3*(2), 155–172.

Dansac, C., Vachée, C., & Gontier, P. (2011). *Du bénévole militant à l'usager consommateur: Transformation des modes d'engagement sous l'effet du développement d'une association. L'éducation populaire au tournant du XXIè siècle*. Présenté à Colloque du CIRCEFT.

Dansac, C., Vachée, C., Gontier, P., & Carletti, M. (2012). *Securing funds and developing activities: How do public policies, rationalization and managerialism influence volunteers' world in the French context?* Laboratoire de Recherche Pluridisciplinaire du Nord-Est de Midi-Pyrénées (LRPMip)/IUT Toulouse 2 Figeac.

Eliasoph, N. (2009). Top-down civic projects are not grassroots associations: How the differences matter in everyday life. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 20*(3), 291–308.

Epstein, I. (1970). Professional role orientations and conflict strategies. *Social Work, 15*, 87–92.

Erdogan, E., & Uyan-Semerci, P. (2020). Türkiye'de gönüllülük araştırması 2019: Gönüllü profili, Gönüllülerin Koşulları ve Kazanımları. In E. Erdogan, P. Uyan-Semerci, N. Yentürk, & L. Yurttagüler (Eds.), *Türkiye'de Gönüllülük: Deneyimler, sınırlılıklar ve yeni açılımlar* (pp. 1–43). Istanbul Bilgi Universitesi Yayınları.

Ferrand-Bechmann, D. (2000). *Le métier de bénévole*. Anthropos.

Ferrand-Bechmann, D. (2011). Le bénévolat, entre travail et engagement: les relations entre salaries et bénévoles, Vie sociale et traitements. *Revue des CEMEA, 1*, 109.

Friedman, A. (2008). *How to be both: Negotiating professionalism and activism in the nonprofit sector*, Unpublished master's dissertation. Haverford College Sociology Department.

Gökçe-Kızılkaya, S., & Onursal-Beşgül, Ö. (2017). Youth participation in local politics: City councils and youth assemblies in Turkey. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 17*(1), 97–112.

Hustinx, L. (2010). Institutionally individualized volunteering: Towards a late modern re-construction. *Journal of Civil Society, 6*(2), 165–179.

Hustinx, L. (2014). Volunteering in a hybrid institutional and organizational environment: An emerging research agenda. In M. Freise & T. Hallmann (Eds.), *Modernizing democracy* (pp. 99–110). Springer.

Hwang, H., & Powell, W. W. (2009). The rationalization of charity: The influences of professionalism in the nonprofit sector. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 54*(2), 268–298.

İçduygu, A., Meydanoğlu, Z., & Sert, D. (2011). C*ivil society in Turkey: At a turning point: Civil society index project*. TUSEV.

Kalaycıoğlu, E. (2002). State and civil society in Turkey: Democracy, development, and protest. In A. B. Sajoo (Ed.), *Civil society in the Muslim world: Contemporary perspectives* (pp. 247–272). IB Tauris.

Kreutzer, K., & Jäger, U. (2011). Volunteering versus managerialism: Conflict over organizational identity in voluntary associations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 40*(4), 634–661.

Kurtaran, Y. (2014). Türkiye Gençlik Alanı İzleme Raporu 2009–2012. In L. Yurttagüler, B. Oy, & Y. Kurtaran (Eds.), *Özerklik ve Özgürlükler Açısından Türkiye'de Gençlik Politikaları* (pp. 75–121). İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları.

Kuzmanovic, D. (2010). Project culture and Turkish civil society. *Turkish Studies, 11*(3), 429–444.

Lüküslü, D., & Osmanoğlu, B. (2018). Youth work in Turkey: A sector newly emerging and marked by political competition. *Social Science, 7*, 31.

McAdam, D. (1982). *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Meyer, M., Buber, R., & Aghamanoukjan, A. (2012). In search of legitimacy: Managerialism and legitimation in civil society organizations. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 24*(1), 167–193.

Prouteau, L., Tabariés, M., & Tchernonog, V. (2008). L'âge des associations a-t-il une influence sur le profil sociodémographique de leurs dirigeants? *Économie et Solidarités, 39*(2), 75–88.

Schmid, H., Bar, M., & Nirel, R. (2008). Advocacy activities in nonprofit human service organizations: Implications for policy. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 37*(4), 581–602.

Smith, J. D. (1996). Should volunteers be managed? In D. Billis & M. Harris (Eds.), *Voluntary agencies: Challenged of organization and management*. Macmillan Press.

Toprak, B. (1996). Civil society in Turkey. In A. G. Norton (Ed.), *Civil society in the Middle East* (pp. 87–118). EJ Brill.

Vachée, C., & Dansac, C. (2019). Faire du bénévolat rémunéré pour se professionnaliser: d'un oxymore à une stratégie pour les jeunes volontaires. In F. Hille & S. Labbé (Eds.), *Professionnalisation: Repères et Ouvertures* (pp. 115–130). L'Harmattan.

Zencirci, G. (2014). Civil society's history: New constructions of the Ottoman heritage by the Justice and Development Party in Turkey. *European Journal of Turkish Studies, 19*, 1–17.

Berrin Osmanoğlu   is PhD candidate in Political Science at Université Paris 8 Saint Denis, France

Demet Lüküslü   is Professor of Sociology, Yeditepe University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Sociology Department in Istanbul, Turkey

Chapter 5
Youth Participation and Mediation Practices: Issues of Social Learning

Alessandro Martelli and Stella Volturo

Abstract During the last years, studies coming from different disciplines have shed light on the multiple forms and meanings of youth participation. If we focus on the relationship between practices of participation and learning, it is observable that a relevant part of the learning that occurs when young people participate goes beyond the achievement of prescribed goals; it is rather about pursuing self-realisation, self-efficacy and learning from the 'journey'. In other words, young people's participation is essentially an experience of self-discovery and self-empowering where they 'actively' try to (re)define their individual and social identities and skills. However, the study of youth participation cannot be separated from a more general understanding of contemporary society and its complex dynamics affecting different social life spheres and the relationship between individuals and their social environment. The chapter explores this relationship presenting the results of an empirical study on youth participation in the field of cultural-artistic practices. The study is an illustrative case of youth participation in everyday life arenas with focus on sociability and building of social bonds. The findings from the fieldwork are analysed through a conceptual framework which interprets youth participation as a process of mediation and a 'laboratory' of social learning.

Keywords Youth · Participation · Mediation · Social learning · Social bonds

A. Martelli · S. Volturo (✉)
Department of Sociology and Business Law, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy
e-mail: a.martelli@unibo.it; stella.volturo2@unibo.it

Introduction

The study of youth participation cannot be separated from a more general understanding of contemporary society and its complex dynamics affecting different social life spheres, such as education, labour market participation, family life, adulthood transition processes and, in more general terms, the relationship between individual and their social environment. This relationship seems more and more marked by individualisation processes, which imply the weakening or the rupture of social ties (Bauman, 2001; Beck, 2002; Giddens, 2013). Therefore, sociality and solidarity forms are less predictable than in the early modernity; the construction and maintaining of social bonds represent a challenge for the cohesion of our societies. As highlighted by Serge Paugam (2018), and as we will illustrate in this chapter, social bonds depend on two main dimensions: protection (from principal social risks) and recognition. In this sense, the fragility of social ties implies a lack of protection and/or recognition which can severely affect individual and social well-being. When it comes to young people, these effects are even more severe in terms of inequality reproduction and potential obstacles to their life trajectories and self-realisation.

Starting from this theoretical background, the chapter explores youth participation as a dynamic process developing in daily life arenas, according to a vision which conceives participation as a learning laboratory in social situated activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first one introduces the theoretical framework and conceptual issues related to the topic by focusing on three analytical dimensions: youth participation as a phenomenon concerning everyday life arenas; the process of individualisation and the fragility of social bonds as ambiguous signs of social change analysed through the lens of mediation theory; and learning as a social process and its relation to participation and mediation.

The second section aims at presenting the results of an empirical study on youth participation in the field of cultural-artistic practices. The study is an illustrative case of youth participation in everyday life arenas with focus on sociability and building of social bonds. The findings from the fieldwork are analysed through a conceptual framework which focuses on connections between meanings and forms of youth participation, social learning and mediation practices.

Finally, the third section summarises the chapter and highlights the emerging issues from both a theoretical and empirical perspective, aiming at systematisation and general reflection regarding youth participation and learning.

Theoretical Framework

Youth Participation in Everyday Life Arenas

Participation is a central phenomenon in young people's everyday lives. Participatory practices are underpinned by *interactions* embedded in specific structural conditions. If, for example, the youth condition, in a general sense, is associated with high unemployment rates and fragmentation of biographical carriers, young people are simultaneously protagonists of participatory instances both within the sphere of cultural practices and participation activities (Furlong, 2009; Leccardi & Ruspini, 2006; Loncle et al., 2012; Walther, 2012). In relation to the widespread idea of a resigned decline of youth protagonism, cultural practices and actions of young people represent a relevant observatory where changes in young people's participation can be seen and analysed (Bennett, 2003). In fact, while traditional political youth participation in the sphere of party-politics is clearly on the decline, forms of *personalisation* of political action – in terms of behaviours, lifestyles and consumption (Harris et al., 2010) – become more and more important. Besides their role as 'standby citizens'[1] (Amnå & Ekman, 2014), research on the topic has revealed interesting experiences of active involvement and unconventional forms of participation (Alteri & Raffini, 2014; Percy-Smith, 2015; Pickard & Bessant, 2018; Pitti, 2018; Walther et al., 2020).

Despite the persistence of growing social inequalities, or maybe precisely because of these, young people do not seem to cease exercising their subjectivity (Cuzzocrea & Collins, 2015). Recent research has shown several forms of social youth protagonism, such as volunteering, street art and neighbourhood cultural activities (Walther et al., 2020). Through these activities young people try to build a dialogue with the community, which can in turn be interpreted as a strategy for recomposing social ties. Within the current social and economic order, youth coping strategies to risks and uncertainties become expressions understandable as forms of negotiation, re-composition and re-signification (Loncle et al., 2020), that is, concrete acts of creation and sense making. Therefore, even leisure practices can represent relevant dimensions to (re)define individual and collective identity. When these kinds of activities are realised in highly collaborative contexts, they have the potential of creating real 'participation laboratories' where collective processes are valued even in the absence of rigidly structured exchanges and interactions. Participatory expressions of this kind can be understood as forms of civic engagement (Sherrod et al., 2010; Levine, 2011), assuming that this notion is extended beyond the political sphere stricto sensu and that involvement in group activities – whether political or not – promotes social cohesion which is a value and a goal in itself. This perspective

---

[1] We refer to the analytical category introduced by Amnå (2010) regarding the diverse faces and meanings of political passivity and their different implications for democracy.

presupposes a commitment to collective ideals in the construction of a shared horizon. If we understand civic engagement as a form of connection that nourishes social life, then it is possible to read forms of youth participation as a possible way to (re)build social ties (Putnam, 2000).

Social Bonds Through the Lens of Mediation

In contemporary European societies, the fragility of social bonds has become a permanent feature and characteristic of social life. This fragility can be interpreted in several ways and refer to different dynamics. For our purposes, it is interesting to observe that the weakening of social bonds can be related to macro-societal processes affecting young people lives, as a result of a general transformation of intergenerational relationships dating back to at least the 1970s (Ascoli & Sgritta, 2020). The question of generation is linked to complex and interconnected macrosocial dynamics such as the demographic revolution, mainly characterised by the ageing process, the decline of welfare systems and the crisis of the social-democratic compromise following the decades after the Second World War, the development of mass education, the increasing participation of women in the labour market, the gradual dissolution of nuclear family and the transformation of family forms and the transformation of the labour market. These changes are perceived as particularly intense and risky in those countries, mainly concentrated in the Mediterranean area, where the 'core' of social protection has been mainly in charge of family responsibilities, as a result of fragmented and ungenerous social policies addressed to the youngest generations (Masson, 2017; Sgritta & Raitano, 2018). The increasing imbalances and inequalities descending from these processes have a strong socioeconomic and cultural impact, above all on young people. The impact is even more severe as continuous individualisation of society seems to be one of the prevailing – even if ambivalent – 'codes' of late modernity. The ambivalence of a 'new individualism' (Leccardi & Volonté, 2018) is marked by two apparently different processes: individual's emphasis on their own 'singularity' (Martuccelli, 2010) and, in parallel, the constant tension individuals show towards forms of mutual (social) recognition of their uniqueness and originality. In relation to the worlds of young people, the concurrence of the individuals' importance and the openness towards others can be seen as a sort of 'moral individualism' (Beck, 2002), which stands behind the daily construction of social bonds and collective responsibilities without neglecting the search for personal gratification. In this sense, a process of individualism and collectivism occur simultaneously, as distinctive features of the contemporary way to intend to the reproduction of social ties and sociability, together with the cultivation of singularity. In this perspective, in times marked by social isolation emblematically defined by Laurent (2018) as the 'pandemic of loneliness', the social dimension becomes even more crucial.

In this context, the mediation perspective allows us to shed light on connections, solidarities and proximity forms, where social ties and mechanisms of recognition seem to be weakened. The potentialities of this perspective have not yet been fully explored and practiced by contemporary social scientists. Indeed, mediation theory has so far been mainly used to interpret and to justify its applicative side in the management of social conflicts or, at most, to focus on the regulatory aspects of mediation practices (Bonafé-Schmitt, 2020). However, already in the classical sociological thought, we can find fragments of theory which has much in common with mediation. In *De la division du travail social*, Durkheim (1997, original edition 1893) asks: how is it possible to keep society together through solidarity in a world where we are more and more differentiated, and what is the nature of the social bond in this changed context? Nowadays, given the rapid development and the diffusion of the individualisation process, the need for a theory to interpret and explain these variations of social life and social change becomes even more urgent. In this perspective, we adopt *mediation* as a conceptual lens through which we analyse mechanisms that enhance and promote social bonds building.

Regarding the more practical implications of the mediation approach, it can be said that it tries to cope with the fragilities of social bonds through a large spectrum of social activities and practices which actively involve citizens. In our perspective, by following the seminal approach of Baruch and Folger (1994), mediation is mainly based on a transformative process which ideally enhances dynamics of recognition (Honneth, 1996) and empowerment of individuals involved in the process.

The concepts of mediation and participation share many similarities, both theoretically and practically, as they are based and rely on questions of relation and recognition as key aspects of social life. If we assume that '(participation) stands for relational practices or practical relationships of addressing and being addressed, positioning and being positioned, recognising and being recognised' (Partispace, 2018), mediation is, in its essence, *the art of relation* because its ultimate goal is to (re)build social ties and relations.

Furthermore, both participation and mediation focus on processes of *recognition* and *misrecognition*. According to recent analysis, recognition is the concept which explains most of the relationality of (youth) participation (cf. Walther et al., 2020). Especially during the last years, inequalities grounded upon various modes of misrecognition (based on class, race/ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) have become central within the social science debate as well as in the public arena, due to their crucial impact on the living conditions of individuals and groups. In this sense, social inequalities are conceived not only as material deprivation (where the economic dimension plays a central role) but also as misrecognition and lack of respect. Richard Sennett (2003), for example, discusses the importance of promoting social interactions between 'strangers'. By 'strangers' Sennett refers to people who do not share relationships of intimate proximity, friendship or kinship, but who – despite their unfamiliarity – learn to live together, to respect and to socially recognise each other as inhabitants of the same space. These kinds of social interactions have the potential to give shape to collective forms of coexistence while maintaining diversity.

The current debate on recognition starts from the well-known work of Axel Honneth (1996) who identifies three main modes of intersubjective recognition:

1. *Love*, which refers to family, friendship and romantic relationships.
2. *Right*, which refers to reciprocal recognition of rights.
3. *Solidarity*, which is supportive approval of alternative lifestyles; solidarity gives rise to ethical recognition and highlights the equal dignity of different cultures and intersubjective awareness of the unicity and irreplaceability of individual in his/her autonomy.

Within the first form of recognition – love – the opportunity for self-confidence is implicitly contained; it is a crucial form of recognition for the development of individual personality.

In the experience of legal recognition (the domain of right), the reciprocity of the relationship is fundamental too: in the act of recognising the rights of others, the subject also recognizes as legitimate his/her own claim that others respect his/her rights. Recognition thus guarantees the protection of the other's equal dignity and their right to be treated with respect. Even though the outcome of this form of recognition is *self*-respect, the collective dimension is constitutive of this process, and it is as important as the individual dimension.

Finally, thanks to solidarity, a form of ethical recognition is promoted. In this case, recognition concerns the particular qualities that characterise people as unique individuals: the other is not only 'tolerated' because of the principle of pluralism and respect for different lifestyles but is also 'appreciated' for his/her abilities and actions.

Turning to youth participation, Thomas (2012) argues that all three modes of recognition are essential in guaranteeing full participation. Young people, indeed:

> do not engage fully if they do not feel a sense of warmth and affection; they cannot participate equally if they are not respected as rights-holders; and they will not have a real impact unless there is mutual esteem and solidarity, and a sense of shared purpose. (Thomas, 2012, 12)

When forms of misrecognition occur with regard to youth participation, young people are conceptualised in terms of a general category and viewed as trivial, irrelevant or even deviant. As a consequence, they may experience feelings of misrecognition and a loss of individual value. However, experiences of misrecognition can be used 'creatively' and give rise to processes of social learning and actions moved by the struggle for recognition (Honneth, 1996). It is often an ambivalent struggle, where individual needs for self-achievement go hand in hand with the search for meaning and building of social bonds.

With Serge Paugam (2018) we can identify four types of social bonds: the *lineal bond*, related to family relationships; the *elective participation bond*, related to 'chosen' proximity relationships; the *organic participation bond*, related to relations and functions within the labour market; and the *citizenship bond*, related to the sphere of belonging to the same political community. According to Paugam, the four types of social bonds simultaneously provide *protection* and *recognition* necessary

for social existence. In this perspective, protection is associated with the spectrum of support (family, community, institutional and professional resources) that an individual can mobilise in order to cope with social risks. Recognition, as discussed before, is linked to that social interaction from which the individual finds a confirmation of his/her existence and value, through the 'eyes' of the other.

The four types of social bonds are linked together, meaning that social identity is made up of a complex mosaic of different forms of belonging, which can also have different intensity and meanings from the subjective perspective of the individual. From our point of view, even though we do not neglect the importance and presence of the other types of bonds, we mainly refer to the *elective participation bond*, related to extra-family socialisation through which the individual makes connections with others and learns how to construct relations with various groups and institutions. The *places* of this socialisation are many: the neighbourhood, friendship groups, local community and religious, sports and cultural institutions. Across these differentiated *relational places*, individuals start that process of *social learning* which will last over the entire life cycle and which will occur through multiple activities.

Social Learning as Situated Social Activity

Close connections can be traced between youth participation and learning (Walther et al., 2020). Indeed, if we focus on the relationship between practices of participation and learning, it is observable that a relevant part of the learning that occurs when young people participate goes beyond the achievement of prescribed goals; it is rather about pursuing self-realisation, self-efficacy and learning from the 'journey' (McMahon et al., 2018). In other words, young people's participation is essentially an experience of self-discovery and self-empowering where they actively try to (re)define their individual and social identities and skills.

Social learning theory, in relation to young people, has been generally associated with the problems of deviance and to behaviourist approaches (Ward, 2007). Wildemeersch et al. (1998) extend the point of view by defining social learning as the:

> learning taking place in groups, communities, networks and social systems that operate in new, unexpected, uncertain and unpredictable circumstances; it is directed at the solution of unexpected context problems and it is characterised by an optimal use of the problem-solving capacity which is available within this group or community. (Wildemeersch, 2007, 100)

Following John Dewey, it is interesting to note the experiential side of learning, which gives it the characteristic of learning *by doing*. While experiential learning in the past has mainly been conceptualised regarding individuals, Wildemeersch et al. (1998) conceive a kind of experiential learning taking place within group interactions.

Social learning develops across four basic dimensions: action, reflection, communication and cooperation. The *action dimension*, as driver of participatory activity, recognises the need or the desire to change a specific situation. In this sense, action comes from the discrepancy between an initial condition and the tension towards the change. The *reflection dimension* is fundamental for improving the action, above all in terms of *critical reflection* aimed at questioning ideas, judgements, emotions and feelings. The *communication dimension* is another fundamental ingredient for enhancing the participatory process, and it is closely connected with the *cooperative dimension* where the dialogue and the interaction between actors are crucial, as they are constantly involved in implicit and explicit processes of negotiation (Wildemeersch et al., 1998).

In our perspective, young people learn 'through' and 'about' participation, meaning that learning and participation are inextricably intertwined. How can learning through participation or, in more processual terms, a *learning participation* be developed? As highlighted by the Council of Europe (2014), 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. However, even the presence of obstacles to participation or to a full access to resources can produce mobilisation and forms of participation.

Contexts where young people learn about participation are several: formal education (such as schools) and non-formal education, in local youth clubs and civic organisations and through participation in local and regional youth councils and parliaments. Moreover, they also learn to participate informally while experiencing participation in diverse youth work settings and practices: this last form of learning is probably more 'fluid' and internally differentiated, as it refers to different activities and contexts.

As pointed out by findings in this field, 'understanding learning as active processes of appropriating the world implies that the spaces and situations in which young people learn influence but do not determine what and how they learn' (Partispace, 2018). So, the activities of young people in public spaces reveal different and perhaps contrasting scenarios, such as experiences of power and powerlessness, of self-efficacy and disrespect, of inclusion and exclusion. This aspect is particularly interesting because it demonstrates the non-deterministic nature of context and implies the importance of *agency* of young people. The combination and interplay of structural elements with subjective ones can thus create unexpected, innovative outputs and practices.

Given the interconnection between participation and learning, we can state that every participatory process produces learning while simultaneously including forms of mediation, even when the motivation behind participation is mainly related to conflictual/antagonist stances.

As social learning and participation are about the need to transform the relationship between the self and the world by considering the complex interplay between individual needs and the tension towards the collective dimension, mediation aims at making a step forward by focusing on social mechanisms that promote cooperation and solidarity. To this concern, our view of mediation does not imply a pacified world or nostalgia towards communitarian social systems. Conflictual relationship

forms are not seen as destructive with regard to social bonds; they are rather conceived as a great opportunity for young people's learning about themselves and their relations with the world.

Emerging Issues from a Case Study: Cultural-Artistic Practices in a Medium-Size Town in Northern Italy

Following the analytical framework on social learning and mediation, the adopted perspective for the analysis of our case starts from a conception of cultural-artistic practices as a sort of 'yeast' in the creation and maintenance of social ties within the local community. Within this perspective, the 'art worlds' (Becker, 1982) are interpreted as contexts of action where young people express necessities and individual needs in relation to a wider, collective sphere of daily life arenas. The local context of the case study is Forlì, a city of approximately 120,000 inhabitants situated in the Emilia-Romagna Region in Northern Italy. The empirical fieldwork focused on observing forms of artistic-cultural expressions with emphasis on three main fields: (1) leisure consumption, (2) participation and cultural (co)production and (3) cultural sector as occupational field. For the sake of our analysis, we single out three main questions from the larger study:

1. Which are the forms of youth participation mainly associated with dynamics of social bonds construction and, therefore, mediation?
2. What does participation mean from the subjective experiences of the young people involved?
3. How are participation activities intertwined with processes of social learning?

In order to answer these questions, we explore the subjective worlds of young people. More precisely, the analysis is based on 47 semi-structured interviews with young people and experts. In addition, participant observations of cultural events and activities were carried out in the Forlì city and are also a part of the empirical material which grounds the analysis. The interviewee sample is divided into two main categories: young people (aged from 18 to 35) involved in participatory activities[2] mainly within the sector of cultural-artistic practices and the 'experts', individuals who, although belonging to the adult world, have a well-informed point of view regarding young people's participation.[3]

---

[2] Regarding the socio-demographic characteristics of young people, the sampling has been informed by gender (14 males and 13 females) and by type of artistic activity according to both the specific sector (theater, music, dance) and the role of the interviewee (differentiating between those who work in the sector and those who participate voluntarily). Almost all of the interviewees have a bachelor's degree or are in tertiary education.

[3] Among these we find, for example, artistic directors of theaters, experts in artistic training and educators working at youth centers.

Learning to Participate In-Between Spontaneous Processes and Structured Contexts

Based on the findings from the case study, we propose three instances of youth cultural participation as examples of practices aimed at (re)constructing social bonds.

(Re)signifying Urban Space Through Performative Arts

One of the ways in which young people's participation is displayed in the city is by giving new meaning to abandoned spaces which become the scenography of artistic performance like dancing, playing music, singing and painting. Besides the artistic product, another interesting aspect is the process that animated the participation of youth involved in these experiences and the reasons that led them to express their voice in the city. This is illustrated through the experience of the 'semi-interrati'[4] cultural association, a collective of young artists driven by the goal of revitalising the city. Below is an excerpt from an interview with Barbara,[5] a 26-year-old dancer and one of the founders, who tells us about the origins and development of the project:

> It all started with an idea of a friend of mine, who decided to make a video inside the former sugar factory in Forlì. It is an emblematic place of the city: it is an object that everyone considers 'dead' and absolutely useless, but which actually hides infinite beauty. In fact, it is not only the set of a thousand photo shoots by various artists, but it is also a place where we find street art, or murales. And it's also an interesting place for kids who do parkourParkour.
>
> We are all part of the same dance school, so we called our friends who do contemporary dance, ballet, some of us do hip-hop and breakdance. We then called a friend who is a photographer, a friend who paints and a friend who does aerial dance and plays with fire. The creator said: "good! I want to take you back inside this space, I want to make a provocative video". It all started basically like this: saying "look, Forlì is not dead, Forlì is alive and has many beautiful places". You just need to know and find out. So we were not born with the aim of building something new, but with the aim of showing to the city what already existed, demonstrating that it is absolutely not true that there is nothing in Forlì and that young people do nothing and that Forlì is boring.

Thanks to experiences like these, young people learn how to feel and be protagonists in their daily contexts. Initiating a process of social change is highly empowering for their sense of self-efficacy, encouraging them to be pro-active. Fun is combined with a 'sense of place', revealing an inter-generational process

---

[4] In Italian, the name indicates a word pun: "semi" means seeds and "interrati" means submerged, but the whole word (seminterrati without the hyphen) means 'undergrounds'.

[5] All names are fictive.

while generating a sort of mediation effect. The territorial dimension is central in this re-negotiation of meaning by young people. As illustrated by the excerpt, the mission of semi-interrati is to ascribe new meaning to abandoned locations in urban space.

The primary group has gradually expanded to involve about 80 young people (aged from 16 to 30 years), who, departing from different skills and artistic modes of expression, have acted 'chorally' in order to ascribe fresh meaning to neglected and forgotten locations in the city. A video film produced by the semi-interrati association in which young members showcase their talents ends with these quite emblematic words pronounced by one of the members:

> *I've always been told that this city is like an arid land from which beauty cannot arise. But I wonder: if this land hides some buried seeds, wouldn't it be reckless, and perhaps illogical, to call it dead?*

In addition to the importance of the territorial dimension, another strongly emergent theme is the openness towards the construction of social ties, solidarity and friendship through learning and artistic expression. As illustrated by Barbara:

> *The nice thing about this Association is that we are friends. In my opinion there are some people, within the Association, who represent its spirit. For example, there is the guy who helped to edit the video and who had a passion for skateboarding, then, staying with us and seeing us dance, he decided to do hip-hop and became very good! I think he is the greatest Semi-interrati 'conquest'. This is the result of the mutual influence that we have been able to exert on each other. [...] The nice thing about us is that we are so varied [meaning that we have different artistic interests and skills] that we share a lot of ideas and we learn from each other.*

In these words, there's a reference to learning which obviously does not only have to do with learning to dance or play an instrument. These are just tools in a larger process of social learning in which personal growth and collaboration are implicated.

The reason for the success of this initiative, which thanks to the online dissemination of the video has become well known and appreciated in the city, consists in the simplicity of the project, in being young and loving the city. Barbara explains:

> *In my opinion it is such a trivial thing: looking at the beautiful things that are in the city. Starting with the guys who breakdance under the post office, which is a wonderful thing. That is, they have their own 'theater', and everyone sees them there. They do beautiful things and no one has noticed. The idea for the new video goes in the direction of enhancing the artistic and cultural heritage of Forlì: framing various places, some hidden, other clearly visible, but not considered by local inhabitants. Like a sort of a moving photograph [...] The key to success also lies in the fact that we are young, we are energized and we are the only ones in this sense... there are not so many young people who love the city so much.*

Young people's visibility in the city relates to the aspects of recognition discussed earlier. Feelings of friendship (or 'love', in Honneth's words) represent the social base for a restored and creative sense of belonging to their city.

(Re)discovering Urban Space: The Cultural Valorisation 'From Below'

Another participative action puts emphasis on the (re)discovery of space from a perspective of urban regeneration. Also in this case the focus is on abandoned city-spaces, but the way in which these spaces are conceived and experienced relates to a different methodology, which relies even more clearly on direct action of citizens. This is the case of 'Spazi Indecisi',[6] a cultural association which since 2010 has been experimenting and designing processes of urban regeneration. Their work is based on cultural activities that transform abandoned places into fields of research for photographers, landscape architects, urban planners and citizens in general.

We interviewed one of the founders of the association, Giacomo (35 years old), who told us about the idea behind the project:

> We started in a very simple way, with a bike ride around the abandoned places in the city.7 The goal was to 'enter' these places. For this purpose, it was necessary to establish relationships with the local administration, which did not believe in it, did not believe that this was the right way to talk about these places. Personally, I have always been convinced that this is the way to talk about places, do not go to the same old boring conferences, where there are always the usual ten people, nor by writing theses... So we wanted to unhinge this logic: first of all we try to visit these places and then we see what will happen. The intent was to show a new 'face' of these places, which are seen as a 'problem', as hidden. Instead we wanted to overturn this perspective by showing them, understanding whether they still had a value or not. After the first ride we created another event, we realized that the approach was right, it was inclusive, in a good sense of the word.

These words clearly suggest the urgency to implement more effective and more attractive ways of displaying and experiencing the city. Further, in the process of rediscovering abandoned places, emotions seem to acquire particular importance. This dimension is characterised by a subjective sphere (people choose to take care of a certain place because they 'feel attached') and also by a collective sphere related to the larger community (the place is also chosen because it is the product of social interaction). Giacomo, again, expressed:

> The only goal is to show this place, to make people empathize with this place. In doing so it can make something vibrate and can stimulate the fact that some of these people who will come into contact with it, may think to bring it forward and to save it from total abandonment. This is the basic vision. You can't do it for all places, because there are so many abandoned places, but how do you choose? How does a community choose places? One chooses them because he/she is fond of them. Because the place suggests a common vision. Make a place manifest so that, if the community *sees* it again, it can have an interest in taking care of it.

The association has grown in recent years. It is increasingly recognised in the city and beyond, and new projects have been launched. Through these different projects and artistic languages, young people try to build a dialogue with the local

---

[6]In Italian 'Spazi indecisi' means 'undecided spaces'.

community where the association is based. The community in question is characterised by social marginalisation and issues of coexistence, as explained by Giacomo:

> In addition to the rediscovery of abandoned spaces, we are interested in the people who live in this neighborhood, which is made up mainly of families who live in council housing buildings. [. . .]. The inhabitants involved were asked "simply" to open their homes to a stranger (an artist), who moved freely inside for 15 minutes and took photos of the interior of the apartment. It was a very complex project, because it is not easy to open your home to a stranger. So it took us months to get people to do it. 13, 14 families joined, but in order to create these relationships, I met many other people.
>
> This year we repeated it, doing dance inside the condominium courtyards. So there is this attention 'towards the outside' (of the Association), towards social situations, where art is an activator of dynamics of social inclusion, an answer to situations of social marginalization. The project, in order to have an incisiveness, must consolidate a 'practice': either you invest in situated interactions or you cannot make a difference.

Promotion and Reproduction of Social Ties: Culture as the Vehicle of Inclusion

The Youth Centre Mandalà, whose main target group are young asylum seekers, is an illustration of a third type of participative action. The richness of the activities and the participatory ferment that nourishes the relationships in the centre have made this place a meeting point between asylum seekers and young people from Forlì. The centre is a space for coming together, sharing experiences and cultivating relationships. Various courses are promoted at the centre, for example, in Italian language, history of art and computer use.

Among the case studies analysed here, this is the one that most responds to explicit aims of social integration. At first glance, it would seem not to have much to do with the themes of art and culture. However, looking more closely at the activities given at the centre, the role of arts for the purpose of social integration becomes evident. Activities such as concerts, theatre performances, public readings of poems and stories (flashreading) and production of music videos are natural features. These activities involved many of the young asylum seekers (particularly from the regions of sub-Saharan Africa) as well as young people from Forlì, as either volunteers or visitors to the centre. In addition to direct observations of the activities carried out at the centre, a series of interviews with volunteers were conducted.

The participatory spirit at the centre clearly emerges through the voice of Giulia 28 years old, one of the volunteers:

> My job is another one and I do it to earn, not for passion. But here, at the Mandalà, I feel I am doing something good both for me and for them (young asylum seekers), and for the citizens of Forlì. That is, for the first time I feel like an active citizen. Before now, I have never felt like an active citizen. When I was a Scout leader I didn't feel it was my active choice. While now I am choosing to stay here, to do activities with African guys, I choose the interaction, I

choose to work for a more open, tolerant and human society. Until a few years ago I wasn't even going to vote, just to make you understand how detached I felt from my country. Now I am attached to Italy, but above all to help foreign citizens, because I want a chance for them to live in a more inclusive society.

This quote is emblematic of a transformative process which comes from social interactions in daily activities. Everyday life becomes the main arena of social learning carrying along aspirations for active involvement and direct action aimed at a wider social change.

For Giulia, a year-long volunteering experience in Zambia served as a biographical turning point which made her realise what she wanted her life project to be:

Returning home (from Zambia), I changed my way of seeing the world, of living my daily life. When people ask me: what do you want to do when you grow up? I do not know! I know I need relationships, culture. Even now, the poetry workshop we did, it is a joy for the heart! I come from classical studies. Everything has already been thought and said. I have studied for years and I have always been afraid that my studies were not consistent with the actual reality, but I realize that my gaze on the world is also nourished by this awareness. When I say I have a degree in Ancient Greek [said emphatically], people laugh in my face! It's not nice at all! At the time I had chosen it out of passion, because I had gone to classical high school. But even there, I don't like he idea that it must be a courageous choice if you enroll in humanities. We are getting ugly, for me we are going towards the end! Because it is not possible for people to enroll in a degree in science just to have better job chances. Now, there is this component of African culture, which, however, I have not yet started studying. I said to myself: if I find a more stable job, whatever it is, it is only to enroll in anthropology! And my family and other people tell me: you cannot study all your life! I would like to do anthropology to better understand their culture (referring to the boys who attend the Center).

The Mandalà experience is an illustrative case of the complex interplay between participation, social learning (which clearly occurs by sharing biographies in a multicultural context) and mediation practices, enhancing that *togetherness* (Amin, 2012) that can be seen as antidote to processes of social distancing and indifference.

Conclusions

The cases presented in this chapter talk about youth participation in an urban context in three slightly different ways, according to the issue in focus and the form of action taken. However, all cases testify how closely participation and learning are intertwined while simultaneously illustrating that participative action has a socially oriented behaviour. Actually, the emphasis on participation as agency in times of diffused individualisation of social life does not deny the importance of social relationships and engagement (Tisdall & Davis, 2006; Alteri et al., 2016; Cuzzocrea et al., 2020). When acting as a generational group, even when appearing as self-referential like in the case of semi-interrati and their aim of revitalising the city through artistic performances in abandoned sites, young people's semantic frame is

that of general community. In this way, young people's participation is strongly linked to a collective dimension of crucial importance, embedded in their community of belonging (Percy-Smith, 2012; Forkby & Batsleer, 2020; Shildrik, 2006). So, actions developed in these youth organisations have in common a movement towards adults and institutions in the city, aiming at both recognition and dialogue.

Research results demonstrate the undeniable prevalence of participation as direct social action (Zamponi, 2019), interpreted by young people as the most authentic, meaningful and concrete form of participation. This aspect recollects Sennett's (2012) considerations about the rituals of cooperation. According to Sennett, the contemporary (re)composition of social bonds develops through collaborative practices aimed at 'doing' together. As emerging in our analysis, the 'collaborative practices' in focus concern social abilities that are at the same time performed and learnt through participation (Cuzzocrea & Collins, 2015; De Luigi et al., 2018).

Through their actions young people develop and promote social learning. Their practices of participation therefore imply social learning as both a tool and a result. At the same time, these actions produce mediation effects: they reduce distances between urban sites, contextualise their historical heritage and raise citizens' awareness about their contemporary potential. In this way, participation promotes renewed and enlarged points of view on the city and its inhabitants. Youth participation can thus be appreciated in its combined nature: as containing elements of both learning *and* mediation.

Looking at the potential of these kinds of initiatives, an interesting and more general point emerges in relation to the impact of participative actions on the wider urban community. All three cases express the reality of 'active minorities' (Moscovici, 1973) in relation both to the larger population of young people and to the inhabitants of the city. Representative of these active minorities is the effort to practice a sort of alternative and inclusive way of living in the city. Public exteriorisation has the aim of testifying the agency of young people in struggling for recognition, and it also suggests the possibility of a wider, renovate and solidaristic idea of everyday life in the urban space. Moreover, it is an attempt of affecting the crystallised dynamics of behaviours and relations in the local community through the proposal of new sources of influence, of legitimisation and of social communication (Lalli, 1999). Even if these actions will not have immediate and visible impact on consolidated cultural, political and economic powers and structures, it does not mean that they will be forgotten nor re-entered as system 'noise' (ibidem). In this perspective, the social (intra- and inter-generational) relevance of these practices of participation seems to be strictly connected to the general conditions experienced from youth 'as a whole' in contemporary society and to the (mis)recognition they receive; its meaning and its effects have to do with the potential of social influence embedded in everyday life and in social movements.

References

Alteri, L., & Raffini, L. (a cura di) (2014). *La nuova politica. Mobilitazioni, movimenti e conflitti in Italia*. EdiSes.

Alteri, L., Leccardi, C., & Raffini, L. (2016). Youth and the reinvention of politics: New forms of participation in the age of individualization and presentification. *PACO, 9*(3), 717–747.

Amin, A. (2012). *Land of strangers*. Polity Press.

Amnå, E. (2010). Active, passive, or standby citizens? Latent and manifest political participation. In E. Amnå (Ed.), *New forms of citizen participation: Normative implications* (pp. 191–203). Baden-Baden.

Amnå, E., & Ekman, J. (2014). Standby citizens: Diverse faces of political passivity. *European Political Science Review, 6*(2), 261–281.

Ascoli, U., & Sgritta, G. B. (2020). Logoramento dei legami sociali, sistemi di welfare e solidarietà di base. *La Rivista delle Politiche Sociali*, 19–42.

Baruch Bush, R. A., & Folger, J. B. (1994). *The promise of mediation: Responding to conflict through empowerment and recognition*. Jossey-Bass.

Bauman, Z. (2001). *The individualized society*. Polity Press.

Beck, U. (2002). *Individualization: Institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences* (Vol. 13). Sage.

Becker, H. (1982). *Art worlds*. University of California Press.

Bennett, W. L. (2003). Civic learning in changing democracies. In *Young citizens and new media: Learning for democratic participation* (pp. 59–78).

Bonafé-Schmitt, J. P. (2020). Le renouveau de la médiation. *Les cahiers de la justice, 3*, 535–545.

Council of Europe. (2014). *Revisiting youth participation: Current challenges, priorities and recommendations*. Available at the link: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261980/Consolidated+papers_reflection+group.pdf/5d365dac-4ba0-4fd9-85bf-0785e09e3631

Cuzzocrea, V., & Collins, R. (2015). Collaborative individualization? Peer-to-peer action in youth transitions. *Young, 2*, 136–153.

Cuzzocrea, V., Bello, B. G., & Kazepov, Y. (Eds.). (2020). *Italian youth in international context. Belonging, constraints and opportunities*. Routledge.

De Luigi, N., Martelli, A., & Pitti, I. (2018). New forms of solidarity and young people: An ethnography of youth participation in Italy. In *Young people re-generating politics in times of crises* (pp. 253–271). Palgrave Macmillan.

Durkheim, E. (1997). *The division of labour in society* [original edition 1893]. Free Press.

Forkby, T., & Batsleer, J. (2020). In search of the beloved community: Dancing to a different tune of youth participation. *Ethnography and Education, 15*, 493–508.

Furlong, A. (2009). *Handbook of youth and young adulthood. New perspectives and agendas*. Routledge.

Giddens, A. (2013). *The consequences of modernity*. Polity Press.

Harris, A., Wyn, J., & Younes, S. (2010). Beyond apathetic or activist youth. 'Ordinary' young people and contemporary forms of participation. *Young Nordic Journal of Youth Research, 18*(1), 9–32.

Honneth, A. (1996). *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts*. Mit Press.

Lalli, P. (1999). The experience of an active minority: Cultural and communicative aspects. In A. Martelli, M. T. Tagliaventi, & P. Zurla (Eds.), *"Piazza Grande's laboratories" between work and social action*. FrancoAngeli.

Laurent, É. (2018). *L'impasse collaborative. Pour une véritable économie de la coopération*. Les Liens qui Libèrent.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Leccardi, C., & Ruspini, E. (2006). *A new youth? Young people, generations and family life*. Routledge.

Leccardi, C., & Volontè, P. (Eds.). (2018). *Un nuovo individualismo? Individualizzazione, soggettiva e legame sociale*. Egea.

Levine, P. D. (2011). *The capacity for civic engagement. Public and private worlds of the self*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Loncle, P., Cuconato, M., Muniglia, V., & Walther, A. (Eds.). (2012). *Beyond discourses, practices and realities of youth participation in Europe*. Policy Press.

Loncle, A., Martelli, Y., & Mengilli, I. P. (2020). Participation and everyday life: Emerging meanings in youth cultures. In A. Walther, J. Batsleer, P. Loncle, & A. Pohl (Eds.), *Young people and the struggle for participation. Contested practices, power and pedagogies of young people in public* (pp. 130–145). Routledge.

Martuccelli, D. (2010). *La société singulariste*. Armand Colin.

Masson, A. (2017). Protection sociale et privée contre l'inflation inédite des vieux jours. In Guillemard A.-M. e Moscova E. (a cura di), *Allongement de la vie. Quels défis? Quelles politiques?* Ed. La Découverte.

McMahon, G., Percy-Smith, B., Thomas, N., Bečević, Z., Hansson, S. L., & Forkby T. (2018). *Young people's participation: Learning from action research in eight European cities* (Partispace Working Papers).

Moscovici, S. (1973). *Social influence and social change*. Academic.

Partispace. (2018). *Re-thinking youth participation – Contributions of PARTISPACE* (Partispace Working Paper Series). Available at the link: http://partispace.eu/cms/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/PARTISPACE-Working-paper-re-thinking-youth-participation.pdf

Paugam, S. (2018). *Le lien social*. PUF.

Percy-Smith, B. (2012). Participation as mediation and social learning: Empowering children as actors in social contexts. In C. Baraldi & V. Iervese (Eds.), *Participation, facilitation and mediation. Children and young people in their social contexts*. Routledge.

Percy-Smith, B. (2015). Negotiating active citizenship: Young people's participation in everyday spaces. In K. P. Kallio, S. Mills, & T. Skelton (Eds.), *Politics, citizenship and right*. Springer.

Percy-Smith, et al. (2018) Partispace deliverable 7.2: Youth Participation Training Module. https://zenodo.org/record/1240342#.Ycr7TRPMJD0.

Pickard, S., & Bessant, J. (Eds.). (2018). *Young people re-generating politics in times of crisis*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Pitti, I. (2018). *Youth and unconventional political participation*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.

Sennett, R. (2003). *Respect in a world of inequality*. Norton & Co.

Sennett, R. (2012). *Together. The rituals, pleasures and politics of cooperation*. Yale University Press.

Sgritta, G. B., & Raitano M. (2018). Generazioni: dal conflitto alla sostenibilità. *La Rivista delle politiche sociali/Italian Journal of Social Policy, 3*, 11–32.

Sherrod, R. L., Torney-Purta, J., & Flanagan, A. C. (Eds.). (2010). *Handbook of research on civic engagement in youth*. Wiley.

Shildrick, T. (2006). Youth culture, subculture and the importance of neighbourhood. *Young, 14*(1), 61–74.

Thomas, N. (2012). Love, rights and solidarity: Studying children's participation using Honneth's theory of recognition. *Childhood, 19*(4), 453–466.

Tisdall, K., & Davis, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Children, young people and social inclusion: Participation for what?* Policy Press.

Walther, A. (2012). Participation or non-participation? Getting beyond dichotomies by applying an ideology-critical, a comparative and a biographical perspective. In P. Loncle et al. (Eds.), *Young people and the struggle for participation. Beyond discourses, practices and realities of youth participation in Europe*. Policy Press.

Walther, A., Batsleer, J., Loncle, P., & Pohl, A. (Eds.). (2020). *Young people and the struggle for participation. Contested practices, power and pedagogies of young people in public*. Routledge.

Ward, C. L. (2007). Young people's violent behaviour: Social learning in context. In P. Burton (Ed.), *Someone stole my smile: An exploration into the causes of youth violence in South Africa*. Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention.

Wildemeersch, D. (2007). Social learning revisited: Lessons learned from north and south. In A. J. Wals (Ed.), *Social learning towards a more sustainable world* (pp. 99–116).

Wildemeersch, D., Jansen, T., Vandenabeele, J., & Jans, M. (1998). Social learning: A new perspective on learning in participatory systems. *Studies in Continuing Education, 20*(2), 251–265.

Zamponi, L. (2019). Direct social action, welfare retrenchment and political identities. Coping with the crisis and pursuing change in Italy. *Partecipazione e conflitto, 12*(2), 382–409.

Alessandro Martelli is Full Professor of Sociology at the Department of Sociology and Business Law, University of Bologna, Italy.

Stella Volturo is PhD in Sociology, Post-doctoral researcher at the Department of Sociology and Business Law, University of Bologna, Italy.

Chapter 6
Participation Through Learning: Supporting Young People in Exile

Patricia Loncle, Louise Bonnel, and Zuwaina Salim

Abstract In this chapter, we focus on the links between learning and processes of informal participation. We do this by closely examining some of the activities of *Welcome*, an association created by a small group of volunteers in 2016 in Rennes with the aim of delivering French classes to people in exile. This particular case study was conducted within the framework of the Partispace project as an example of informal participation organised by and addressed to young people. *Welcome* is an interesting case for exploring learning and processes of informal participation, for several reasons: it is a young association, created in 2016; its organisation and activities can be characterised as informal as it operates without any public funding; it is dedicated to people in exile and thus tends to respond to the lack of mobilisation of public authorities towards this population. The aim of this chapter is to look at the effects of learning processes developed inside the association by focusing on participation and engagement pathways of both young volunteers and people in exile. The research question broached here is: To what extent do non-formal learning activities of a volunteer association lead to participation and engagement careers among young volunteers and people in exile, and consequently, to what extent do these activities influence individual life trajectories in the local public space?

Keywords Young volunteers · Young people in exile · Learning process · Participation · Engagement

P. Loncle (✉)
The EHESP School of Public Health and Member of the Research Laboratory Arènes, Rennes, France
e-mail: patricia.loncle@ehesp.fr

L. Bonnel
Local Social Development for the Local Agency of the French Department of Ille et Vilaine, Fougères, France

Z. Salim
University of Rennes 1 and Coop'eskemm, Rennes, France

Introduction

In this chapter, we focus on the links between learning and processes of informal participation. We do this by closely examining some of the activities of *Welcome*, an association created by a small group of volunteers in 2016 in Rennes with the aim of delivering French classes to asylum seekers. Actually, even if the status of the association affirms that its aim is to provide help and support to asylum seekers, the group of people directly involved in the association is much larger: among them we find refugees, unaccompanied minors, foreign students and people with an irregular legal status. Having this reality in mind, and in accordance with a common definition suggested by the recipients in the field, we decided to name the informants in our study "people in exile". According to the recipients but also to some academics, this denomination is less bureaucratic and less pejorative than asylum seekers or migrants, for instance (Vallay, 2009; Nouss, 2015).

This particular case study was conducted within the framework of the Partispace project as an example of informal participation organised by and addressed to young people. Although the association is not officially driven by and dedicated to young people, the great majority of association members are young. This can be explained through the characteristics of the city where the association is situated: in the framework of the project, Rennes was characterised as a "student city" where the role of students, who represent around one third of the city's overall population (67,000 students for a population of 215,000 inhabitants), is significant, especially considering that students are widely involved as volunteers in local association life.

Welcome is an interesting case for exploring learning and processes of informal participation, for several reasons: it is a young association, created in 2016; its organisation and activities can be characterised as informal as it operates without any public funding; it is dedicated to people in exile and thus tends to respond to the lack of mobilisation of public authorities towards this population.

Given this short background, the aim of this chapter is to look at the effects of learning processes developed inside the association by focusing on participation and engagement pathways of both young volunteers and people in exile. In fact, the distinction between volunteers and people in exile is not completely operative since a number of young exiles straddle the line between client and provider. Occupying overlapping roles, they participate in the framing and development of the association's activities, and, consequently, they are simultaneously considered as volunteers.

In order to pursue our aim, we consider young people from the perspective of the life course theory (Sayad & Bourdieu, 2014), defined by Elder (2003, p. 4) as "age-graded patterns that are embedded in social institutions and history". Elder writes: [life course theory] "tells us how lives are socially organized in biological and historical time, and how the resulting social pattern affects the way we think, feel, and act. (. . .) Human development is embedded in the life course and historical time" (1998, p. 9). This notion is particularly interesting as it permits to link individual paths (e.g. individual initiative and action capacities) and the regulation of life

courses, both by the socio-economic system (education, work, old age) and by the public policies of the social state (family allowances, social benefits, pensions) (Dubard & Nicourd, 2017, pp. 19–21). Actually, the notion of life course, insofar as it enables an understanding of stops, breaks and bifurcations in the lives of individuals without inducing linearity, appears particularly heuristic. Indeed, it encompasses two groups of young people (volunteers and people in exile) who in their everyday lives experience a mixture of personal choices, non-choices and even forced choices (e.g. when a person enters a profession that is not particularly attractive for him or her but he or she was not aware that there were other alternatives or because he or she is directed into an academic or vocational training that is not suitable for him or her) (Robin, 2016). This statement applies to volunteers insofar as many of them are still students or looking for work and have to face multiple situations of precariousness and uncertainty affecting young people in contemporary French society. This reality is even more pronounced for people in exile who have had to flee their country of origin because of war, persecution or extreme poverty. In addition, we intend to articulate the notion of life course with that of career (Darmon, 2008), more precisely *engagement* career, which refers to the evolution of engagement people experience during their life course. According to Nicourd (2019), the notion of life course is relevant as it allows a simultaneous examination of individual and collective characteristics of engagement as well as socio-political contexts in which the engagements take place. The engagements in Welcome are, from this point of view, particularly interesting for analysing processes of learning and participation: most people (even young people) take part in Welcome activities after having experienced other forms of activism. Their engagement in the association usually strengthens their determination to act in relation to social issues locally and elsewhere.

So, the research question broached here is: To what extent do non-formal learning activities of a volunteer association lead to participation and engagement careers among young volunteers and people in exile, and consequently, to what extent do these activities influence individual life trajectories in the local public space?

This question is important for understanding ways in which social movements, defined as any "form of concerted collective action in favour of a cause" (Neveu, 2011, p. 10), structure citizen engagement in public life. Social movements, in particular progressive ones, are "at the gate" of institutional systems and create spaces where democratic innovations happen (della Porta, 2020). In the case of *Welcome*, the association not only organises French classes through non-formal methods; the gathering of volunteers and people in exile also leads to political engagement in the public space. Thus, a certain number of people in exile who have benefited from Welcome's support have become involved in other local associations, which intervene, for instance, in the fight against poverty or the fight against AIDS.

The chapter consists of two parts. The first part deals with non-formal learning activities organised by the association and the impact of these activities on young volunteers and people in exile's lives and integration trajectories. The second part

focuses on different ways in which these two groups develop participation and engagement actions in the association as well as in the local public space.

To Be Involved in *Welcome*: Social Integration and the Life Course

In this first part, we focus on how involvement in non-formal learning activities at Welcome affects the life course of both young volunteers and young people in exile. In doing so, we pay particular attention to the social integration dimension of the activities. Here, social integration can be defined as a process in which individuals participate in a variety of relations and activities which give them a sense of communality and identification (see, e.g. Holt-Lunstad & Lefler, 2020). In this part, we examine three elements: the progressive definition of Welcome objectives, the effects of associative involvement on the social integration process and the life course of volunteers and people in exile.

Initial Trial and Error: A Blurred Project with Many Expectations

The first meeting of *Welcome*'s volunteers followed a message posted on a Facebook page by a hospital nurse who wanted to organise French courses for people in exile, appealing to willing people for help with this project. At the time, one of the researchers (Patricia Loncle) was looking for new ethnographic fieldwork in the framework of the Partispace project. She came into contact with the association by responding to the open call posted online and attending the first meeting.[1] During this meeting, which was attended by five volunteers and five people in exile who did not know exactly what to expect, the nurse explained that people who applied for asylum frequently had to wait months before obtaining their papers and, during this time, were excluded from French language courses offered by formal institutions. As a result, a long period could elapse between their arrival and starting their language learning, a difficult period marked by isolation and a strong feeling of social uselessness. Nevertheless, the group organised and quickly got French courses

---

[1] Patricia Loncle took part in the first meetings and was eventually involved in the association as a volunteer. She taught French classes on a weekly basis during 18 months and was also member of the board during a year. The empirical examples in this chapter are taken from her ethnographic fieldwork with the association. Louise Bonnel and Zuwaïna Salim joined the association in 2019, as volunteers. They are currently both members of the board and work in a research project about people in exile and access to rights.

underway which continued at a fairly steady pace, with new volunteers and new people in exile constantly arriving.

The association was formally created on June 18, 2016. During the first meeting, the statutes and main objectives were written, and a president and a steering committee were elected. The meeting took place in the garden of the nurse (elected president) who initiated the first language classes. Eight volunteers and eight people in exile were present. General aims of the project were also discussed. Clearly, the learning of French was the central objective, but other dimensions were addressed as well. A mentoring system was set up to support people in exile with administrative procedures (for instance, the preparation of asylum application files, the accompaniment for medical visits, the appointments at the Prefecture, etc.). It was also decided that the group should develop creative activities (such as picnics, sports, visits of cultural facilities or trips to the sea) in order to combat loneliness. In particular, activities highlighting the cultures of the people in exile (at the outset mainly Afghans and Sudanese) were proposed.

Beyond these objectives, later meetings revealed numerous difficulties in specifying the project. For instance, lengthy discussions took place on how to best organise the French classes. As most of the volunteers were not French teachers, each of them brought his or her own ideas on which pedagogy to adopt. Some considered that entering in relation with people was most important, while others preferred offering real lessons. As a result of these oppositions, it was never possible to agree on shared pedagogical practices. Another point of tension was the course registration system. While some considered that people in exile should sign up for the classes to allow a more fluid organisation, others rejected this, arguing that the association had to remain open to distinguish itself from the more institutionalised initiatives. Which cultural activities to implement was also an issue: some wanted to collect life stories to show how difficult it was for people to migrate, while others were concerned that narratives could potentially expose individuals to additional stress that no one in the association could cope with.

The trial and error phase lasted for about a year. It was probably inevitable, given the fact that the project was undefined when the association was launched. Subsequently, the project became clearer. In any case, from a life course perspective, the organised non-formal activities and other social activities had an obvious impact on the participant's experiences of social integration.

The Effects of Non-formal Learning Activities on Young Volunteers' Life Courses

Taking part in the activities of *Welcome* was an engagement that indubitably affected the life course of volunteers animating French workshops for people in exile. Whether or not they had previously been involved in other associations, this experience affected their personal, professional and educational paths. It changed

the way they apprehend their social relationships and their vision of their own culture, as well as how they consider other cultures by which they are surrounded in this transcultural environment. Studies have shown that by strengthening their social relationships and their involvement in social activities, young volunteers feel a greater sense of belonging to their city (Leclercq & Pagis, 2011).

The number of volunteers in Welcome is quite irregular as students' commitments, insofar as they are closely linked to the course of the academic year, can be quite short. However, during the period of the ethnographic fieldwork (from June 2016 to autumn 2017), the number of volunteers rapidly increased from 10 to approximately 40 people. Among these there was a very large majority of students and young job-seekers and a couple of traditional activists (coming either from the radical left or catholic social movements). Two-thirds of the volunteers were women. From the point of view of gender and political background, the composition of the group could be considered as quite typical (cf. Coutant, 2018).

Most of the young people who volunteered for *Welcome* had some previous experience of involvement; it was rarely their first step into volunteering. Their motives for coming to the association were several and had often to do with finding something they failed to find in other associations, the importance of human relationships, intercultural exchange or an ambition to pursue their involvement with people in exile. Two of them had previously been volunteering in Calais and Grande-Synthe[2] and wanted to maintain their commitment in some way. It was also the case for a volunteer who spent a year in Germany doing volunteer work with people in exile. Many others had travelled in Africa and the Middle East and had quite some understanding of different country contexts.

Helping people in exile can appear overwhelming, and maybe young people decide to choose this cause at a point in their life when they have already acquired volunteering tools and feel the need to be recognised for their skills. This can be a time-consuming engagement and emotionally demanding; volunteers have to deal with trauma survivors and be able to build tangible and sometimes close relationships with them. They need to be in possession of necessary tools in order to create a distance between volunteering activities and their personal lives, tools likely to have been acquired through other volunteering experiences. As a consequence, being a volunteer for *Welcome* was rarely a first involvement in a young person's life course.

The ability to keep a distance can be considered as a skill which young volunteers develop, thanks to their activities at Welcome. The young volunteers all testified that joining the association allowed them to gain new skills and to develop those they thought most useful for future professional lives. The skills developed centre around adaptability and learning how to work with people who come from very different cultural backgrounds.

---

[2] In 2015 and 2016, these two coastal cities close to the Channel Tunnel have been home to migrant camps (who gathered up to 3500 people each). They were classified as "temporary housing centres" where a number of volunteers have been involved in providing aid and supporting people (Kaiser & Lainé, 2017). These two camps no longer exist, but many of the first volunteers in Welcome have had their initial volunteering experiences there.

Initially, volunteers wanted to plan their French workshops ahead, basing their work on methods and books. However, they soon realised that this was inappropriate for *Welcome* participants, so they started to improvise instead. Elodie, a 23-year-old volunteer, explains:

> At first, I wanted to build a course and as my father is a teacher, I asked him for teaching books and workbooks, which he gave me. [...] As we do not know who is going to come to the class, I realised it was useless to do this. In the end, it works better when it is spontaneous and when people tell us "I want to practise my oral skills", so we speak, and then another one tells me, "I'd rather do this".

Developing organisational skills and finding a place in an organisation were also relevant elements of the upskilling process linked to the Welcome experience of some of the volunteers, who learned how to reconcile their private, professional and associative lives and how to actively participate in decision-making processes. For some, the skills developed will be directly related to later management of professional life, many of them wanting to pursue a career in teaching or social work:

> I wondered, last year, if I should have gone back to school to study social issues, [. . .], I think I'll do it, because I realise that these topics are what I like most. . . or maybe become a teacher, I think I'll start a French as a foreign language training. With this association, I've found something I like, I have discovered a way to express what I am interested in professionally. . . . (Chloé, 30 years old, volunteer)

In fact, for many of the young people at Welcome, their experiences as volunteer teachers offered new perspectives regarding what they want to do for a living. For some, it was a way to experiment, to ensure their chosen path was right for them, as highlighted by Marc:

> I hope I'll become a teacher next year, so, to me, it is interesting to teach French every Monday to see how I can share my knowledge. (Marc, 30 years old, volunteer)

This experience also influences which studies the volunteers choose to pursue and which topics they choose to write about. Elodie explains:

> Now, I would struggle not to follow studies linked to this field. I realise I'm reading a lot of things about this topic and geopolitics in general. The situation in those countries really interests me, and I would suffer from doing something completely disconnected. And in my job, that's the question, whether my job should combine these aspects, whether I should look for a job close to all this? Is volunteering enough to fill in for the things that my job will lack? That is the big question.

For some, doing volunteer work also functions as an incubator for professional projects, as they meet the right people with similar desires and goals and create networks making these projects reachable. One of the volunteers, Manon, 27 years old, who studied psychology and was struggling to find a job at the time of the interview, worked on a project which dealt with psychological support for people in exile. He did this together with another volunteer with same academic background and a professor they met through a conference organised by Welcome.

However, despite all these positive aspects, we found that experiences of the volunteers produced both positive and negative effects on relationships with friends and family. Generally, the volunteers are the ones introducing their families to this

cause, even though some of them struggle to talk about what they do, because they feel describing what is happening is not enough. Their families were mainly supportive; some even committing to the same cause and others supporting what they did without becoming volunteers themselves, and some were however indifferent or stood back. At few occasions, the volunteers had to combat prejudice and racism within their own families. Their commitment to the volunteering cause was always an important aspect of relations they had with other family members. A pattern found in most of the narratives was the drastic consequences their engagement had on who they considered as friends. Many of them mentioned they found themselves selecting among their friends, because when they actively volunteered for Welcome, met people in exile and built strong relationships with them, it became harder to tolerate certain reactions and viewpoints:

> It made me sort through my friends because some of them don't understand my engagement or are completely indifferent. And this I cannot conceive, it is a part of me, of my life now, I can't be friends with people who are not sympathetic to this cause, I'm not talking about committing to the cause, but people who won't talk about it or are not interested in it. (Elodie)

What can be underlined here is that volunteering at *Welcome* represented a commitment that affected the social integration process of the volunteers and their engagement careers. In doing so, it could be considered a turning point (i.e. a configuration in which contingent events and slight disturbances can be the source of important reorientations in individual trajectories or collective processes). Clearly, activism in the volunteer association has contributed to reconfigure relationships as well as lifestyles of the volunteers (Bessin et al., 2010, p. 9).

Non-formal Learning Activities and Integration Processes

Being part of Welcome impacted on young people in exile social integration processes as well. Many of them came to the association soon after their arrival in Rennes. They did not necessarily know other people, barely spoke French and did not know how to exercise their rights. Others had come further with their integration but found volunteers eager to help and include them in all kinds of activities.

As illustrated in the following interview excerpts, the association represents a space where people in exile feel well at ease and comforted:

> It's a good thing. It helps people to integrate and... to have daily activities, especially if they don't have a job. It keeps them busy. (Abdullah, 33, Algerian)
>   Yeah, the Welcome Centre is like a family for me. Since I arrived here, I sometimes cry because without a family, without parents, it's a bit complicated. But when I come to the association . . . then I come home happy.... (Osman, 21, Afghan)

The association does not receive public funding and does not employ payed staff; in this sense it is weakly institutionalised. This aspect can however be seen as an advantage by people in exile. According to some of our interviewees, and compared

to the very complex, dense French administration, *Welcome* does not have rigid rules for newcomers. It does not categorise beneficiaries according to administrative status or nationality; the fact that it is open to all without justification increases approachability for all people in exile. From this perspective, as people in exile encounter many challenges on their migration path, they become reluctant to make their lives more complicated by orienting themselves to highly institutionalised and administrative spaces.

This is what Widad underlined during a meeting dedicated to an Erasmus+ project addressing youth in exile mobility:

> We talk about anger, there are ups and downs in our lives. The life of asylum seekers is really difficult, with Dublin, it's complicated. (field note extract, 16th of February 2019)

This is what makes Welcome a safe and welcoming space; people in exile get involved in it not only for formal inquiries such as administrative help or learning French but also for socialising and learning in a more relaxed way. For example, they learn to express themselves in French while playing football and about French culture and the local way of life through outdoor activities. The processes of non-formal learning happening around tea breaks, cultural parties and cultural outings are at least as important as formal classes.

The non-formal learning facilitates the integration process of people in exile and unscrambles French codes and lifestyle more easily and faster than formal learning. Regarding their involvement in the filming of a video clip on their relationship with Welcome, one participant underlined:

> Welcome brings people together, promotes friendship, movement. We came from several countries and we integrate thanks to the values of Welcome. Everyone speaks in their mother tongue in the clip, but we met at Welcome, we learned to speak French together. Welcome is there to give opportunities, to show that we are not useless to society. (field note extract, 16th of February 2019)

Meeting different kinds of people in a safe place, or at least a non-institutional setting, makes many feel more comfortable, at ease to ask questions, and have social interactions without being judged or labelled.

It also makes them more open to other cultures and ways of thinking. Different people in exile from different countries, religions and nationalities share similar experiences of being in exile; they struggle with same issues regarding the French bureaucratic system, meet the same associations and so on. These circumstances can have two potential outcomes: on the one hand, the youth in exile might realise that they have much in common and come together in closed, "exiled", communities, or, on the other hand, the experiences they acquire can make them receptive to other cultures and eventually lead them to meet more native French people.

As asserted by Djamel during the same meeting:

> To be involved, you need willpower, determination, to be integrated, to be a volunteer, to do the French lessons. You need to build training centres, for people without resources, to support youth. Especially rejected young minors who are at risk (with drugs). I've migrated, I'm in a new country, we have to make efforts to make a difference. (field note extract, 16th of February 2019)

Thanks to various non-formal activities – such as shooting a film, playing cards or football, organising cultural evenings to promote their cultures of origin, preparing meals on a weekly basis – young people in exile got involved in activities and groups which facilitated their integration process. Being able to express oneself individually, showing one's abilities and being included in a group in a particular participatory context undeniably affect people's life courses. Thanks to their involvement in Welcome, young people in exile felt less isolated and more comfortable. This in turn made it possible for them to integrate socially and participate in the public space.

Welcome: A Tool for Youth Participation?

As already explained, Welcome was not created to promote youth participation; its primary objective was to deliver French courses to asylum seekers. Nevertheless, at least three elements progressively contributed to turn it into an "outside of the box" participation tool, to quote Sarah Pickard (2019), who further writes that "political participation can be an everyday experience outside of election time, which demands engagement beyond putting a cross in a box on polling day" (p. 80). First, young people (volunteers and people in exile) succeeded in gaining recognition for their expertise and their contributions in daily associative functioning. Second, although the role of people in exile in the association was not really thought through at the outset, their involvement in daily functioning gradually became promoted as something essential. Third, the involvement of young volunteers and people in exile in external activities helped to forge a willingness on both sides to get involved not only

in the association but also in the local public space (Pohl et al., 2019).[3] This was accomplished by developing actions together with other local associations or with city's inhabitants, by questioning national and local migration policies, and by calling out local public stakeholders.

To examine these dimensions, we analysed three aspects of the participatory practice: the involvement of Welcome in external projects; the role of young volunteers as people in exile representatives; and the involvement of young people in exile in the local public space.

From Learning to Participation: Actions of Engagement in *Welcome* and Beyond

The activities of *Welcome* do not only consist of French classes organised by volunteers for people in exile. Quite the contrary: learning activities can be considered as a starting point for developing other activities. From this perspective, *Welcome* appears as a means to multifaceted engagement from both groups (volunteers and people in exile) inside and outside the association.

Thus, as seen in other studies with volunteer groups, many actions permit expressions of the association's political values while simultaneously creating links, trust and fun between participants (Andersson et al., 2019). For instance, a football team was created through the initiative of one of the people in exile, as well as a party dedicated to Angolan culture. The aim was to celebrate this particular culture and to instil pride among people coming from Angola and at the same time to struggle against prejudice. Other actions aimed at fund raising. For instance, once a month, a group of people in exile prepared meals which were then sold in the city centre. Volunteers and people in exile participated together in the organisation of these activities.

Actions were also developed in order to create links between *Welcome* and the urban environment, meaning other local stakeholders and associations who in various ways work with people in exile. From this perspective, *Welcome* appears as an association rooted in a specific city. The actions of the association occur in a particular urban context, which in turn contributes to shaping the association (Coutant, 2018). One example of action is the "housing commission" that is organised inside the association and whose objective is to nourish partnerships between organisations that help people in exile find housing solutions in the city. Another example is the "weekly gleaning operation"; each Saturday, at the end of the market, a group of volunteers and people in exile collect unsold food, organise a picnic with the inhabitants of the neighbourhood and distribute the remaining food in squatted buildings occupied by people in exile.

---

[3]For example, through organisation of parties, meetings with local representatives to plead the cause of exiled people or co-involvement in research projects on migration issues

In this context, the place dedicated to people in exile in sharing associative responsibilities and day-to-day running of the association is important to analyse. Currently, the board comprises six people (all under 30 years old) among which one of the co-presidents and the treasurer are former beneficiaries of the association. Having elected people in exile to the association's board is a way of showing both their involvement and of signifying that they are not subjects of aid but actors fully capable of contributing to the organisation. This is a result of a quite long process. Indeed, as we have pointed out, initially the room for manoeuvre of people in exile was rather limited, and the functioning of the association was characterised as being top-down for a while (Loncle & Martin, 2019). During the association's first year of functioning, it was not possible to promote a fully fledged involvement for people in exile who, due to ideological disagreements between the volunteers, were essentially considered to be in need of help. Even though some volunteers were in favour of this kind of involvement, and even though the issue was regularly brought up at board meetings, no consensus was reached to consolidate the position of people in exile in terms of sharing responsibilities within the association. However, this situation gradually evolved and the participation of people in exile changed considerably: today they are considered as full participants in the activities of the association.[4] This evolution is characteristic of an association which progressively affirms its values regarding its "beneficiaries" which are not only considered as recipients of collective action but also as being part of it.

This elevated place given to people in exile in the functioning of the association was reinforced through Welcomes participation in external, European projects whose aim was to reflect on the access to rights of people in exile.[5] By being part of these projects, the people of *Welcome* become sorts of "cause entrepreneurs" (Cobb & Elder, 1972), i.e. "actors who try to problematise and bring a (social) problem to the public arena (especially to the public agenda)" (Bergeron et al., 2013, p. 263). The notion of "cause entrepreneurs" is particularly relevant when trying to

---

[4]For example, during the last general assembly, the attendants were equally made up of volunteers and people in exile (the latter are increasingly considered as volunteers).

[5]The first project was an Erasmus + project called MYM (Migrant Youth Mobility) which aimed to promote policy initiatives regarding reception systems for international youth, especially young people in exile. This approach was implemented in Rennes (France) and Sibiu (Romania) between February and June 2019. Various meetings brought together people in exile to discuss migration and mobility policies. The second and ongoing project is entitled Come:on! (Culture, occupation, mobility, Europe: operational network), and its objective is to promote development of alternative spaces for young people in order to improve their engagement. Vacant buildings in European cities are considered as tools to develop temporary use of spaces and to make stronger trans local communities. The project is based on youth work methods and carried out in seven cities (Rennes, Manchester, Bologna, Riga, Timisoara, Sibiu and Brussels). A last, ongoing project is funded by the French National Research Agency and deals with the rights of people in exile in times of crises (one of the topics is to explore the effects of the corona virus crisis in this field). In this project, a group of volunteers and people in exile from Welcome are involved as co-researchers (among which are Louise Bonnel and Zuwaina Salim). In all, the projects mentioned here are promoted by a group of young academics and youth workers whose aim is to highlight these issues in public space (see coop.eskemm.org)

understand individual and collective characteristics of mobilisation in favour of people in exile, to study their "action repertoire" and analyse their capacity (or incapacity) to get heard in the public debate (cf. Siméant, 1994; Mathieu, 2006).

Young Volunteers as People in Exile Representatives

The role of "cause entrepreneurs" is largely assumed by young volunteers. Actually, young volunteers are aware and well informed about the situation people in exile face once they reach European countries. This is why they support them and want to fight for their cause. Exchanging on a regular basis and building relationships with people in exile within the association, they come to a detailed understanding of daily social and administrative issues.

The involvement of the young volunteers was often triggered by events with massive media repercussions, events that spoke to them and pushed them to offer their help for the sake of vulnerable people in exile. During our fieldwork many volunteers told us they felt the people in exile situation were unbearable, leading them to act. Elodie's story about how she decided to help in Calais (see Footnote 2) illustrates this:

> I already knew what was happening to the migrants and as I became aware of this topic, I told myself that protesting was good, but that it was also a good thing to go and help concretely. I really needed that, to tell myself that people need our help, in France, not on the other side of the world, we are talking about something close to us, geographically, and so, I told myself that I would have time over the summer; I'll go there and put my words into action.

Jean, a 22-year-old volunteer who was in Germany in September 2015 when Syrian people arrived on foot from Budapest, tells us he volunteered following the same logic. Another example is Marc, 25, who travelled to Turkey where he witnessed the brutal treatment of people in exiles. For 31-year-old Sami, the engagement was grounded in personal experience. Being from Iran he knew what obstacles are faced by people in exile and therefore decided to offer his help.

This cause is important to the young volunteers which is why some choose to continue their engagement in other associations who support people in exile. Sarah, 23, detailed her duties as a member of another association:

> The association Better World with which I went to the North of France several times over the summer, to Calais and Grande Synthe, because the actions of this association took place in these two towns. So, as I am still a member of this association, there were a lot of volunteers who were from Rennes, so, we try to meet on a regular basis, and at the moment, we are organising a collection on the Villejean campus, we get organised, we are on call, one by one, every three weeks.

Being a member of several associations gives young volunteers legitimacy to raise awareness about the situation of people in exile. One of the general aims is to change the image of people in exile given by the media and to invite others to get involved in associations oriented towards helping and supporting this vulnerable

group. Many of the volunteers we interviewed are convinced associations are the most efficient way to improve living conditions of people in exile:

> If there weren't so many associations helping and working, having in mind what some people think, things would be worse, life would be harder for them, for the foreigners, it would be even harder. (Sarah, 23)

They become spokespersons or at least intermediaries between people in exile, whom they know and feel close to, and the French society: politicians, institutions or random citizens, to whom people in exile are invisible and inaudible. Jean had a relevant reflection on this matter:

> Yes, this seems to me the most efficient way to act. (. . .) for people to stop being prejudiced against migrants and to realise something needs to be done, the best solution is to invite them to give a French class and then they will realise, "Ah. . .", they will be more aware of what is happening, experiencing the activities.

The young volunteers in our study all affirm their interest in politics and their determination to vote. Even though they do not feel represented by politicians, they all have a political conscience as well as knowledge. However, they do not expect change to come from policymakers. To a much higher extent, they put their trust in volunteering fellow citizens rallying for the cause of helping people in exile. Their aim is to stimulate this movement. Jean explains this vision:

> I really believe in citizens taking action, not waiting for people in suits and ties to make decisions. There is a law saying that every asylum seeker should be given a roof, it's not followed. Maybe we can find excuses for the State, maybe it's difficult, but at some point, we have to act.

To advocate for their cause, the volunteers adopt a stance of disapproval towards institutions. They generally think institutions and authorities are not doing enough for people in exile which is why associations like *Welcome* are needed. Here is an excerpt from an interview with Elodie:

> I have a very critical point of view; I am very disappointed by what the State offers, and I think we could do a lot more and in a much better way. And also, my engagement in the association and the fact that I went to Grande Synthe was to show that there are citizens disagreeing with what the French government is doing, and it was a way to mitigate deficiencies a little and to tell myself "okay there was a form of culpability about being French", but taking part in this was me saying, "I have the means to act, and I act because I am scandalised. . .".

Volunteers therefore decide to carry the voices of people in exile in order to show institutions and politicians that their cause matters to a considerable share of the French population.

People in Exile Participation in *Welcome* as a Way Towards Social Integration

Just like the volunteers, young people in exile also get involved outside the association and develop political opinions they express on the occasion of meetings to decision-makers (either to locally elected people or to representatives of the local state who are in charge of the integration policy). From this perspective, they too play the role of "cause entrepreneurs".

Through participation in Welcome, young people in exile feel they can express their opinions and thoughts via non-formal learning activities. This in turn gives them confidence to participate in joint processes of meaning-making together with others in the association, people they identify as open-minded and welcoming.

As Widad asserts:

> I go to Welcome's restaurant on Mondays, I go to the TNB[6] because I like to eat, I like to take French classes, theatre classes. Why are we in Rennes? To integrate, to share cultures, to help Welcome.

The elected board of Welcome is making efforts to gradually include people in exile as members of the board alongside French volunteers. As we learned over the course of our fieldwork, this makes people in exile feel stronger and provides an opportunity to participate in the struggle for recognition and formal rights.

The association welcomes everyone, but several types of social inequality have to be pointed out. This is quite common; in all types of associations, there is a potential discrepancy between volunteers (activists or students from a mainly middle class background) and "beneficiaries" (people in exile who live in precarious social conditions). In this sense, the multiple dimensions of social vulnerability inherent in the people in exile position represent a challenge for participation processes on equal terms.

For instance, individuals identifying as LGBTQ+ generally do not feel safe around organisations and associations of any kind (Kahn et al., 2018). Many have already suffered a lot during their migration journey and are sometimes quite distrustful towards collective activities. In this regard, the association plays an important role in deconstructing the cultural and gender divides that exist unconsciously on both sides. For instance, giving the fact that many volunteers are women who mainly teach to men in exile, one can ask how potential prejudice between women and men could be overcome? How can the association be made a safe place for everyone? One answer was given by opening a French class only for women.

---

[6]The TNB is the National Theatre of Brittany where part of the French classes are delivered.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we dealt with two main elements related to non-formal learning and participation. First, the effects of involvement in Welcome on social integration processes and on individuals' life course were examined. It has been demonstrated that both volunteers and people in exile experience what can be considered as "turning points" through their involvement in the association (Bessin et al., 2010): their participation leads to new paths and relationships, to new roles in the local public space. In addition, participation in *Welcome* appears as a step in the engagement careers of young people, whether they are volunteers or exiles. All the people interviewed expressed their willingness to follow up on this commitment. Second, the involvement in Welcome as a way of increasing volunteer's and people in exile participation in the association, as well as in the local public space, was also analysed. From this perspective, it was shown how volunteers become "cause entrepreneurs" and contribute to raising awareness, not only in relation to the importance of the activities carried out within the association but also in relation to the people in exile cause in general. With regard to these elements, we have emphasised the capacity for transformation provided by an association that is weakly institutionalised and operates with extremely limited financial resources. Individuals who participate in non-formal activities of the association gain many skills, particularly "soft skills" (transversal, non-technical skills, which can be mobilised in a large number of educational, social and professional situations) (Maire, 2018, p. 16) that empower them to engage and participate more inside as well as outside the association. The participatory and learning activities and actions of the Welcome association are illustrative of the vitality of new social movements that address social problems where the State (even an interventionist state like France) is unwilling or unable to act. *Welcome* can thus be conceptualised as a progressive social movement innovating from the bottom up (Della Porta, 2020), searching for answers to the so-called migrant crisis to which neither the state nor local authorities are able to respond. To paraphrase Sarah Pickard and Judith Bessant (2017): these types of youth-led movements have the potential to re-generate politics in times of democratic crisis.

References

Andersson, B., Reutlinger, C., Roth, P., & Zimmermann, D. (2019). Young people's appropriation of public space: Participation through voice, sociability and activity. In A. Walther, J. Batsleer, P. Loncle, & A. Pohl (Eds.), *Young people and the struggle for participation: Contested practices, power and pedagogies in public spaces* (pp. 82–96). Routledge.

Bergeron, H., Castel, P., & Nouguez, E. (2013). Éléments pour une sociologie de l'entrepreneur-frontière Genèse et diffusion d'un programme de prévention de l'obésité. *Revue Française de Sociologie, 54-2*, 263–302.

Bessin, M., Bidart, C., & Grossetti, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Bifurcations. Les sciences sociales face aux ruptures et à l'événement*. La Découverte.

Cobb, R. W., & Elder, C. D. (1972). *Participation in American politics. The dynamics of agenda-building*. Allyn and Bacon.

Coutant, I. (2018). *Les migrants en bas de chez soi*. Seuil.

Darmon, M. (2008). *Devenir anorexique: une approche sociologique*. La Découverte.

Della Porta, D. (2020). *How social movements can save democracy: Democratic innovations from below*. Polity.

Dubard, C., & Nicourd, S. (2017). *Les biographies en sociologie*. La Découverte.

Elder, G. H. (1998). The life course as developmental theory. *Child Development, 69*(1), 1–12.

Elder, G. H., Kirkpatrick, J. M., & Crosnoe, R. (2003). The emergence and development of life course theory. In J. T. Mortimer & M. J. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the life course* (p. 2003). Plenum Press.

Holt-Lunstad, J., & Lefler, M. (2020). Social integration. In D. Gu & M. E. Dupre (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of gerontology and population aging* (pp. 1–11). Springer.

Kahn, S., et al. (2018). Facilitating mental health support for LGBT forced migrants: A qualitative inquiry. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 96*, 316–326.

Keiser, C., & Lainé, K. (2017). Habiter le temporaire et la contrainte : le centre d'accueil provisoire de la Jungle de Calais. *Urbanités, 8*, 1–16.

Leclercq, C., & Pagis, J. (2011). Les incidences biographiques de l'engagement: Socialisations militantes et mobilité sociale. Introduction. *Sociétés contemporaines, 84*(4), 5–23.

Loncle, P., & Martin, C. (2019). La politisation des jeunes et le fonctionnement associatif: exemples de deux associations locales faiblement institutionnalisées. *Revue Jeunes et Société, 4*(2), 113–136.

Maire, S. (2018). *Science et politique des « soft skills » de l'éducation à l'emploi. Sociologie d'un nouveau motif cognitif international.* thèse de doctorat en sociologie, Strasbourg.

Mathieu, L. (2006). *La double peine. Histoire d'une lutte inachevée*. La Dispute.

Neveu, É. (2011). *Sociologie des mouvements sociaux* (Vol. 5e éd. Repères). La Découverte.

Nicourd, S. (2019). *Les Engagements Au Travail Dans Les Politiques Socioéducatives*. Habilitation à diriger la recherche en sciences politiques. Sciences Po Paris.

Nouss, A. (2015). Enjeu et Fondation Des Études Exiliques Ou Portrait de l'exilé. *Socio, 5-* (October), 241–268.

Pickard, S. (2019). *Politics, protest and young people, political participation and dissent in 21st century Britain*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Pickard, S., & Bessant, J. (Eds.). (2017). *Young people regenerating politics in times of crisis*. Springer.

Pohl, A., Batsleer, J., Loncle, P., & Walther, A. (2019). Contested practices, power and pedagogies of young people in public spaces: An introduction. In A. Walther, J. Batsleer, P. Loncle, & A. Pohl (Eds.), *Young people and the struggle for participation: Contested practices, power and pedagogies in public spaces* (pp. 1–12). Routledge.

Robin, P. (2016). Le parcours de vie, un concept polysémique? *Les Cahiers Dynamiques, 67*(1), 33–41.

Sayad, A., & Bourdieu, P. (2014). *La double absence : des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré*. Éd. Points.

Siméant, J. (1994). Immigration et action collective. L'exemple des mobilisations d'étrangers en situation irrégulière. *Sociétés contemporaines, 20*, 39–62.

Valluy, J. (2009). *Rejet des exilés, le grand retournement du droit de l'asile*. Editions du Croquant.

Patricia Loncle is Professor of Sociology at the High School of Public Health in Rennes, France

Louise Bonnel is in charge of local social development for the local Agency of the French department of Ille et Vilaine in Fougères, France

Zuwaina Salim is a co researcher at university of Rennes 1 and Coop'eskemm in Rennes, France

Chapter 7
The Theatre as a Laboratory of Creativity and Chaos: Youth Participation and Informal Processes of Multidimensional Learning

Björn Andersson and Zulmir Bečević

> *Theater is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theater can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it.*
> *Augusto Boal.*
>
> *If you are doing theatre then you are . . . I think you need to be really curious about many things, and like cherish that. Curious about society, curious about people, curious about fantasy, curious about ideas. You want to explore things. And not be afraid to expose yourself.*
> *Jonna, member of Theater Kolektiv.*

Abstract Theater Kolektiv is a group of young people for whom theatre has long been an overwhelming interest. To the members, theatre represents a way of expressing oneself and presenting ideas concerning important social and political issues in the world. Acting is also a path for self-development and offers an opportunity to influence others. The group studied aesthetic programs in secondary school and received a lot of support from the municipal cultural school. In the research, we followed the group during a period when they worked purposively to make their theatre group independent of that kind of support, and a method to accomplish this was to stage a play of their own. However, this turned out to be a quite complicated process. The group had to take care of tasks and solve problems that they previously had not handled on their own. Also, this situation uncovered differences between the various members, which had not been obvious before. The result was that the members pulled the group in different directions, and they did not succeed in carrying out the play project. At the same time, extensive learning took place both in relation to the external world, the shared life of the group and each member's inner world. The members experienced their project as an example of

B. Andersson (✉) · Z. Bečević
Department of Social Work, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden
e-mail: Bjorn.andersson@socwork.gu.se; Zulmir.becevic@socwork.gu.se

meaningful participation in society, and the group process illustrates how a lived citizenship can emerge from young people's cultural commitment.

Introduction

Since the post-war period, dramaturgical analyses of social interaction have become an essential feature of sociological theory. Originating in anthropology, the concept of "role" is most strongly associated with and renowned through the works of Erving Goffman (1959, 1961, 1967, 1971) and his sociology of everyday life. From a Goffmanesque dramaturgical perspective, the everyday life of interaction and human meaning-making can be analytically perceived through theatrical imagery and metaphor. The world is a theatre, a great stage on which individuals perform and play roles and by engaging in interactions with others create identities. As actors, individuals are constantly involved in performances in front of or together with others. Their performances are characterized by conscious or unconscious "impression management" (Goffman, 1959/2009: 182–206), that is, activities through which they try to manage and control others' perceptions of them. According to Goffman, people's identities do not emanate from a secluded inner core; they are an effect of the whole "scene" which frames the interaction. They are produced in situ, always as part of the larger interactional context which enables certain ways of presenting oneself while hindering others. At times, Goffman has been criticized for ignoring dimensions of power in the making of social relations and identities (Giddens & Sutton, 2014: 211f). Emphasizing the interaction process from the perspective of the individual, the actor can easily be perceived as superficial, manipulative and without authenticity. However, part of this criticism is misdirected. Goffman (1959/2009: 219f) writes that his theatre analogy is not to be understood literally; the dramaturgical perspective is of course a metaphor which serves to open up the analysis of social life and human conduct.

What is interesting and equally peculiar, however, is that the sociology of everyday life has paid little attention to the inner workings and interactions of *theatrical life* (Atkinson, 2006: 41, 51). Inspired by Goffman, social scientists have been diligent in the use of the drama metaphor to study reality while simultaneously neglecting to study theatrical contexts and cultural meaning-making *as everyday life*, through the lens of social interaction. One of few exceptions is Paul Atkinson's (2006) detailed, ethnographic account of the social organization and collective work of the Welsh National Opera Company. Setting out to fill this lacuna in the interactionist tradition, Atkinson (2006: 51f) simply reverses the Goffmanesque analysis: instead of using the theatre to understand everyday life, he uses the sociology of everyday life to understand the work of theatre.

Partly inspired by this reversed approach, in this chapter we depart from a similar premise: we analyse the workings and multidimensional learning processes of a

young, amateur theatre group as everyday social interaction. Placing the analysis of the ethnographic case study within an interactionist tradition essentially means conceptualizing individuals as profoundly social beings shaped by society and culture. Through their active nature, ongoing interpretive practice and interactions with others, they in turn are continuously shaping and (re)constructing the social worlds they inhabit (Mead, 1934/1967; Blumer, 1969/1998). Here, the term *interaction* refers to mutual action accomplished together by several individuals participating in a setting characterized by intersubjectivity and collective construction of meaning (Joas & Knöbl, 2009: 123 ff). Human beings are engaged in constant reflection and dialogue with themselves and their social context, which implies a concept of *informal learning* as a reflexive and socially conditioned interpretation of internal factors (instincts, drives, needs), as well as interpretation of external factors to which the individual has to relate in any given situation. Participating in a youth group which devotes itself to culture means engaging in a "constant process of conscious and strategic as well as non-reflective learning" (Sernhede, 2011: 172). Self-chosen and meaningful participation is thus inevitably interwoven with multilayered processes of learning. As Etienne Wenger (1998: 3) writes, learning is "a fundamentally social phenomenon" emerging from "the context of our lived experience of participation in the world".

Following this brief discussion on the intersection of participation in culture and learning, our interactionist approach to the workings of the theatre group will be looking at *how* learning is accomplished through interaction framed by a theatrical setting, as well as the individuals' subjective experiences of learning in relation to this particular context. Both learning and participation are conceptualized as collective endeavours (Wenger, 1998; Walther et al., 2020). The object of analysis is the group, because as previous research has shown, participation in culture and cultural production would not be possible without collective (social) organization (Becker, 1974, 1982). As Atkinson (2006: 53) writes, there is "a dialectical relationship between social life and theatricality. The sociological imagination therefore needs to pay attention to the everyday life of the theatre just as much as to the theatricality of everyday life". Since life is drama and drama is life, the aim of our analysis is to understand learning as it emerges and evolves in the intersection between the *reality* and the *theatricality* of social action.

In the following section we present the theatre group and the empirical material underpinning the analysis. We also present a typology of learning and learning types derived from the interdisciplinary field of youth studies. Thereafter we move on with the presentation of main empirical themes relating to the topic of the chapter.

The Case Study: Theater Kolektiv

Theater Kolektiv is a free theatre group based in Gothenburg, Sweden. The group joined the PARTISPACE project as one of six ethnographic case studies and later as one of the action research projects (see Bečević et al., 2017; McMahon et al., 2018).

The empirical material used in this chapter was collected in two overlapping research stages. The ethnographic fieldwork with the group was conducted between September 2016 and January 2017. During this period the group functioned within the organizational structure of the publicly financed Culture School.[1] Within the typology of PARTISPACE cases, their participatory activities were categorized as being both "formal" and "informal" by nature. During the ethnography, Theater Kolektiv was provided with a rehearsal facility, a fully equipped theatre "black box" containing theatre necessities such as an open floor serving as a semi-circular stage, a seating section for an audience of up to 100 people, lights, a sound system and a backstage area. Here, they met and practised once to twice a week together with a professional drama teacher whose primary task was to help the group transition from the formal organization of the Culture School to independence and self-management.

The black box was the main setting of the ethnography. The group also met regularly in their free time in order to socialize and discuss the overall mission of the group as well as the form and content of their tangible work related to the practice sessions. The ethnographic material consists of participant observations during their training sessions, materials and discussions regularly posted on the closed Facebook page of the group, informal discussions and short interviews with group members, a group discussion and three longer biographical interviews. In January 2017, the group formally left the Culture School, found a new rehearsing studio and commenced an action research project, the purpose of which was to explore conditions, possibilities and obstacles related to the struggle of establishing themselves as an independent group. During this second stage (January–June 2017), the research team kept regular contact with the group and their work in progress. Two long focus group interviews were conducted with the group, with particular focus on *learning* (one at the beginning of the action research phase and one at the end), and are also included in the empirical base of the chapter.

During their involvement in PARTISPACE, the constellation of the group varied. From the beginning of the ethnography, the group consisted of up to ten members aged 18–21.[2] Most of the members had a background in the theatre programmes and drama classes organized by the Culture School. Others were newcomers to the group. All members shared what could be described as curiosity and a passion for performing arts in general, and the theatre in particular. However, given that this was not a professional but an amateur group which came together in their free time to do theatre and try to find their ways into the professional world of theatre, the amount of work and the level of engagement each member was ready to put in varied according to periodic commitments to other arenas of life such as the family, school, work, leisure activities, friends and so on. In general, the group was held together by a

---

[1]The municipal Culture School offers voluntary, and free, after-school training in a range of aesthetic subjects to children and young people aged between 6 and 19.

[2]One of the members was male and the rest were female.

dedicated core of four to five people, while other members engaged on a less regular basis.

A Typology of Multidimensional Learning

In order to uncover and analyse learning processes that took shape through the practices of the theatre group, we adapt a typology from youth culture research and a pioneering ethnographic study of three Swedish rock bands (Fornäs et al., 1995).[3] A brief outline follows of the learning model, specifically adapted to the analysis of the empirical material relating to the creative work of Theater Kolektiv.

As suggested by Fornäs et al. (1995: 229–249), informal learning processes through participation in cultural group activities (e.g. playing music in a band, doing theatre) can be conceptualized along three main dimensions pertaining to both the collective and the individual experience of acting in the world: learning that happens in relation to an objective, existing reality (what the authors call *learning in the external world*); learning that is intersubjective by nature and socially shared (*learning in the shared world*); and learning related to each person's more or less unique world of subjective experience (*learning in the inner world*). Each of these main dimensions then contains several subtypes of learning.

The first type, or dimension, of learning – learning in the external world – can be divided into three subtypes and competences which are achieved through active participation in a theatre group: *practical competence* (has to do with learning to handle "general material logistics" like creating and equipping the rehearsal studio, learning technical skills like camera and sound management), *administrative abilities* (such as forming a theatre association and handling all the paperwork that goes into that, applying for funding, managing the finances, in short, a learning process emanating from relations with surrounding institutions) and finally *knowledge of nature and society* (this broad learning category has to do with developing a "conceptual understanding of the world" [Ibid. p. 234] through, for example, political, social and ethical themes the group so often chose to address in rehearsal and discussions).

The second learning type – learning in the shared world – is premised not by a relation to the external world but on intersubjective and shared activities that are part of the social universe of theatre. Acquiring *cultural skills*, such as understanding and participating in the symbolic and stylistic genres of theatrical discourse, is a multi-faceted endeavour which, for example, encompasses different bricolage strategies when rehearsing and playing around with certain themes and materials in order to create new meaning and communicate specific experience. Practising theatre is often a sort of "creative chaos" without a clear starting or end point, where members

---

[3] See also Sernhede (2011) for an application of the model on learning processes of a young Swedish hip-hop collective.

improvise, search, succeed, fail, appropriate, invert and play around with symbols deriving from drama, everyday life, music, texts, newspapers and so on. Each participant is a "bricoleur" (cf. Hebdige, 1979) in this explorative quest, never knowing where she is headed in the improvised interactions with her peers. What is important is the creation of a symbolic system of congruence, that is, that the doings related to theatre make sense and are meaningful to oneself as well as to one's peers and that they are intersubjectively transferable, which they need to be in order to make sense. Furthermore, *normative capabilities* have to do with creating a common set of intersubjectively shared "rules for social interaction", including "learning to deal with conflicts and to cooperate" (Fornäs et al., 1995: 236). Normative learning processes of different kinds characterized the working process of the group, from managing and finding solutions to conflicts to discussing and agreeing on what the group really wants to achieve. Normative learning is characterized by a process of openness and experimental freedom through which the group jointly constructs and establishes a "structure of norms" that they decide to follow. This structure is of course never fixed but always open for further negotiation and re-definition.

The third learning type – learning in the inner world – is related to a subjective, embodied world of the individual and can also be broken down into three interrelated subtypes. *Self-knowledge* has to do with learning who you are through engagement in theatre. This self-knowledge is always reflexive and encompasses reflections about one's own social background (family background, class, gender, age, race/ethnicity) and "conceptual knowledge of the world" (Ibid. p. 239) through which the individual tries to come to terms with her identity, limitations and capabilities. Related to this is the *ability to form ideals* pertaining to the life course, future life plans and matters of desires and goals: who do I want to become? As will be shown, for some members of the collective, theatrical experience is inseparable from questions of personal identity and development and thus profoundly meaningful in relation to the past, present and future. The last learning subtype has to do with *expressive ability*: through theatre young people are provided with tools to articulate, express and act out feelings, needs and impulses.

Of course, the learning types discussed here can in reality not be separated from each other. This systematization of a multilayered learning process in a theatre group is an analytical construct which helps us differentiate between subtle learning types and processes observed in the participatory activities of the group – to which we now turn.

Keeping on Through Transformation

During the period when we followed Theater Kolektiv, the members strived to manage a process that involved both continuity and change. The core of the group really wanted their theatre project to live on. This was very much a question of

meaning and identity; for them, acting and thinking theatre represented existential qualities that had helped them to find their place in life:

Many that do theatre, I think they have felt they have not fitted in so much. /. . ./ They feel a bit weird you know . . . I think. /. . ./ I don't know, but I think it was a pretty constant thing with the people I have talked to and done theatre with; they have always felt that they have not fitted in, in different contexts. But when they do theatre, they feel like they fit in. (Anna, Biographical Interview)

Anna thinks of herself and her friends as belonging to a collective of "theatre people" to whom playing a part and acting have always been important tools for self-expression and belonging, though this has not always been appreciated by peers, and finding like-minded persons has sometimes been a demanding search. Nonetheless, choosing another life path was never an option since theatre embraces so many vital areas of life. The engagement helps to understand both oneself and others; it forms a basis for self-reflection as well as for grasping the outer world. As Johanna puts it:

The theatre has shaped me a lot . . . I have gained a lot of friends through the theatre. Also, I have not talked about creativity and imagination, but I realised a while ago, it is not something one is born with, you have to expand your imagination, and everything I have gained through theatre means a lot. /. . ./ And it is invaluable, it is awesome to be with people who think the same and who like exploring the same things. (Johanna, Biographical Interview)

From a biographical perspective, finding these friends who "think the same" proved to be easier with age. When choosing further education after compulsory school, several of the group members ended up in a school that offered programmes for studies in theatre and music. Anna describes the difference:

It was a huge change; it was really fun to get there. It was a completely different atmosphere at the whole school; it was a completely different thing because people had also chosen it, as I had. And largely for the same reason . . . all of a sudden, I experienced that I could discuss things with people, things I thought were interesting, and they understood. I remember, I became friends with someone who had listened to the same music as I had, and I had never met someone who listened to the music that I did. So, then it was really like "What!?", it was awesome. (Anna, Biographical Interview)

It was at this school that several members of the group first met and formed their mutual theatre project. As mentioned, this was organized within the Cultural School, through which the group was provided with professional drama teaching as well as training facilities. This support was important in order to realize and embody the position as "theatre people", and, when leaving the Cultural School, the group struggled with all issues and practical matters they now had to take care of on their own.

The difficulties of maintaining the group were connected not just to the new independent position in relation to the Cultural School but also to a transitional phase that many young people encounter in their twenties. The Kolektiv members had to decide on important questions concerning what life course to follow, such as: Should I go to university? Find a job? Move or stay? Take the chance to travel and live abroad? When we worked with the group during the second stage of the empirical studies, the participants were really at a crossroads. This made them reflect much on

life issues, both in retrospect and concerning the future. In this context, taking part in the research project was helpful:

> *It has been analytical, in a good way; we have been thinking about our work more than we would have done if we would have been outside this* [the research project]*; then I think we would have taken every week as it came. But now we got the opportunity to tie together what we are doing and perhaps become more aware of what it is that we want with ourselves.* (Johanna, Group Interview 2)

Many of the reflections in the group had to do with learning aspects of being engaged in theatre and acting. Using the theatre metaphor of "the scene", in the following we will present these considerations in a three-level structure based on the typology of multidimensional learning presented earlier.

Scene One: Learning in the External World

> The group is sitting on the floor, reading and cutting out articles from newspapers that Gunilla (the teacher) has brought with her. Members start discussing common themes that have caught their attention, which all deal with problems of various kinds: war, racist politics, citizenship, gender issues.
> Theater Kolektiv field notes, The Box, 10/10/2016.

The members of Theater Kolektiv saw themselves as politically aware persons, and they were deeply involved in socio-political issues concerning, for example, sexism, racism, citizenship and identity. To them, it was important that their acting should be part of, and reflect, this engagement. A play should have something to say and, while still at the Culture School, they methodologically investigated media to find contemporary material that could be transformed into dramatic performance. As they saw it, the theatre was exceptionally well suited for dealing with the complexity of current issues:

> *It's like this: I think the theatre is a forum where you can process big, difficult questions. Everything from mental illness to world war. Because it's such a beneficial forum to bring up this stuff in, from all ages.* (Group discussion)

As another group member puts it:

> *So, the theatre is really . . . it can target an individual level and it can target a societal level. There are very few limits in theatre. You can influence someone on an individual level and bring up something that is difficult for people. And you can address societal problems, and I think it's a very good way to also feel involved in society. That you get involved in depicting society through an art form that you like. And as one can develop in private as well as, as a person.* (Group discussion)

In the view of the group, theatre work carries the possibilities of expressing concerns and ideas about important issues on all levels. Through this, engagement in society and personal maturation may happen at the same time. This fusion between the individual and the collective is crucial because it represents an existential dimension of youth participation: a lived citizenship (Kallio et al., 2020).

However, these expressive qualities of the theatre were just one side of what the group members wanted to achieve; they also emphasized the possibilities of impression, that is, to make people reflect, be affected and, perhaps, change their minds:

> *I think you can influence people's knowledge, people's opinions, people's way of thinking . . . you can influence people to give them a little seed for a new thought or idea by telling them a story or showing something to them.* (Johanna, Biographical Interview)

From a learning perspective, the ambition of Theater Kolektiv was to learn a great deal about contemporary societal problems and how these could be presented as important issues that touch and influence the audience. This requires a deep understanding of social interaction and involves a great diversity of situations, relationships and communication. However, as an actor, it also has a very practical side: to learn how to portray people, events and moods in a multifaceted but at the same time clear way. One way the group used to practise this was by always starting their meetings with various improvisation exercises. These sessions were often based on pressing issues such as tolerance for functional variation, exclusion of homosexuals and the living conditions of beggars. During rehearsals, the group discussed and analysed how different characters could be portrayed:

> *How can we address a stereotype such as a fourteen-year-old girl? Does she just wear pink, does she just talk like this* [uses a squeaky voice]*? So, all that, how can we bring that up and make clear that it is a stereotype? We do not mean that it should be, or is, like this, but we kind of push the issue to somehow show the absurdity of it. So, this is really very central: to be clear about whether to show a stereotype or not and where to draw the line.* (Group discussion)

There was constant effort within the group to develop as actors and refine their ability to bring the external world into the theatre, represent it on stage and communicate something significant back to the audience. The support they received from the Culture School was essential in this respect, both for the professional leadership and because it provided them with a recognized basis in relation to external contacts. When the group tried to advertise their project independently after leaving the school, they found out that being young was often equated with being inexperienced:

> *I guess we have noticed how hard it is for young people to be participants, if we do not fight a lot for it. Most people know that, it's not just about stepping outside the door and "Yeah, now we have a show and a scene and oh so good, and a big audience." Instead, we have to struggle extra for it /. . ./ If we call up the people with power within theatre then it's like "Yeah, yeah, so you are a theatre group and you are about 20 years old, yeah, yeah, do you have any experiences of it from before?" Straight away, there is such a disinterested tone* (Anna, Group Interview 2)

Another part of the group's learning about the external world was that the realm of theatre proved to have barriers to entry, which they had not met before. In fact, as already mentioned, being young was linked to a number of difficulties when trying to keep the theatre project going:

> *I think it's a bad age period, the age period most of us are in, to pull something together, because people do different things all the time. Perhaps starting education, or getting a new job and so, then everything becomes chaotic.* (Johanna, Group Interview 2)

The life course is affected by structuring processes in society which link age to certain developmental stages. On the one hand, youth is a very open period when much is possible. On the other, it is a phase when important decisions have to be made and time must not be wasted on unnecessary things but rather invested in plans for a functioning and productive future. During the time when we followed Theater Kolektiv, some members left, temporarily or permanently. Obviously, it was a difficult time to keep the group together. This had to do with external reasons but was also related to the internal processes of the group, to which we now turn.

Scene Two: Learning in the Shared World

> The group is discussing internal dynamics. Anna says that everyone needs to step forward more; everyone needs to feel free to speak; members of the group cannot continue being as shy and cautious as they have been (in the concrete planning phase of the work) so far. The group agrees that everyone needs to step up and participate even more; the forum is open for that.
> Theater Kolektiv field notes, The Box, 5/10/2016.

An important goal for the theatre group was to put on a play of their own: to carry out a whole performance. They were very happy with their improvisation exercises and very skilled in conducting them, but they wanted to do something that was more outwardly directed and would answer to their socio-political ambitions. This process started while the group was still at the Culture School and continued afterwards and became a symbol of their ability to cope with the new, independent position:

> *Because this is the first performance that we will put on, whether it will be now or in three years. And then you want to do everything, you want to show that "we are good" and "we can do it". That sort of thinking accomplishes things. We want to show that we can do this without a teacher. And I think we have also learned that . . . it will really require that we take it as it comes*. (Group discussion)

Taking on a play affected relations within the group. Processes of different kinds were triggered and developed in various directions. During the interviews, when the group recall what has happened, they paint a rather complex picture of setbacks and progress. One thing was that they had problems keeping the group together, and it became clear that there were differences concerning aspirations and motivations between group members:

> **Zulmir** *What have been the biggest obstacles along the way?*
> **Petra** *Group dynamics, I think.*
> **Anna** *Yeah, it has looked different every time actually.*
> **Zulmir** *Lack of continuity. . .?*
> **Petra** *Hmm, we have had a core group that has been there often and so. And then people have come and gone.*
> **Gunilla** *Different levels of ambition, it sounds like.*
> **Johanna** *Yes.*
> **Petra** *I think we had different ideas, with regards to what we wanted with the group.* (Group Interview 2)

One thing the group discovered was that there were so many things to deal with in order to set up a play. It concerned all aspects of a performance: script, distribution of roles, direction, staging and reaching an audience. It became very clear that their position inside the Culture School had been quite sheltered:

> *I think we jumped to fast perhaps, in this safe world of the Culture School where it was like "Here are your lines; that's the only thing you have to focus on" to "Now you create a full show." I think so; it was too big of a jump perhaps.* (Johanna, Group Interview 2)

A priority was to have a script to start out from. First, the group tried to write something on their own, but this proved problematic:

> *I think every idea we have tried, we have given it a couple of weeks, and then we have analysed it and felt that . . . for example writing our own script. We discovered the difficulties with that. No one actually has any experience of writing scripts, and we wanted to fill it with a lot of substance, and at the same time we needed to make choices. Then we felt we should move on to an already written script instead, because that is also work, deciding how to interpret a script.* (Johanna, Group Interview 2)

When the difficulties of writing a script became overwhelming, they found an already written play that was available. The story in this script was about a young girl who was going to write a kind of farewell text to her family. However, the content of this text was not fixed in the script, so this allowed the group to fill it with their own material. Here was an opportunity to highlight all the contemporary issues and problems that the group wanted to put across on stage. However, again the divisive ideas within the group came to the surface:

> *The big change in the group happened, I think, when we decided to work with an already written script. /. . ./ Because this thing, each of us having a responsibility for a certain part, already there we had ten different understandings about what it meant. Someone perhaps thought "Then I have 100% ownership of this part, and I decide exactly what everyone will do and I can direct it." And someone perhaps thought "I can improvise, and I can also improvise in your parts," so there were very, very different perspectives. And then it was this script thing, doing an existing script . . . There was also a small conflict, if one can call it that. Because some people didn't want to do it, others could imagine doing it, and a third party didn't even take it into consideration. So, I think that was pretty much what changed the group.* (Johanna, Group Interview 1)

The task of putting on a play forced the group to introduce a division of labour, which had not structured their mutual theatre project before. This process highlighted individual characteristics and challenged the idea of keeping the group together and making decisions on a collective basis. The new situation also forced the group to reflect on important distinctions between work and leisure, on the one hand, and being friends and workmates, on the other:

> *It is so delicate, how to deal with that, you can view this as work and think that we are almost like colleagues, and now it is not the 'private' Petra sitting here, but . . . what we do here has only to do with the work, and what happened this weekend we leave aside. That is how we perhaps think, but then someone else will think that this is totally irrelevant, why should we do that, this is just a leisure time thing, it ought to be more personal. And no matter how hard we work towards becoming work colleagues, it is impossible to ignore that we are friends. So, it has been tricky in many ways.* (Petra, Group Interview 2)

During the time that we followed Theater Kolektiv, they did not manage to put on any performance. The task was too big and the members of the group were too divided between all kinds of obligations and possibilities. However, the hope that the group would survive lingered on:

> We are on our way in different directions. I think everyone is doing different things: no one knows where they are going to be during the summer, no one knows where they will be during the autumn. I think that is where we are at the moment, standing still while at the same time we know that we . . . now I am talking for myself, but it feels like we know that we would like to make it work as a group. (Petra, Group Interview 2)

In spite of all the obstacles and difficulties that the group encountered during their work on a play, their evaluation of this period was not that it had resulted in failure. Instead, they emphasized how much they had learnt and that this had helped them to develop:

> Yes, but we also felt that we tried a lot of things; we dared to try writing our own material, we dared to improvise, we dared to try to create a play of our own and to take over a manuscript. All the time we tried different things, and through this we moved forward. (Petra, Group Interview 2)

> Every discussion has been good for our group, in order to move us forward and make us realise that it does not have to be in a certain way . . . we have dared to try things out. (Anna, Group Interview 2)

The overall feeling was that they had been brave in not hesitating to take on new tasks and try out unfamiliar roles. To them, this showed the meaning of participation on a group level:

> And then that everyone in the group is involved in their own way; that everyone is needed for something to be done. This is also a form of participation, that you come to the meetings and show that you care and fight for the group. (Petra, Group Interview 2)

Scene Three: Learning in the Inner World

> The group continues with an improvisation exercise called 'The Class Party' which involves the participants playing opposites to themselves and their personality.
> Theater Kolektiv field notes, The Box, 17/10/2016.

To the members of Theater Kolektiv, acting was not just a way to explore the socio-political issues of their times; it was also a way to explore themselves as persons: to get to know more about an inner world of feelings and identifications but also to find out the limits and possibilities of bodily expression:

> It is everything about the theatre. Learning so much about myself, what I can do with my body, what I feel, what I can easily play and relate to, what I cannot relate to or what I am afraid of. (Johanna, BI)

The goal was for self-awareness to grow. The theatre helped them to mentally process things they had gone through and to relate to the emotional landscapes of other people:

When I come to the theatre, I can process everything that I experience and feel. And then I can put myself into feelings or situations, or how I have seen that other people feel, how I feel. So, it's therapy as well. (Group discussion)

The therapeutic capability of the theatre had much to do with a twofold, circular process of acting out and taking in. On stage it was possible to assume all kinds of roles and positions and to use strong expressions both verbally and bodily. The improvisation exercises, in particular, allowed for this. However, since the expressive position changed between the actors involved, all the participants continuously had to take in what the others acted out. This reciprocal process could become quite obtrusive, and the group often discussed what they had experienced after the session had ended. Such discussions helped each member to gain from the exercise, and it was possible to clear out lingering doubts.

Several of the group members saw acting as a very natural and long-standing trait in their personality. They had always loved to "mess around":

I mean as long as I can remember I have liked theatre, to mess around and have fun and do weird voices, and I really like being a clown in different contexts. (Anna, BI)

As a consequence, imagining a future career as a professional actor was close at hand. However, experiences from outside the theatre could change this:

Sometimes I think that perhaps it is not the theatre as such that I like. For a while I was determined that I would work as an actor, but now I am not at all that sure. Now I work with children with disabilities, and I use my theatre a lot in that work. Not that anyone can see that I am acting because I am not, but I am using things I have taken from the theatre in my work. (Johanna, BI)

The insight that Johanna describes is that working as an actor does not have to depend on a theatre, a stage and a play. When acting is truly integrated with one's personality, it can be disconnected from theatre props, and the everyday world becomes the stage. And nobody will realize that this is happening; it will just be a part of social life (cf. Goffman, 1959/2009).

Discussion

We were more or less thrown out of a secure place, from having a confident leader, and then just bang, now we are independent, a bit like leaving home. /. . ./ So, learning in terms of . . . yeah, but in terms of that it does not always have to lead to something tangible; I mean what you say in January does not need to hold in May; things change all the time. And that does not mean it's a failure. /. . ./ It can be part of the learning.
Group Interview 2.

Youth as a social category in the contemporary West is sometimes characterized as being under cross pressure between structuring forces of subordination on the one side and autonomy on the other (cf. Jones, 2009). We can see this struggle among the young members of Theater Kolektiv. There are several liberating factors in their lives. They have recently left school and have time and space to indulge in individual

development and personal interests. It is a golden opportunity to put acting and the theatre at the centre of their social activities and to realize their dream of putting on a play of their own.

However, they gradually grasp that this commitment not just opens up possibilities; it is also connected to new forms of limitations. An independent theatre project contains an abundance of tasks and obligations that have to be solved; things they have previously received support to deal with. The new-found freedom is therefore exercised within a restricting and time-consuming framework of activities and decisions. They also meet key figures in the world of theatre who are not at all impressed by young people's efforts and enthusiasm. Furthermore, aside from acting there are many exciting things to try, such as travel and short studies abroad. The time for theatre activities thus has competition. Time is also not as free as it seems: the future attracts their attention. The youth phase is temporary and should not be spent too carelessly. There are duties and demands for usefulness to take into consideration. It becomes important to really use the time in the way one wants, and the members of Theater Kolektiv make different choices, which complicates group cohesion.

In this way, a new interplay arises between aspects of demands and opportunities, which *reverses the spheres of freedom and dependence*. Previously, it was the formal institution of the school that represented dependence and the theatre project that signified free and self-selected activities. Now, formal obligations are low, and instead the voluntary theatre project has become quite a demanding dimension of the young people's lives. To some, this means that the pleasure has gone, so they leave the group.

Obviously, this is a time that changes and strains the relationships within the group. To some extent this has to do with the fact that it is theatre in which they engage. As Atkinson et al. (2013: 495) point out, performative art is often characteristically *authority based*. There is learning and a ranking order between people with more or less experience and a division of labour that marks different positions. Not least, the director is central. This is what the theatre group discovers when they start working on their performance. They have to distribute the tasks between the members of the group, and this complicates the relationships. Through this process, existing differences concerning ideals and the seriousness of the investment become clear. The question of power comes to the surface: How should the decision-making be organized and how should conflicts that arise be dealt with? This becomes extra difficult in a group in which the relationships are fundamentally based on friendship and a shared interest.

Although the performance does not take place, the core of the theatre group insist that they have had a period of *profound and meaningful learning*. As we have shown, we have been able to point to all levels based on the model we have used: learning in the external world, in a shared world and in an inner one. However, these levels should not obscure the striking fact that learning is so often simultaneous and multidimensional. The formation of a social reality on stage means that so much happens at once: the presentation of a social issue, the assuming of roles, the expression of meaning, the emotional outburst, the reception of the opponent's

acting, etc. Macro, meso and micro layers are constantly interwoven and relate to one another. Goffman's use of the theatre metaphor is about precisely this, and that is why it is so compelling. What is "real" and when is someone "genuine" in a world of constant acting? The discovery that Johanna relates to about being able to use theatrical expressions in her work with young people with disabilities illustrates this.

At the same time, the group members constantly highlight how much their project is about and how it provides space for *participation*. This is partly internal, within the group. The fact that everyone contributes, does his or her part, is a form of participation on a very basic level. However, there is also much more externally directed participation, which we have previously linked to the concept of *a lived citizenship*. This has been defined by Lister (2007: 55) as "how people understand and negotiate rights and responsibilities, belonging and participation", and she adds a quotation from Hall and Williamson (1999, p. 2) that it is also about "the meaning that citizenship actually has in people's lives and the ways in which people's social and cultural backgrounds and material circumstances affect their lives as citizens".

At the core of Theater Kolektiv, lies the engagement in theatre and the project that the group tried to carry through was really an effort to negotiate a space to problematize and embody issues concerning rights, responsibilities and belonging, on behalf of both themselves and others. In their discussion on lived citizenship, Kallio et al. (2020: 717–718) suggest four dimensions as a framework for the concept: spatiality, intersubjectivity, performed aspects and affective qualities. Obviously, the practices of Theater Kolektiv that we have explored in this chapter fit perfectly within this framework.

In light of this, it is easy to understand the optimistic assessment of their effort that the group members articulated at the end of the research period. They did not manage to put a play about everyday life issues on the theatre stage, but they managed to stage the theatricality of lived citizenship characteristic of the dynamic life phase they are in.

References

Atkinson, P. (2006). *Everyday arias. An operatic ethnography*. AltaMira Press.

Atkinson, P., Watermeyer, R., & Delamont, S. (2013). Expertise, authority and embodied pedagogy: Operatic masterclasses. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 34*(4), 487–503.

Bečević, Z., Liljeholm Hansson, S., Forkby, T., & Andersson, B. (2017). *Youth participation: National country report*. Partispace.

Becker, H. S. (1974). Art as collective action. *American Sociological Review, 39*(6), 767–776.

Becker, H. S. (1982). *Art worlds*. University of California Press.

Blumer, H. (1969/1998). *Symbolic interactionism. Perspective and method*. University of California Press.

Fornäs, J., Lindberg, U., & Sernhede, O. (1995). *In Garageland. Rock, youth and modernity*. Routledge.

Giddens, A., & Sutton, P. W. (2014). *Sociologi*. Studentlitteratur.

Goffman, E. (1959/2009). *Jaget och maskerna. En studie i vardagslivets dramatik* [The presentation of self in everyday life]. Norstedts.

Goffman, E. (1961/1991). *Asylums. Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. Penguin Books Limited.

Goffman, E. (1967/2005). *Interaction ritual*. Anchor.

Goffman, E. (1971/2011). *Stigma. Den avvikandes roll och identitet* [Stigma. Notes on the management of spoiled identity]. Norstedts.

Hall, T., & Williamson, H. (1999). *Citizenship and community*. Youth Work Press.

Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture. The meaning of style*. Routledge.

Joas, H., & Knöbl, W. (2009). *Social theory: Twenty introductory lectures*. Cambridge University Press.

Jones, G. (2009). *Youth*. Polity Press.

Kallio, K. P., Wood, E. B., & Häkli, J. (2020). Lived citizenship: Conceptualising an emerging field. *Citizenship Studies, 24*(6), 713–729.

Lister, R. (2007). Inclusive citizenship: Realizing the potential. *Citizenship Studies, 11*(1), 49–61.

McMahon, G., Percy-Smith, P., Thomas, N., Bečević, Z., Liljeholm Hansson, S., & Forkby, T. (2018). *Action research with young people. Comparative report*. Partispace.

Mead, H. G. (1934/1967). *Mind, self and society*. University of Chicago Press.

Sernhede, O. (2011). School, youth culture and territorial stigmatization in Swedish metropolitan districts. *Young, 19*(2), 159–180.

Walther, A., Batsleer, J., Loncle, P., & Pohl, A. (2020). *Young people and the struggle for participation. Contested practices, power and pedagogies in public spaces*. Routledge.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice. Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.

Björn Andersson   is Associate Professor and Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the Department of Social Work, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Zulmir Bečević   is PhD in Childhood Studies and Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the Department of Social Work, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Chapter 8
Mimesis and Sharing: Learning Political Imagination in Everyday Interactions

Ilaria Pitti

Abstract Concerning youth engagement in institutionalized settings, academic and institutional discourses have clearly stressed the need to "train" young people to participation. Activism in grass-root social movements organizations (SMOs) is, on the contrary, often interpreted as a "call" that needs only commitment and impetus to be fulfilled. While not dismissing the relevance of passion and spontaneity in informal civic and political practices of participation, the chapter starts from the assumption that activism requires specific skills and competencies to be performed in an efficient way and discusses two mechanisms through which these skills are acquired in daily interactions between activists. Practices of "mimesis", reflexive imitation of others' behaviours, and "sharing" – intimate moments of confidentiality between activists – are explored as experiences of informal learning through which young people acquire "political imagination". The chapter draws on data collected between 2015 and 2019 through participant observations and biographical interviews conducted with young activists participating in two left-wing SMOs in Italy and Sweden.

Keywords Youth activism · Everyday interactions · Everyday learning · Informal learning · Political imagination

Introduction

Youth participation research has shown a growing interest in studying the pathways leading young people to develop participatory actions. The concept of "political socialization" (Gordon & Taft, 2011) has been built around a vast literature that explains and analyses mechanisms of transmission and negotiation of political attitudes and values between parents and children and, more broadly, between adults and young people. These studies have shown, for example, how growing up in

I. Pitti (✉)
University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy
e-mail: ilaria.pitti2@unibo.it

politically progressive communities and being exposed to certain political standards and practices affect the political attitudes of people during their lives in early childhood and adolescence. Growing up in politically engaged families can lead to higher levels, for instance, of interest in political issues and of civic and political involvement.

Lately, the "civic education" paradigm (Sears & Levy, 2003) has widened the perspective of classic political socialization theories. The civic education model has contributed to broadening the interest of academics beyond the time of primary socialization. As Petrovic et al. (2014: 8) pointed out, more focus is now paid to the balance between what people learn during their youth and what is learned during the rest of their lives, and political socialization has been taken into account as a lifelong learning process. In this perspective, the model of civic education has contributed to supporting analyses on socialization agencies alternative to family, such as the peer group, as well as on the mechanisms by which individuals develop skills, knowledge and experience of citizenship during their youth, adulthood and old age.

This shift of attention has also contributed to the proliferation of a constructivist model within the field of civic education. The constructivist model has led academics to abandon the concept of socialization as a one-way mechanism where adults are responsible for teaching youth engagement. The debate on civic education questioned what was described as the "deficit model of political socialization" (Torney-Purta & Wilkenfeld, 2009; Kahne & Sporte, 2008), i.e. the notion of young people as "empty glasses" that must be filled by adults. In doing so, the paradigm of civic education has recognized that young people do political socialization for themselves (Earl et al., 2017). According to Younnis et al. (2002), adults and their institutions would provide young people with "raw materials – knowledge, models, reflective matter, and various forms of feedback" (Younnis et al., 2002: 133), but it is then the youth themselves "who synthesize this material, individually and collaboratively, in ways that make sense to them" (Ibid.).

The political socialization and civic education models were mainly applied to youth engagement in social movement organizations (hereinafter SMOs), respectively, to stress the impact of socialization on the development of activism and to shed light on the political competencies that can be gained by young people through their participation in social movements.

Social movement studies have explored the biographical pathways leading young people to become involved in movement politics and the impact that growing up in politicized environments (families, schools, urban areas) has on later life's participation in movement politics. Research has shown how the family histories of activists frequently involve a childhood marked by their parents' vigorous activism. Through their example and a series of everyday behaviours based on their political beliefs, parents would pass a propensity to activism (Pitti, 2018) to their children. Moreover, the networks in which parents participate will become a socializing force of their own, as illustrated, for example, in a study conducted by Kaplan and Shapiro (1998) on the life stories of "red diaper babies" who grew up in American

communist environments during the 1950s. Finally, SMOs have been regarded as spaces where young people's civic skills are nurtured, that is, spaces where young people can acquire a set of competencies and information relevant to the formation of their civic identity and the exercise of their rights as citizens. In this perspective, SMOs will enable young people to discover themselves as citizens through various processes that would promote a shift from the individual to the collective identity (Giugni, 2004). In other words, SMOs will teach young people to identify and recognize collective values and beliefs that relate their individual circumstances to the past and present (Younnis, 1997; Younnis & Yates, 2007) and to a wider social and cultural scenario (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). Involvement in SMOs would also teach collaborative problem-solving to young people (Kirhner, 2007), enabling them to work together collectively to have an impact on their lives and those of others. As suggested by Van Dyke and Dixon (2013), engagement in social movements enables participating individuals to gain an "activist human capital" through the partnerships they build with other activists. In fact, the engagement between activists would lead to the development of a set of tangible competencies in terms of organizing techniques that would help maintain their commitment and that would also be beneficial in their private lives.

A notion that engagement in social movements involves expertise, competencies and skills (Petrovic et al., 2014: 10) distinguishes all these perspectives. This brief analysis of the literature, however, highlights how the attention of scholars has been placed either on the processes of socialization occurring before the beginning of involvement in movement politics (i.e. how socialization in the family guarantees the acquisition of certain skills that are useful to activism) or on the impact that participation in SMOs can have in terms of skills that are expendable elsewhere, in more formal and institutionalized settings of engagement. In other words, while the importance of skills and competencies in activism has been illustrated by literature on youth in protest politics, the interest continues to be primarily based on the *before* and the *after*, rather than on what happens *during* the engagement in the social movement.

In fact, there is a lack of research on the specific processes and activities through which young people acquire the skills that are needed to participate in movement politics. The aim of this chapter is to contribute to this debate by proposing an in-depth study of the processes of everyday learning occurring between the young people participating in two radical-left social movements. Relying on Guzman-Concha (2015), radical social movements are here defined as collective political groups defined by three distinctive elements: they pursue an agenda of radical changes that would impact elite interests; they pursue their political demands through a repertoire of confrontational and unconventional political practices; and they gradually adopt counter-cultural identities that frame and explain unconventional goals. Radical social movements do not aim to abolish government and its institutions, even though they promote radical political and social reforms and use unorthodox (and often unlawful) means of action.

Drawing on an ethnography conducted between 2015 and 2019 in Italy and in Sweden, the chapter is especially interested in evaluating the processes of everyday socialization of new members within the observed SMOs, which will be considered to address the following research question: *How do everyday interactions contribute to the training of new members for the role of activist*? Participatory trajectories of young activists within the two social movements will be used to illustrate how everyday sociality (Maffesoli, 1996) contributes to the development of skills, competencies and abilities that are deemed important to be considered a "good activist".

The study of social movement engagement trajectories through the lenses of everyday interactions has interesting ramifications for the understanding of both youth activism and social movements. First, this perspective of analysis emphasizes the importance of skills, abilities and competencies in influencing the course of youth participation in political movements. In doing so, this approach challenges a still prevalent "romanticized" representation of activism that sees engagement in protest politics as "naturally" arising from a mixture of vocational and ideological aspects. While the romanticized outlook on movement politics implies that every young person could become an activist if the person concerned has the right cause to fight for, the analysis of socialization for youth participation occurring within movement politics sheds light on the relevant investment on learning that is required for a "successful" political militancy. On a second level, analysing learning processes in movement politics implies understanding SMOs as sources of alternative knowledge production (Hill, 2004), which are capable of transmitting a set of skills which are essential for the survival of the movement itself. This approach of analysis contributes to the debate on the functioning and structuring of SMOs as alternative learning sites and educational organizations.

The chapter begins with an introduction of the case studies aimed at broadly presenting the two groups' history and main characteristics. The following analysis explores, first of all, what characteristics are deemed relevant to be recognized as a good activist within the two groups. In particular, the study uses the concept of "political imagination" to summarize a series of character skills that, according to the young members of the groups, emerge as the most relevant qualities in activism. Arguing that political imagination is a learnable skill rather than an innate individual capacity, the analysis presents two processes – respectively, *mimesis* and *sharing* – through which political imagination is transmitted through the everyday interactions between the two SMOs' members. Conclusion discusses the implication of these results for understanding processes of knowledge production in everyday life and activism.

Methodology: Presentation of the Cases and Research Design

The materials on which this article is based have been collected within the framework of the Horizon 2020 project "Partispace" – which aimed at analysing formal, non-formal and informal possibilities for youth participation in different European

cities – and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie project "Youthblocs", which focused its attention on the analysis of young people's illegal practices of participation.[1] In particular, the data considered for this chapter were gathered between 2015 and 2019 through a qualitative comparative research performed on two youth SMOs, respectively, based in Bologna (Italy) and Malmö (Sweden).

This paragraph's intention is to broadly introduce the reader to the two SMOs before discussing the processes of formal and informal training occurring within them. More than providing elements for an international comparison, the combined consideration of the two groups is aimed to shed light on similarities in the observed processes of training and education to activism occurring in the two case studies.

I will refer to the Italian SMOs through the fictional name of "Lucha". Lucha's history starts at the end of 2012, when a group of young people decided to occupy an abandoned old barrack in the centre of Bologna. The building became the organization's "headquarters", but it also served as lodging for many of the activists. Over the next 5 years, it was transformed into a "social center" (in Italian: *centro sociale*)[2] where various projects for and with the local community were created. Within Lucha, one might find a self-managed migrant shelter, a weekly market for farmers, a micro-brewery, an organic greenhouse, a pizzeria, a library with a study space, a bike repair store and a kindergarten. Moreover, seminars, workshops and cultural events (e.g. concerts, art exhibits) were regularly organized on the centre's premises.

Lucha was largely enjoyed by the local inhabitants of Bologna, but due to the unlawful status of the *centro sociale*, the relations between the social centre, local political institutions and police authorities were marked by strong disagreements. The dispute with the authorities resulted in the SMO being evicted from the barrack in August 2017. A rally was organized after the expulsion, and more than 10,000 people gathered in Bologna to call for the reopening of Lucha. Authorities have declined to accept the possibility of keeping Lucha inside the occupied barracks but have given the group a new space where some of the old projects have been re-started along with new ones. At the beginning of its existence, Lucha involved just a group of 20–30 young activists with previous experience in movement politics. However, around 150 individuals, mainly aged between 20 and 25, were participating in the activities of the social centre in August 2017, and Lucha still involve a large community of about 100 activists.[3]

The second case study on which this chapter is based is a Malmö (Sweden)-based radical-left SMO, here fictionally called "Gain". The birth of this movement dates back to the time immediately following the G8 meeting in Gothenburg in 2001,

[2]The term "centri sociali" refers, in the Italian context, to a particular kind of political experience. In general, social centres are abandoned buildings that are squatted and converted into self-managed and counter-cultural spaces that propose political and social initiatives (Mudu, 2012; Genova, 2018).

[3]Due to the informal nature and fluid participation that characterise SMOs, it is not possible to know the exact number of people taking part in the activities.

which is generally regarded as a crucial turning point for Sweden's entire political scene when it comes to social movements and grass-roots political initiatives (Jämte, 2013; Peterson, 2015; Wannerhag et al., 2017). Many Swedish social movements engaged in a reflexive reconsideration of their position in the public sphere after the G8 meeting that led to an effort to organize broader segments of the population (Jämte, 2013; Peterson et al., 2017; Schierup et al., 2017). It is at that time that Gain was established and began to evolve in many Swedish cities seeking to reinvent its radical-left identity to engage segments of the population that are not active in movements (despite being interested in politics) because they are "intimidated" by radical SMOs' more controversial activities or ideas. In Malmö, thanks to the city's traditional left-wing identity, Gain has found fertile ground for its growth. The group has managed to engage an increasing number of people in a few years and has become one of the city's strongest and largest grass-roots political groups. When this research was carried out, the group was composed of around 60–70 participants, primarily between 20 and 30 years of age.

In both case studies, data have been gathered through ethnography and biographical interviews with the activists. More specifically, concerning Lucha, ethnography started in 2015 and ended in 2019. During this time span, 25 biographical interviews were carried through with the young activists participating in the centre's activities. For the Swedish case study, observations were conducted between 2016 and 2018 and combined with 20 biographical interviews with members of the group. Thanks to the conduct of extended observations over a period of time spanning several years, the research is enriched by the in-depth insight I have gained in the case studies. While I have defined my professional position from the very beginning, the continued participation and similarity (in terms of age, political views and social background) with the young activists participating in the two SMOs has led to the establishment of strong relationships of friendship and mutual confidence.

Political Imagination as a Learnable Skill

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is especially important to stress that both observed SMOs were composed of a small number of activists having previous extensive experience in movement politics (I will refer to them as *senior activists*) and a large number of participants inexperienced in movement politics (I will refer to them as *junior activists*). Junior activists were regularly recruited by the two SMOs through "calls for volunteers" targeting specifically inexperienced people. This is in line with the groups' general intention to open movement politics to people who were not already involved in the radical left-wing scene of the two cities. This specific characteristic of the groups allows for analysing the processes through which junior activists were socialized and trained for the role of the "good activist" and how the everyday relationships between senior and junior activists influenced this.

This analytical goal requires an attempt to describe the ideal model of an activist that the participants should strive at. In other words, what do the two groups mean by being a "good activist"?

While passion and emotional involvement in the cause were certainly approved qualities, the permanence of the activists in the groups and their growth within the groups' hierarchies was facilitated first and foremost by the acquisition and demonstration of what can be defined as a capacity for *political imagination*. The concept of political imagination refers to the capacity to read any situation strategically as a political opportunity. It refers to a mix of rationality, optimism, vision, persistence and flexibility, and this distinguishes the most promising activists:

> During the demonstration, Sven [one of the senior activists] has handed the microphone to Ilva [one the junior activists]; a sign of trust in her capacities as an activist. [...] She is young, and she has started to be involved in the group only few months ago, but people seem to like her and she has been charged with many tasks lately. [...] I ask Sven what he likes about Ilva as an activist and he says that it is "mostly, because she has vision". He tells me that Ilva has always "great, practicable ideas" stressing the word 'practicable'. When I ask what he does mean, he tells me that "it is about reading rationally the moment but elaborating creatively the situation. That is political eye". (Malmö, February 2017)

The capability for political imagination comprises, thus, a series of character skills or personal attributes that represent desirable qualities for certain activities (Foley, 1999). Indeed, when one's member showed capacity for political imagination, the other activists usually used expressions such as "having the right character" or the "right attitude" to explain why that member succeeded in being an activist:

> I discuss with Federica, one of the senior activists, about Andrea, a junior activist. Federica says she thinks he has the "right qualities" to "be more active", which means to be more than a volunteer. "He is intelligent, has big ideas, he is committed, etc. He has the right character. I think he could handle more responsibility". (Bologna, February 2018)

When it comes to personal attitudes, the general understanding is that these soft skills cannot be acquired as they would represent innate and unmodifiable individual qualities anticipating the involvement in movement politics. This perspective is largely responsible for the romanticized ideas which surround youth activism and portray young activists as "innately ready" for the unconventional forms of youth participation they practice. The young activists involved in this study strongly questioned this idealization that, in their perspective, not only didn't represent their experience but also contributed to distancing people from activism by creating a "*sacred aura*" around movement politics and the militant role:

> I did have Che Guevara's poster in my room, but there can be only one Che Guevara... and if people think that you need to be Che Guevara to do activism, then people will not join [...] We worked to make our image 'common', to look as much accessible as possible, to make it clear that normal people can be activists too. (Interview with Björn, senior activist, Malmö, April 2017)

The extensive observation of the skills and abilities praised in these movements shed light on the fact that these young people's ideal model of activist is rather different from the common image through which young activists are usually

described. In fact, political imagination emerges as a skill that can be acquired through participation rather than as an innate personal capacity:

> Marta: I am not an activist, you know. The real activists are [names of some senior activists].
> Researcher: And what makes them "real" activists?
> Marta: Experience, I would say. They have learnt to think as an activist, to understand situation as activists do.
> Researcher: And what do you mean exactly?
> Marta: I mean that they have spent so much time into this [movement politics] that they have learnt to see the world around them, anything around them, as something you can change through action and they always have ideas about what it could be done to change things [. . .] Sometimes it is exhausting [she laughs] [. . .].
> Researcher: what do you mean when you say that they have learnt this?
> Marta: That being an activist is not an immediate decision, like you step in a centro sociale and you are an activist. You can have interest, you can have passion, you can be smart and all you want, but you learn with time how to use your passion like an activist. . . otherwise you are just a 'tourist of the riot'".
> (Interview with Marta, junior activist, Bologna, June 2016)

From the above discussion, it is possible to understand political imagination as a set of skills that a person acquires through and during the involvement in movement politics, as well as the ending result of process through which one becomes aware about his or her political capacity. Learning to be an activist, in fact, is both a process of acquisition of competencies and a path to political self-consciousness and awareness. As stated by Bickford and Reynolds (2002: 230), people do not automatically "envision themselves as actors or agents in political arenas" but have to be encouraged and taught to see the political potential of their actions and to think themselves as activists. Similarly, Von Kotze (2012: 104) has argued that the "shift from mere critical to anticipatory consciousness [occurring in activism] can instil the hope and determination necessary for assuming agency, but it requires a slow process to feed and develop a fertile imagination". Starting from these premises, the next paragraph focuses specifically on the informal and everyday practices through which political imagination is acquired and transmitted between junior and senior members.

Learning to Be an Activist Through Everyday Interactions

In the two observed SMOs, learning emerges as a social practice: the aggregate of skills, competencies, knowledge and awareness that compose political imagination is continuously transmitted in the everyday interactions between junior and senior members. In order to understand processes of learning within SMOs, it is in fact necessary to adopt an extensive idea of where processes of socialization to activism happen and where knowledge is created. Indeed, understanding learning in activism implies to blur the boundaries between the more structured training activities and everyday knowledge production processes happening through the contacts between the members. While both groups organized "formal" program activities such as study groups and seminars on theories and issues relevant for the SMOs activities,

our attention focuses on informal training and everyday knowledge exchange processes. In particular, two everyday processes of learning will be analysed in this paragraph: *mimesis* and *sharing*.

When asking the young activists to explain how they learn for activism, they described it being based upon "just being there" (Interview with Simon, Malmö, March 2017). In other words, their answer consistently stresses how learning was mainly occurring through the involvement in the group's activities and, more specifically, through observing, listening and imitating what more experienced activists do. I refer to this process through the concept of *mimesis* (Billet, 2014; Harris, 2007), and the following quotes illustrate an example of this learning strategy:

> Me: "Would you say one needs to participate in a demonstration to be considered a good activist?".
> Stefano: "Yes. Overall, I would say yes. I think everybody here should participate in a No-Tav[4] demonstration".
> Me: "Why so?"
> Stefano: "Because you learn something in these events. You learn to deal with the risk, you learn to coordinate yourself with others under pressure, you learn to stay calm when the police provokes you. It's like a school".
> Me: "And how do you learn all this?"
> Stefano: "By looking and copying!"
> (Bologna, July 2018)

Both junior and senior activists involved in the two SMOs highlighted the relevance of imitation as a process of acquisition of the skills necessary to be considered a real activist. This is not surprising: as a process of learning, mimesis – observing and imitating – represents a basic form of socialization which occurs continuously in our everyday life. However, probably because of its trivial nature, mimesis is a largely taken for granted, overlooked and misrecognized practice in educational discourses on political socialization. As suggested by Billet (2014: 476), the downgrading of mimesis as a process of learning is common in schooled societies "because of the absence of direct interaction with teachers and other informed partners". Moreover, processes of learning through imitation are misrecognized because they are understood as a form of acritical copying, a "mindless mimicry" (Billet, 2014; Tomasello, 2004). In reality, the observations conducted in the two case studies show how mimesis requires "abilities to understand the context for the action, and individuals placing themselves in the position of observed actors, and to generate and reproduce those behaviours, actions, and practices with their own bodies" (Billet, 2014: 477). In other words, mimesis requires the actors to

---

[4]No TAV is an Italian protest movement born in the early nineties of the twentieth century. The movement criticizes the construction of infrastructures for high-speed rail (commonly known as TAV) between Italy and France. Over the years, the TAV infrastructures have become a symbol of the inadequate management of common goods and public spending. Many protest events and demonstrations have been organized by No TAV activists. Sometimes these events have resulted in harsh confrontations with police.

mediate between what they see and what they are: imitation, in these terms, emerges as both a challenging cognitive process and an exercise for self-reflection:

> Simona [a junior activist] tells me she thinks she has grown up a lot during the period she has spent in Lucha both "as an activist and as a person" [. . .] She tells me that this growth has been especially influenced by the time she has spent with Sara and Roberta [two senior activists]. She explains that it is because these two senior activists have a character that is similar to hers. "So, I would look at them and think that I could be like them or at least similar to them, because I am a little shyer than them". (Bologna, September 2017)

The process of learning occurring through observation and imitation assumes a key relevance in activism for two main reasons. On a first level, mimesis is a process initiated primarily by the observer (Jordan, 2011): it is not a top-down process of knowledge transmission "forced" by the mediation of an educator agent, but a learning activity initiated and realized by individuals autonomously. This characteristic makes this process of learning occurring through observation and imitation potentially empowering, as learning develops through people's own decision to act. In this perspective, imitation is in line with the principle of non-coercion, autonomy, critical thought and voluntariness which distinguish movement politics:

> According to Marcus, one must always avoid engaging people by telling them what they should do. He says that what they do [as senior activists] is mostly to provide unexperienced people with examples of what they could do. "You don't tell them 'do this'. . . You do it and then let them decide if they want to do it like you or in a different way" he says, adding that through actions, "you show them that it is possible to do something. . . and that is enough". (Malmö, March 2017)

On a second level, implying an exercise of self-reflection, mimesis fosters junior activists' capacity to reflect on their own position in society. Observation and imitation require the observer to actively engage with what they witness and to re-elaborate the learning materials provided by the senior activists on the basis of their identity. In this perspective, imitation requires the activists to participate in active meaning-making processes and to develop an awareness about who they are (in society) and what they can do (in society). In this perspective, this learning process is in line with movement politics' ambition to foster people's consciousness of their political position in society and of their potential power as agents of change:

> I ask Marina if she recalls her very first public speech. She tells me she was a junior activist at the time, and that she practiced the discourse a lot. She learnt how to speak at the microphone, working on her voice and tone by imitating the way most experienced activists speak during demonstrations: "alternating short sentences pronounced with a loud voice with moment of silence". [. . .] She says that she started from a previous speech given by a senior activist one year before because she "didn't know what to do", but then she changed it to make it more hers: "I used it as a basis, you know, like the first time you have to write a letter and you look at something on the Internet and then you add your ideas to it. You make it yours. . ." (Bologna, March 2019)

On the basis of the observations conducted, it was possible to notice a second process of everyday learning occurring in the observed SMOs through the practice of *sharing*. In this study, this term refers to a series of micro, intimate, daily interactions between activists through which young people would share their own stories,

experiences and difficulties with other members of the group. Sharing has to do with intimacy, trust and friendship and happens usually during informal dialogues occurring incidentally to more structured or common activities organized by the group:

> It is always difficult, for me, to understand when the young activists are exchanging personal confidences and when they are talking politically: indeed, the two levels seem always interconnected and impossible to clearly separate. [...] Today I was with Giorgia and Maura at the social centre to prepare some stuff for tomorrow's dinner with the migrants. Giorgia has suddenly started to tell us about the problems she is facing with her boyfriend [...] The conversation between Giorgia and Maura moved between Giorgia's personal problems and women's problems in a surprisingly fluid fashion: while remaining intimate, was filled with words such as "collective", "structural", and "domination". (Bologna, November 2016)

Although apparently disconnected from the practice of activism, these daily moments of intimacy between the members of the SMOs emerged as having a pivotal role in acquiring political imagination as they helped the involved junior activists in shifting the focus from the "I" to the "We". Indeed, in the interaction with the more experienced members of the group, they learnt to read their own condition and problems through collective lenses.

Three things happen through sharing: the participants in the interactions jointly produced experiential information and a shared idea of the problem; they compare themselves to the jointly constructed picture; and the active sharing of experience bestows a mutual recognition. In sharing, a conversion of personal experience into a collective experience occurs through a process similar to what happens when we talk about our experiences with a friend. However, because it occurs between two activists, sharing in SMOs' daily life also becomes a process of political socialization. This is noticeable looking at the solutions suggested to shared problems in these interactions, which are usually collective and political: in so doing, the interaction fosters political imagination:

> I met again with Jonas after one year from our first encounter. He, his partner and their kids have now moved into a house that they share with another couple and their kids. The house is huge and central, and I ask him how they came to choose such an uncommon arrangement. [...] He tells me they were experiencing difficulties in finding a place in Malmö and that he was extremely frustrated and stressed by that as he couldn't see a solution [...] He says that the "illumination" arrived while talking with Marcus, another activist, who made him realise "it was not just his issue". This sentence, he says, made him think to look for other people having the same problem to elaborate a "creative solution together". (Malmö, October 2018)

From a certain perspective, sharing is an everyday replication of the processes of learning happening in consciousness-raising groups that is in more structured activities aimed at fostering people's awareness of their condition through sharing stories. The practices of consciousness-raising groups became common in grass-roots political environments during the 1970s in the context of second-wave feminism and gay liberation. According to Larson (2014: 1), "[consciousness-raising's] essential element was the use of group process for the transformation of individual awareness from a personal to a political frame of reference. Specifically, it aims to explore the origin of dissatisfaction and unhappiness that was previously experienced as

resulting from a personal flaw to being the result of social oppression". While consciousness-raising groups are non-formal strategies of socialization and training to activism, sharing refers to a kind of interactions that blur the boundaries between young people's everyday life and activist life, but that similarly helps participants to connect their personal experience to the broader understanding of societal structure:

> Why I decided to stay in this group and not in other political groups [that are active in Bologna]? [. . .] and then also because I felt understood. There are spaces where to be an activist, you need to forget that you are a person, that you have problems too. [. . .] Here it is different: I can talk with people of my very personal problems without being considered silly. . . . (Interview with Sara, Bologna, June 2017)

Through the analysis of mimesis and sharing as everyday learning processes, this paragraph has sought to underscore the relevance of everyday learning processes occurring in social movement politics. This analytical approach does not intend to dismiss the relevance of more structured learning activities organized by SMOs to train their members to activism. Rather it aims to recognize the potential for learning existing in the "trivial vectors" (Maffesoli, 1996) of ordinary sociality and the links that connect everyday learning to more complex forms of socialization and education. In line with Maffesoli, it is in fact possible to argue that the basis for more structured forms of sociality can always be found in the "insurmountable nature of the everyday substrate": by observing learning occurring in the "informal underground centrality" (Maffesoli, 1996: 4) of everyday interactions between the members of the group, it is thus possible to understand more clearly also the practices of non-formal learning organized within these groups. Indeed, as suggested by Choudry (2015), most of the learning occurring in SMOs is informal and happens in the course of organizing and practicing activism, and "more structured forms and processes of education in movements are linked to incidental learning and knowledge production that take place through everyday interactions" (Choudry, 2015: 77).

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the processes of learning occurring in two grass-roots radical-left SMOs, the present chapter has sought to underscore the significance of social movements as alternative learning settings (Foley, 1999). The idea that learning occurs beyond formal institutions is not new, but surprisingly few scholars have focused their attention on what young people learn in movement politics and on how processes of learning occur within these settings. Moreover, when specific attention has been given to these aspects, academic interest has mostly focused on the more structured practices through which knowledge is produced and transmitted within movement politics (i.e. study groups and seminars). In line with Choudry (2015: 89), I think that "not only people's everyday practices in struggle contribute to constructing alternative forms of knowledge but attending to this learning and knowledge production can also help us understand social movements" and activism.

Indeed, without this, we risk reproducing romanticized ideas of activism and "falling back on shorthand understandings of politics and protests, which threatens to do more to obscure than to explain what actually happens in the course of activism" (Ibid.).

Starting from these premises, the chapter has sought to adopt a more extensive view to knowledge production within SMOs by looking at what happens in the everyday life of young activists and by closely observing processes of learning occurring within and through micro-interactions between junior and senior activists. The analysis of the qualitative materials collected through ethnography and biographical interviews highlights the need to rethink and shed light on the potential of activists' learning through daily activities and interactions in social movements (Kirshner, 2007). Analysis shows how learning across activist environments occurs not only by participating in structured activities of socialization to politics and political values but also through daily, trivial exchanges where young people are not mentored, taught or guided by others.

The learning occurring in the everyday experience of activism emerges as a kind of learning deeply concerned with individuals' emancipation and empowerment. Everyday learning occurs in the daily interactions between activists through exchanges that, starting from young people's own problems and issues, help them to acquire and develop a political imagination. Mimesis and sharing are here analysed as processes through which young activists learn to question political disparities and to critically recognize collective problems through self-reflection. These practices of learning start where young activists are – their current conditions – and support them to go beyond that: everyday sociality between the young activists provides collective lenses through which young people can reinterpret their conditions, as well as models of action through which they can collectively change those conditions. In this perspective, the observed everyday knowledge exchanges happening in SMOs, although trivial, play a pivotal role in helping young people to reflect, generalize and apply learning in their everyday struggle for change through processes that are difficult to replicate through formal curricula for participation and that, for this exact reason, should be recognized just as valuable and pivotal in forming young people's political identity, as are more structured educational programmes.

References

Billett, S. (2009). Conceptualizing learning experiences: Contributions and mediations of the social, personal and brute. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 16*, 32–47.

Billett, S. (2014). Mimesis: Learning through everyday activities and interactions at work. *Human Resource Development Review, 13*(4), 462–482. https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484314548275

Choudry, A. (2015). *Learning activism: The intellectual life of contemporary social movements*. University of Toronto Press.

Earl, J., Maher, T. V., & Elliott, T. (2017). Youth, activism, and social movements. *Sociology Compass, 11*, 12465. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12465

Foley, G. (1999). *Learning in social action: A contribution to understanding informal education*. Zed Books.

Genova, C. (2018). Youth activism in political squats between Centri Sociali and case Occupate. *Societies, 8*(77), 1–18.

Ginwright, S., & Cammarota, J. (2007). Youth activism in the urban community: Learning critical civic praxis within community organizations. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 20*, 693–710.

Giugni, M. G. (2004). Personal and biographical consequences. In D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell companion to social movements* (pp. 489–507). Blackwell Publishing.

Gordon, H. R., & Taft, J. K. (2011). Rethinking youth political socialization: Teenage activists talk back. *Youth & Society, 43*(4), 1499–1527.

Guzman-Concha, C. (2015). Radical social movements in Europe: A configurational analysis. *Social Movement Studies, 14*(6), 1–24.

Harris, M. (Ed.). (2007). *Ways of knowing: New approaches in the anthropology of experience and learning*. Berghahn Books.

Hill, R. J. (2004). Fugitive and codified knowledge: Implications for communities struggling to control the meaning of local environmental hazards. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 23*(3), 221–242.

Jämte, J. (2013). *Antirasismens många ansikten*. Umeå universitet, Statsvetenskapliga institutionen. http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-81637 [visited on 03.10.2020].

Jordan, B. (2011). *The double Helix of learning: Knowledge transfer in traditional and techno-centric communities*. Palo Alto Research Center.

Kahne, J., & Sporte, S. (2008). Developing citizens: The impact of civic learning opportunities on students' commitment to civic participation. *American Educational Research Journal, 20*, 1–29.

Kaplan, J., & Shapiro, L. (1998). *Red diapers: Growing up in the communist left*. University of Illinois Press.

Kirshner, B. (2007). Youth activism as a context for learning and development. *American Behavioral Scientist, 51*, 367–379.

Larson, P. (2014). Consciousness-raising groups. In T. Teo (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of critical psychology*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_603

Mudu, P. (2012). At the intersection of anarchists and autonomists: Autogestioni and centri sociali. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies, 11*(3), 413–438.

Peterson, A. (2015). Successful social movement outcomes without social movement? Research on Swedish social movements and Swedish social movement research. In O. Fillieule & G. Accornero (Eds.), *Social movements in Europe. The state of the art*. Berghahn Books.

Peterson, A., Håkan, T., & Wahlström, M. (2017). Sweden 1950–2015. Contentious politics and social movements between confrontation and conditioned cooperation. In F. Mikkelsen, K. Kjeldstadli, & S. Nyzell (Eds.), *Popular struggle and democracy in Scandinavia*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Petrovic, I., van Stekelenburg, J., & Klandermans, P. G. (2014). Political socialization and social movements. Escaping the political past? In C. Kinnvall, H. Dekker, P. Nesbitt-Larkin, & T. Capelos (Eds.), *Palgrave handbook of global political psychology* (pp. 403–422). Palgrave.

Pitti, I. (2018). *Youth and unconventional political participation*. Palgrave.

Quintelier, E. (2010). Unconventional participation and the problem of inequality: A comparative analysis. In E. Amnå (Ed.), *New forms of citizen participation. Normative implications*. Nomos Verlag.

Schierup, C. U., Ålund, A., & Kings, L. (2014). Reading the Stockholm riots. A moment for social justice? *Race and Class, 55*(3), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396813509191

Schierup, C. U., Alund, A., & Neergaard, A. (2017). Race and the upsurge of antagonistic popular movements in Sweden. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 2*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1361541

Sears, D., & Levy, S. (2003). Childhood and adult political development. In D. Sears, L. Huddy, & R. Jervis (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of political psychology* (pp. 60–109). Oxford University Press.

Tomasello, M. (2004). Learning through others. *Daedalus, 133*, 51–58.

Torney-Purta, J., & Wilkenfeld, B. (2009). *Paths to 21st century competencies through civic education classrooms*. American Bar Association Division for Public Education.

Van Dyke, N., & Dixon, M. (2013). Activist human capital: Skills acquisition and the development of commitment to social movement activism. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly, 18*(2), 197–212.

Youniss, J., & Yates, M. (1997). *Community service and social responsibility in youth*. University of Chicago Press.

Youniss, J., Bales, S., Christmas-Best, V., Diversi, M., Mclaughlin, M., & Silbereisen, R. (2002). Youth civic engagement in the twenty-first century. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 12*, 121–148.

Ilaria Pitti is Senior Assistant Professor at University of Bologna, Italy, and Humboldt Experienced Researcher at Goethe Universität Frankfurt, Germany

Chapter 9
What Do Young People *Learn* in Formal Settings of Youth Participation?

Alexandre Pais

Abstract Formal settings of youth participation such as youth and student councils aim to educate young people into models of citizenships and mainstream politics. The activities developed in these spaces are framed in a way as to allow young people to develop learning activities that enhance their participatory skills and competences. These activities however can result in a set of unintended outcomes, where young people end up learning more than the officially recognised skills and competences. In this article, I use elements from the PARTICISPACE project to illustrate how despite the good intentions surrounding the framing of formal spaces of learning, these spaces can function as a means for the reproduction of political models of participation that do not only fail to challenge the status quo but in fact create the kind of citizens that enjoy the cynical and bureaucratic political participation that characterises late capitalism.

Keywords Formal youth participation · Pedagogisation · University discourse · Interpassivity · Disavowal

Introduction

The conventional logic behind youth participation is that there is a crisis of youth apathy signalled by young people's retreat from formal politics and that the solution is adult-led political socialisation of youth into formal political processes (Delli Carpini, 2000; Henn et al., 2002; Youniss et al., 2002; Gordon & Taft, 2011). In the words of Council of Europe's former director of youth and sports, Lasse Siurala (2005), "the political alienation of young people has reached a point where increasing numbers of young people are either completely disinterested and ignorant of politics or have gone to extremist political movements" (p. 12). *Participation* has become a catchword to signify the importance for young people to become engaged

A. Pais (✉)
Faculty of Education, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK
e-mail: a.pais@mmu.ac.uk

139

in broader society (Andersson, 2017; Matthews, 2001; Raby, 2012; Wyness, 2009). In the last two decades, youth participation has been associated with the provision of instrumental support through tailored training, with the purpose of developing skills and competences in young people (Kirshner, 2008; Pearce & Larson, 2006), the development of young people's identity (Côté & Schwartz, 2002) or the fostering of a sense of sociopolitical control by encouraging young people to participate in "collective actions oriented to influencing social environments" (Martinez et al., 2017, p. 6). The creation of institutionalised spaces for youth participation stems from a need to provide mechanisms through which the needs and interests of young people can be identified and incorporated in new policies and legislations (Geddes & Rust, 2000; Gordon & Taft, 2011). The European Union in particular has actively encouraged local and regional authorities to promote the involvement of young people in local life and politics, with the youth councils being arguably the most visible examples of these policies (Geddes & Rust, 2000; European Commission, 2001, 2009). The reasoning behind youth participation in formal spaces is one where adults develop the best ways to "train", "engage" and "socialise" youth to become active citizens (Fox, 2013; Gordon & Taft, 2011).

In this article, I explore some of the activities of formal participation observed during the PARTISPACE[1] project, in an attempt to situate these activities against the background of broader structural arrangements. Despite the good intentions surrounding the framing of formal spaces of learning, these spaces can function as a means for the reproduction of political models of participation that do not only fail to challenge the status quo but in fact create the kind of citizens that enjoy the cynical and bureaucratic political participation that characterises late capitalism. In this sense, in such formal spaces, more than learning the official skills and competences to become an emancipated and participative citizen, young people are also learning a set of unofficial and perhaps unintended modes of believing that are important to address. In what follows, I start by presenting some of the PARTISPACE results concerning the ways in which formal settings youth participation are run, namely, in what concerns the relation between young people and an adult agenda. Afterwards, I draw on elements of the philosophy of Robert Pfaller and Slavoj Žižek to analyse the role that these settings have in the formation of common beliefs about youth participation and elaborate on the ways in which adults posit youth participation. I conclude with a provocative exploration of what might young people be learning in formal settings of youth participation, beyond the high goals of citizenship.

---

[1] PARTISPACE: Spaces and styles of participation formal, non-formal and informal possibilities of young people's participation in European cities. Grant Agreement number 649416, H2020-YOUNG-SOCIETY-2014. http://partispace.eu

Instances of Formal Participation: Exploring PARTISPACE Results

The PARTISPACE project contemplates analysis of spaces and styles of youth participation in formal, informal and non-formal settings, across eight European cities (Rennes, Manchester, Zurich, Bologna, Gothenburg, Eskisehir, Frankfurt and Plovdiv). Over the last 3 years, researchers collected a significant amount of data through analysis of policy documents; expert, group and biographic interviews; and close ethnographies and action research projects with groups of young people representing formal youth participation (parties, student unions and youth councils), as well as alternative, non-recognised, non-formal and informal spaces and styles of youth participation. For the purposes of this article, we will focus on the analysis of the settings of formal participation explored during the project and recently published in the form or research reports (Batsleer et al., 2017; Lüküslü et al., 2018; Walther et al., 2019). In these documents, the reader can find detailed analyses of the functioning of these spaces, including analyses of youth worker interventions, impressions from the young people who participate in these spaces as well as detailed depictions of the mechanisms that disavow or delay youth engagement. This article takes advantage of this analytical work, by referring to the most important conclusions and using them to illustrate the functioning and the nature of the interactions occurring in these spaces.

Although there is no single model of (formal) youth participation, our research showed how these settings have in common that they are initiated and led by adults with regard to their rules and activities and have a strong proximity to adult institutions. That is, in the formal settings we studied (e.g. youth branches of political parties, student unions, student councils and youth councils, amongst others), there is a tendency for participation to be co-designed and overseen by adults. "Direct" participation, that is, young people just taking their problems in their own hands and dealing with them with the necessary means, becomes difficult to pursue (Batsleer et al., 2017; Lüküslü et al., 2018; Walther et al., 2019). One of the young people in Gothenburg, for instance, described the youth council as "a kind of 'lapdog of politics', a box that politicians can cross and say now we have created something and done something for young people" (Lüküslü et al., 2018, p. 41). Instead of autonomously developing their own activities, young people are presented with predefined campaigns and structured activities, with timelines and specific topics to be addressed (Batlseer et al., 2017, p. 27, 28, 87, 88).

In nearly all the formal settings we studied, the agenda tends to be filled "automatically" because "they are predefined by regulations, rules and routines with a high share of bureaucracy that inhibits young people from coming up with their own initiatives" (Lüküslü et al., 2019, p. 76). Young people may have a budget and can pose questions, offer suggestions and express opinions, but without any decision-making power. It is hard to miss a certain "pedagogisation" of the discussion, structured by adults and aimed at young people's engagement (Lüküslü et al., 2018, pp. 24–29; Batsleer et al., 2017, pp. 43–50, 79, 80; Lüküslü et al., 2019, p. 76).

Youth workers tend to lead the process from above, with every activity being framed externally and where pedagogical methods are applied so that young people learn how to participate in the "right" way (Lüküslü et al., 2019, p. 77). It is as if there was a fear of getting lost in the discussion if given to young people's own initiative, thus the need to control it by elaborating a set of specific rules that groups have to follow (cover certain topics, make a report, report back to one person in the group, etc.) (Batsleer et al., 2017, p. 150, 151). As a result, as mentioned by one of the young people in Manchester, discussions, although addressing quite relevant issues (e.g. issues of diversity and the social integration of minorities), are often "too sugar coated – we did all that in Religious Education for years and years; we want to talk about when there is not cohesion!" (Batsleer et al., 2017, p. 27).

In the case of Manchester, there was the explicit indication from major officers not to talk with young people about the European referendum or about party politics (Batsleer et al., 2017, p. 151):

> [t]here is meant to be Manchester Youth Assembly on June 8th and the theme is Europe and we were going to invite M.P.'s and M.E.P.'s. To give facts as well as opinions and hear from a normal person what it all means. But 'We go into Purdah. . .it means we can't communicate and we can't out things into social media. We can't even talk about politics'. (Speech of the youth worker addressing young people during one of the sessions of the Manchester youth council, in Batsleer et al., 2017, p. 29)

In the case of Zurich's school student committee, activities are supervised by at least one teacher who interferes when the discussions do not seem to correspond to the tasks and topics of the school committee (p. 151). This regulation aims to prevent "negative dynamics", that is, to prevent "the discussion of some of the most significant events in school life and hinders a critical reflection of their [students'] situation at school" (p. 151). These formal places of youth participation perform a role in the enculturation of young people into a world of sanitised politics, where polemic, ideological and economic questions or, more generally, issues that call into question the totality of the system are foreclosed (Žižek, 2014). Instead, problems are addressed from a perspective of expert management and service provision.[2] Moreover, the very idea of youth participation seems to refrain young people from engaging with the problems of the present. It is as if youth participation led by adults serves to disavow or delay the youth engagement with the problems of the present. It keeps young people occupied pretending to play politics while at the same time

---

[2]In his book about the negotiations with the European Union during the 2015 Greek crisis, where Greece was blackmailed into accepting the Eurogroup conditions for a new bailout – thus continuing the politics of austerity and debt that created the problem in the first place – or being kicked out of the Eurozone, Varoufakis (2017) describes how, despite the mass support of the Greek people and the simple logic of economic arguments, the technocratic spirit of those in the Eurogroup continuously ignored any attempt to think at a broader level not only Greece but Europe Union's predicament: "it was as if I had not spoken, as if there was no document in front of them. It was evident from their body language that they denied the very existence of the pieces of paper I had placed before them. Their responses, when they came, took no account of anything I had said" (p. 309).

guaranteeing that their time and energy is not channelled into more political mean-ingful activism. These models of civic engagement do not seem to accord any real political power to youth in the present. As documented by Gordon and Taft's research, this is particularly evident in student government (student councils, student unions, etc.), where activities follow "a model of civic engagement designed by adults to "train" students for future participation while estranging them from real political power in the present" (2011, p. 1512).

The logic at work in the youth and student councils we studied presents important elements characteristic of what Lacan (2007) calls the *university discourse*. It is a discourse that seeks consensus (discussion is valued as a means towards consensus, and conflictual positions sugar coated), avoids polemic issues and follows protocols for each activity, which are evaluated and assessed and then fed into the apparatus of "policy impact". It promotes a discourse that is managerial and promotional, rather than political and dialogical, which assumes itself as neutral and for the common good. Engaged subjective stances are not easily tolerated and tend to be seen as "dogmatic" or "sectarian" (Žižek, 2006, p. 108). Moreover, some of the activities are presented as "cool", "fun" and "enjoyable" as a way to seduce young people into participation.[3]

Occupy Young People: Interpassivity, Dromenon and Delegated Beliefs

Young people are new to a world that precedes them. As new, they represent a threat to the same system that strives to socialise them. This is not exclusive to young people – history is full of episodes of people who have struggled against a certain social order. However, because of being new, young people tend to be perceived by adults as in need to be guided towards some general idea of good (democracy, citizenship, religion, etc.). This "guidance" becomes possible through the deploy-ment of an entire scientific and social industry generating knowledge about youth and designing programmes to increment youth participation. It is not enough that young people participate. This participation has to be recognised and registered within the set of available possibilities for participation. When young people want to decide for themselves and take action on their own hands, they are faced with a set of constraints and offered an array of possibilities wherein this action can be pursued. This creates a bureaucratic machinery of rules, pedagogies, guidelines and regula-tions that not so much inhibit young people from participating, as they frame participation as such.[4]

---

[3]Farthing (2015) notices how attempts to make politics "cool" as to seduce young people result in a cynical attitude by young people.

[4]They also give work to many people.

Educational researchers (e.g. Lundin & Christensen, 2017; Pais, 2013) have been criticising schools as places of *interpassivity* (Pfaller, 2014), where adults relegate the task of learning in children and adolescents, thus passively feeling that all society is learning, while students are the ones actually doing the work. Adults delegate consumption (of education) into students – they are the ones charged with the task of "learning of the world" – while students delegate in teachers (and parents, and adults in general) the belief that school is important for their lives. The result is a caricature of education as it is performed in schools, where all the "dromena" (p. 175) – textbooks, exams, teachers (who speak all the time), activities, etc. – are the ones doing the work, thus protecting the classroom from students: "the running dromena occupy a place that otherwise might have been assumed by something threatening" (p. 181). That is, all the dromena that populate schools prevent or make it difficult for students to actually engage with education as a truly transformative and emancipatory enterprise, by learning in ways that are open and unpredictable. Instead, dromena are very useful in making sure that students *do not* have to learn – the teacher, the textbook, the adult-led tasks and the curriculum do the learning for them.

One can argue that something similar occurs in formal settings of youth participation: these also exist so that young people do not have to participate. The campaigns, the adult-led activities, the highly structured tasks, the training models and the youth worker do the participation for them. Also here, all these *dromena* function as to avoid or tame any potential threatening initiative by young people, by keeping them occupied with formal tasks. As mentioned before, this situation was observed during the PARTISPACE project, where groups of young people have to follow a predefined agenda, including step-by-step guidance to all activities, and a high level of schematisation. Although the discussion is made by young people, the entire structure for the discussion is determined by others beforehand.

Within such settings, there is little space for discord, for raising and discussing polemic issues, to seek out different agendas and activities. Nonetheless, young people continue to participate in them. In as much as schools, where students do not need to believe in the importance of school – it is enough that others (parents, teachers, politicians, adults in general) believe for them – also in formal settings of youth participation, the idea of "youth" relies in a "delegation of belief" (Žižek, 2008, p. 136). That is, young people assume a subject supposed to believe the importance of young people for the society, as well as the relevance of all the prescribed activities developed in these settings. This dimension of the "subject supposed to believe" (Žižek, 2008, p. 202) becomes evident in the way young people conceive "participation". While participation appears in the adult discourse about youth with a high degree of awareness, our PARTISPACE research showed that the great majority of the young people we met show little association with it, and the term is hardly used amongst them. For the European young people we worked with, the term "youth participation" is often an alien one. As noted in one of the project's public reports (Batsleer et al., 2017):

the idea of "youth participation" derives less from the everyday life of adolescents and more from the conceptual world and the language used by adults or the adult world of the organisations (…) In most cases, they are busy with simply being young, with all the

challenges that entails, in terms of education, work, social relations, and future plans in general. (p. 33)

Not only young people do not talk in terms of "youth participation"; they are often puzzled by the idea of "participation" and find it to be out of synch to what they perceive as their concrete life circumstances. This mismatch between the official discourse on youth participation and the concrete life circumstances of young people is rarely acknowledged by researchers and youth workers (Crawshaw et al., 2000). Participation per se tends to be seen as a positive intervention for young people; however, what may be regarded as participation may very well end up in tokenistic and even exploitative activities (Malone & Hartung, 2010; Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). One possible justification has to do with the mismatch between what researchers and youth workers see as an empowering framework and what young people experience as their own interests and needs. Studies have been showing that youth workers' beliefs and perceptions of their own work, its role and achievements, are not always shared or understood by young people (Crawshaw et al., 2000). It is as if adults know better about the problems of young people than young people themselves. Crawshaw et al. (2000) notice how "people within a targeted community may not significantly identify themselves as disempowered or feel the need for change as much as researchers or funding body" (p. 80). In some severe cases, as reported by Crawshaw et al. (2000), the discourse around empowering serves to disguise a certain exploitation of young people, because their involvement is mainly aimed at meeting the needs of stakeholders as youth workers and researchers.

Youth participation is an adult concern, not a youth one. In a way, one can say the entire discourse emphasising the importance of youth participation exists so that adults do not have to participate. Adults delegate participation in young people, while young people delegate in adults the belief that youth participation is a relevant dimension of their lives.

Youth and the Disavowal of Adult Responsibility

When youth is posited as being symptomatic of the wealth of the nation (either because it condenses society's problems or because it is posited as the solution for these problems), an ideological operation is performed by means of displacing the internal and all-pervasive contradictions of society onto an external and contingent group of people. The signifier "youth" quilts together the problems of society and the possibility of a brighter future. It functions as an empty signifier (Žižek, 2008; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) where adults can allocate both the problems and the solutions for their current and future predicaments, thus providing a narrative that conciliates the dangers for society and the possibility of overcoming them. Young people congregate in themselves this tension, quilting the problem and providing the solution. Steedman (1995) refers to the "comforts of narrative exegesis" to signal the

significance of a story about youth that responds to the "crisis in democracy" and social instability. As a result, massive local, national and international programmes are designed to "fix" youth and guarantee the happiness of the species.

This narrative brings comfort because it offers adults a mechanism to avoid facing their own impasses, by disavowing them into an *other* – "young people". By conceiving adolescence as a distinctive stage of life, not only we make them carry what Cohen and Ainley (2000, p. 89) call a "burden of representation", where "everything they do, say, think or feel, is scrutinized by an army of professional commentators"; we also create an object where we can disavow our own direct engagement with the world. As such, the category of youth not only allows for the isolation and treatment of a segment of the population; it can also function as a *disavowal mechanism* (Žižek, 2008) for the adult world, by allocating in young people the problems of the world while at the same time delegating to them the solution for problems that are not youth problems per se. This discourse posits the responsibility of change in the hands of young people and at the same time disavows adults from direct engagement with changing the status quo. That is, it provides adults with a mechanism to disavow in young people their own role in changing a particular situation. In young people, adults disavow their desire for change.

Conclusion: What Do Young People Learn in Formal Settings?

As previously described, in most of the formal settings of the PARTISPACE project, there is little space for discord, for raising and discussing polemic issues, to seek out different agendas and activities. The young people who participate in these settings are aware of issues involving tokenism, the sugar coating of controversial topics, and an overall farcical atmosphere, as if they were being staged for somebody else's gaze (Lüküslü et al., 2019). Nonetheless, young people continue to participate in them. They might do so because there they find it a good place to be and to fraternise and to discuss. They might do so because the alternative is being alone. Participating in youth and student councils brings them closer to future positions of influence, to travelling opportunities, to career possibilities. In our research we found that "young people in student and youth councils are expected to play an intermediary role but, apparently, often choose to situate themselves closer to the adults' world and enjoy the more advantageous position regarding recognition and resources" (Lüküslü et al., 2019, p. 75). Although young people (and also youth workers) might recognise the shortcomings of participation in formal settings, they still do not change their practice because they enjoy being there. Formal settings are important in guaranteeing that the next cohort of citizens will not only perform according to what is expected from them but also enjoy their performance. As such, what is first experienced as a hindrance to youth participation turns into a source of enjoyment, with young people enjoying playing the kind of tokenistic and performative

activities that characterise some spaces of formal participation. They do so in spite of better knowledge, thus showing traces of a *cynical consciousness* that characterises late capitalism (Sloterdijk, 1987; Žižek, 2008). Youth participation can thus be a privileged means towards "adult politics": to learn how to do and profit from activities one does not believe in.

Another feature of the formal settings of youth participation that we studied concerns the absence of a broader and critical questioning of the kind of society young people is supposed to participate. Rather, they follow a logic of "provision of services", where regulations and protocols are created to guarantee a smooth assimilation into the big social market. In a weird way, it seems that it is not young people who engage in participation as a way to make a change in the world. Rather, it is participation – as an adult invention – that uses young people to promote and maintain a certain social order. The purpose is not to question or explore alternatives to current societal arrangements, but to devise and implement strategies that guarantee a smooth transition into a healthy and thriving adulthood in a free and productive society and economy (Côté, 2016; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2011; Walsh et al., 2018). In the face of an uprising of people, contesting against the status quo or manifesting a pure display of rage, there is a need to exert damage control "by way of re-channelling a popular uprising into acceptable parliamentary-capitalist constraints" (Žižek, 2014, p. 114). Some instances of youth work function as to guarantee that young people's time is not "wasted", but can instead be optimised within a logic of permanent self-enhancing productivity (Dillabough, 2009; Raby, 2012). In a society of permanent self-enhancing and productivity, activities like protesting, striking and squatting are seen either as a waste or as dangerous. Youth participation has to occur within a certain "productive" frame. Dillabough (2009) calls it the "utilitarian idea of youth" (p. 216), where young people are perceived as owners of a commodity that cannot be wasted but needs to make itself useful and productive. In order to be useful and productive, one needs to avoid raising core questions about broader societal arrangements and instead follow the procedures and rules in place. In formal settings of youth participation, young people are learning that current society is not without its problems, but these could be solved through more and better resources and the work of engaged people. A questioning of the entire system within which participation occurs is disavowed. Young people not only learn to accept the current state of affairs; they also learn how to become a part of it and enjoy it.

References

Andersson, E. (2017). The pedagogical political participation model (the 3P-M) for exploring, explaining and affecting young people's political participation. *Journal of Youth Studies, 20*(10), 1346–1361.

Batsleer, J., Ehrensperger, K., Lüküslü, F., Osmanoğlu, B., Pais, A., Reutlinger, C., Roth, P., Wigger, A., & Zimmermann, D. (2017). Claiming spaces and struggling for recognition.

Comparative Case Study Report. PARTISPACE Deliverable, 4, 3. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1064119B

Cohen, P., & Ainley, P. (2000). In the country of the blind? Youth studies and cultural studies in Britain. *Journal of Youth Studies, 3*(1), 79–95.

Côté, J. (2016). A new political economy of youth reprised: Rejoinder to France and Threadgold. *Journal of Youth Studies, 19*(6), 852–868.

Côté, J. E., & Schwartz, S. J. (2002). Comparing psychological and sociological approaches to identity: Identity status, identity capital, and the individualization process. *Journal of Adolescence, 25*, 571–586.

Crawshaw, P., Mitchell W., Bunton R., & Green E. (2000). Youth Empowerment and Youth Research, Youth and Policy 1–16.

Delli Carpini, M. X. (2000). Gen.com: Youth, civic engagement, and the new information environment. *Political Communication, 17*, 341–349.

Dillabough, J.-A. (2009). History and the making of young people and the late modern youth researcher: Time, narrative, and change. *Discourse, 30*(2), 213–229.

European Commission. (2001). *A new impetus for European Youth* (No. COM/2001/0681 final/). European Commission.

European Commission. (2009). An EU strategy for youth - Investing and empowering. A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities. Brussels: European Commission.

Farthing, R. (2015). Low-income young people's problematic relationship with individualised policy in England. *Journal of Youth Studies, 18*(10), 1366–1381.

Fox, R. (2013). Resisting participation: Critiquing participatory research methodologies with young people. *Journal of Youth Studies, 16*(8), 986–999.

Geddes, M., & Rust, M. (2000). Catching them young? Local initiatives to involve young people in local government and local democracy. *Youth and Policy, 69*, 42–61.

Gordon, H., & Taft, K. (2011). Rethinking youth political socialization: Teenage activists talk back. *Youth & Society, 43*(4), 1499–1527.

Henn, M., Weinstein, M., & Wring, D. (2002). A generation apart? Youth and political participation in Britain. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 4*(2), 167–192.

Kirshner, B. (2008). Guided participation in three youth activism organizations: Facilitation, apprenticeship, and joint work. *Journal of the Learning Sciences, 17*(1), 60–101.

Lacan, J. (2007). *The other side of psychoanalysis: The seminar of Jacques Lacan book XVII*. Norton & Company.

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. Verso.

Lüküslü, D., Pais, A., Tuorto, D., Walther, A., & Loncle, P. (2018). *Local constellations of youth participation in comparative perspective. PARTISPACE Deliverable D 6.1.* Zenodo. Download here https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1240191

Lüküslü, P., Tuorto, & Walther, A. (2019). "This is a compressed political system." Ambivalences of formal youth participation. In A. Walther, J. Batsleer, P. Loncle, & A. Pohl (Eds.), *Young people and the struggle for participation: Contested, practices, power and pedagogies in public spaces* (pp. 69–82). Routledge.

Lundin, S., & Christensen, D. (2017). Mathematics education as praying wheel: How adults avoid mathematics by pushing it into children. In H. Straehler-Pohl, N. Bohlmann, & A. Pais (Eds.), *The disorder of mathematics education*. Springer.

Malone, K., & Hartung, C. (2010). Challenges of participatory practice with children. In B. Percy-Smith & N. Thomas (Eds.), *A handbook of children and young people's participation: Perspectives from theory and practice* (pp. 24–38). Routledge.

Martinez, M., Loyola, L., & Cumsille, P. (2017). Quality of participation in youth organizations: Relationships with identity and sense of political control. *Youth & Society, 49*(7), 968–993.

Matthews, H. (2001). Citizenship, youth councils and young people's participation. *Journal of Youth Studies, 4*(3), 299–318.

Pais, A. (2013). An ideology critique of the use-value of mathematics. *Educational Studies in Mathematics, 84*(1), 15–34.

Pearce, N., & Larson, R. (2006). How teens become engaged in youth development programs: The process of motivational change in a civic activism organization. *Applied Developmental Science, 10*(3), 121–131.

Pfaller, R. (2014). *On the pleasure principle in culture: Illusions without owners*. Verso Books.

Raby, R. (2012). Children's participation as neo-liberal governance? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 35*(1), 77–89.

Siurala, L. (2005). *A European framework for youth policy*. Strasbourg.

Sloterdijk, P. (1987). *Critique of cynical reason*. University of Minnesota Press.

Steedman, C. (1995). *Strange dislocations: Childhood and the idea of human interiority*. Harvard University Press.

Sukarieh, M., & Tannock, S. (2011). The positivity imperative: A critical look at the 'new' youth development movement. *Journal of Youth Studies, 14*(6), 675–691.

Van Vlaenderen, H., & Neves, D. (2004). Participatory action research and local knowledge in community contexts. In D. Hook, N. J. Mkhize, P. Kiguwa, & A. Collins (Eds.), *Critical psychology* (pp. 445–464). UCT Press.

Varoufakis, Y. (2017). *Adults in the room*. The Bodley Head.

Walsh, L., Black, R., & Prosser, H. (2018). Young people's perceptions of power and influence as a basis for understanding contemporary citizenship. *Journal of Youth Studies, 21*(2), 218–234.

Walther, A., Batsleer, J., Loncle, P., & Pohl, A. (2019). Young People and the Struggle for Participation: Contested Practices, Power and Pedagogies in Public Spaces. London: Routledge.

Wyness, M. (2009). Children representing children: Participation and the problem of diversity in UK youth councils. *Childhood, 16*(4), 535–552.

Youniss, J., Bales, S., Christmas-Best, V., Diversi, M., McLaughlin, M., & Silbereisen, R. (2002). Youth civic engagement in the twenty-first century. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 12*(1), 121–148.

Žižek, S. (2006). Object a in social links. In J. Clemens & R. Grigg (Eds.), *Jacques Lacan and the other side of psychoanalysis* (pp. 107–128). Duke University Press.

Žižek, S. (2008). *The plague of fantasies*. Verso.

Žižek, S. (2014). *Trouble in paradise*. Allen Lane, Penguin Books.

Alexandre Pais is PhD in Educational Studies, Reader at the Faculty of Education, Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom.

Chapter 10
Politics of Re-framing: Youth and the Struggle for Equal Participation in the Urban Peripheries of Sweden

Magnus Dahlstedt

Abstract Based on research conducted in four different areas in the Swedish urban periphery, this chapter draws attention to different forms of participation that challenge dominant, stigmatizing discourses and unequal conditions of participation affecting urban youth. Departing from a *frame analysis* approach, the aim of the chapter is to examine how social movement organizations and individual youth in the urban periphery challenge current social inequalities and stigmatizing discourses by engaging in a *politics of re-framing* reality. The analysis illustrates how problems such as social exclusion are constantly renegotiated and how both social movement organizations and young people are engaged in learning how to understand and to change these problems. There is not *one* problem of social exclusion, but rather a variety of ways of *framing* this problem. Depending on how the problem is framed, different scenarios for the future emerge. Current conditions and developments are not given – rather, they are the result of a *politics of re-framing*, a constant struggle. Social movements as well as young people in the urban periphery are active participants in this struggle. Although the struggle for equal participation takes on different forms, it is based on same critical analysis of current circumstances which are perceived as unequal, illegitimate and in need of change. In these critical reflections of reality, possibilities for transformation emerge. The outcomes of these struggles are yet to be seen.

Keywords Politics of re-framing · Urban periphery · Social exclusion · Social movements · Stigmatization

M. Dahlstedt (✉)
Department of Culture and Society, Linköping University, Linköping, Sweden
e-mail: magnus.dahlstedt@liu.se

Introduction

'I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept'. The words are Angela Davis', professor and author and during the 1960s and 1970s one of the leaders of the American Black Panther Party. With these words, Davis expressed a strong will to change the world – not to be passively subordinated to systemic inequalities, but rather to make active claims for change. In this chapter, I wish to discuss how we can understand why these words ended up on a wall in Malmö in 2018, in a meeting place of a local organization called All of Malmö. What is it that makes them relevant in the Swedish sociopolitical context of today, and what can they tell us about ongoing struggles for equal participation taking place in the urban peripheries of Malmö and other cities throughout the country?

Following media reports on burning cars and stones thrown at police and rescue vehicles, an increasing attention in recent years has been paid to youth in the urban peripheries,[1] as drivers of social disorder and disintegration (Stigendal, 2016). In the wake of such debates, political calls have been made for a range of repressive measures targeting these areas – such as mobilizing the armed forces and increasing police presence. Although young people living in Swedish urban peripheries are negatively affected by current material inequalities as well as dominant stigmatizing discourses (Andersson, 2003; Lalander, 2009), they are by no means passive victims. On the contrary, youth have been shown to develop a range of strategies for both managing and resisting the challenges they currently face (Ålund, 1997; León Rosales, 2010).

This chapter draws attention to different forms of participation that challenge dominant, stigmatizing discourses and unequal conditions of participation affecting urban youth. In line with Stuart Hall (1997), this struggle for equal participation may be described as a 'politics of representation'. Participatory practices of representation have to do with how contemporary conditions for participation in a segregated and polarized Swedish urban landscape are represented and how these representations, in turn, make different claims for change and thus different futures possible. Such struggle for equal participation further relates to some of the main ideas in the emancipatory pedagogical tradition as articulated by Paulo Freire (1972), which emphasizes the importance of critical reflection as a basis for both political mobilization and social change. In this tradition, dialogue is seen as having a great potential for people to both reflect upon and transform reality: 'Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it … through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don't know, we can then act critically to transform reality' (Shor & Freire, 1987: 98–99).

---

[1] In the chapter, the concept of urban periphery refers to urban areas located in larger as well as smaller cities throughout the country, with a large proportion of socioeconomically disadvantaged residents, with a migrant background. The context of urban segregation in contemporary Sweden is further elaborated upon in the following section.

In order to analyse and discuss the process of the struggle for equal participation, I utilize a *frame analysis* approach which draws attention to the ways in which people describe, i.e. *frame*, reality. In the past, such approach has been used to study how social movement organizations reflect upon reality while struggling to transform it (cf. Snow & Benford, 1988). In this chapter, the aim is to examine how social movement organizations and individual youth in the urban periphery challenge current social inequalities and stigmatizing discourses by engaging in a *politics of re-framing* reality. In this process, there are two kinds of framings made. The first one is *diagnostic*, which identifies various phenomena, conditions or events in the present as problematic, and thus in need of change. Such framing also identifies causes and responsibilities, where roles such as victims and perpetrators, friends and enemies emerge. The second kind of framing is *prognostic*, which indicates different ways of dealing with the problems identified, in the form of concrete strategies, specifying what is to be done and by whom.

The chapter builds on results from research conducted in the urban periphery in Sweden in the last decade. Primarily, the chapter is based on interviews conducted within the framework of two research projects carried out between 2015–2016 and 2018–2019, with a focus on sports and other means of promoting social inclusion of youth in four different areas in the urban periphery: referred to as West area, East area, South area and North area. Some of these results have previously been presented elsewhere (cf. Dahlstedt, 2018; Dahlstedt & Ekholm, 2021).[2] These results are also complemented by documentation of the work carried out by the organization All of Malmö and are, further, set in the context of previous research on youth and social movements in other parts of the urban periphery in Sweden (cf. Sernhede et al., 2019).

The chapter is structured in the following way: Initially, the terrain where the struggle for equal participation takes place is presented – a polarized urban landscape framed by dominant political discourses on the 'areas of exclusion' as the main cause of their own problems. It is these specific material and discursive conditions that form the basis of the struggle to which we then turn. Firstly, the focus is put on social movement organizations operating in the urban periphery, who use particular neighbourhood areas as grounds of social mobilization and politicized collective protest. Secondly, the focus is put on other expressions of the same struggle, as they take shape in interviews with youth living in some of the stigmatized areas. Although the struggle for equal participation takes different forms, there is a common critical reflection on current circumstances among both social movement organizations and the youth, which are understood as unequal, illegitimate and in need of change. Thus, in such critical reflection in relation to reality, possibilities for transformation start to emerge.

---

[2] By using a snowball sampling, in total 56 youth in the ages 15 and 26 were selected for participation in interviews, individually as well as in focus groups. The youth included both girls and boys, and a range of ethnocultural backgrounds.

Urban Polarization and Politics of Exclusion

In recent decades, and particularly since the early 1990s, the Swedish welfare state has changed dramatically. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a new political consensus emerged, with an emphasis of the individual's freedom and responsibility as guiding principles for the ongoing renewal of the Swedish welfare state (Boréus, 1994; Blomqvist & Rothstein, 2000). In the name of freedom of choice, efficiency and decentralization, a series of reforms were introduced in different parts of the welfare state, where the individual citizen was to make active and well-informed choices in order to provide for their own welfare without public intervention (Larsson et al., 2012). Such reforms were accompanied by ideas that society should be organized as a market (Montin, 1997; Karlsson, 2017).

In the wake of these changes, the social and economic divisions have widened significantly, with an increasingly polarized society emerging, both in metropolitan and rural areas (Swärd, 2017). This process of polarization has led to heightened social tensions which have made urban segregation a topic that has received a great amount of public attention (Tedros, 2008). Once more, attention has been drawn to the urban areas previously known as part of the Million Programme, a large-scale housing project initiated in the late 1960s, providing rental apartments for the broad population. Almost from the start, these urban areas were framed in terms of deviance and as sites of social problems, tensions and conflicts – in the 1970s with a focus on class and in the 1980s and 1990s with a focus on ethno-cultural difference (cf. Ristilammi, 1994).

As shown in previous research, the areas of the Million Programme have become places strongly dominated by households with low average income and foreign background. Spatial and socioeconomic polarization between different areas in the cities has increased significantly since the economic crisis of the early 1990s – leading to a growth of unequal living conditions in different parts of the cities (Andersson et al., 2009; Scarpa, 2015). In the areas of the Million Programme, the intertwined effects of spatial segregation, marginalization in the labour market and territorial stigmatization produce social and economic as well as educational inequalities, affecting not least children and youth (Bunar, 2009).

In the new millennium, these suburban areas and their residents were primarily characterized in terms of social exclusion (*utanförskap*) and portrayed as excluded and being outside the mainstream Swedish society. 'Areas of exclusion' (*utanförskapsområden*) is in public discourse a common way of referring to multi-ethnic neighbourhoods in Sweden (Dahlstedt, 2015, 2018). The concept of social exclusion was part of mainstream policy discourse already in the 1990s, but it was normalized in the beginning of the new millennium. Particularly, the concept gained wider political support after the 2006 elections, when the centre-right government succeeded in defining the main challenge facing Swedish society and its welfare state as a choice between work and exclusion, activation and passive welfare benefits (Davidsson, 2010; Dahlstedt, 2015).

In the last decade, the areas categorized as 'areas of exclusion' have repeatedly been framed as a problem, not least due to general suppositions about their 'mentality' characterized by welfare dependency, alienation and passivity. In this dominant framing of the problem of exclusion, it is argued that once such mentality has emerged, it has a dynamic of its own, (re)producing urban peripheries into areas located on the outside of society – a kind of 'parallel society' (Dahlstedt & Eliassi, 2018). In this way, the urban periphery is framed as a problem in itself, posing a threat to the moral core of Swedish society and its social cohesion (cf. Schierup & Ålund, 2018). In relation to such framing of the urban periphery as a problem, calls have been made for a wide range of interventions to promote security and order in the Swedish urban landscape.

The framing of the urban periphery as a threat to order and security has been further accentuated in recent years, particularly in the aftermath of the 'refugee crisis' in 2015 when a large number of refugees sought refuge in Sweden, mainly from war-torn Syria (Herz & Lalander, 2019; Dahlstedt & Fejes, 2021). Discourses on securitization based on repressive measures targeting migrants (particularly Muslims) have previously been promoted by radical right-wing parties. However, in the wake of the 'refugee crisis', such measures have gradually been normalized. As in other European countries, mainstream political parties in Sweden have gradually changed their agenda, with a stronger focus on demands on migrants to adapt to the norms of Swedish majority (Dahlstedt & Neergaard, 2019; Lundström & Hübinette, 2020). In this context, the urban periphery has repeatedly been used in order to legitimize repressive measures targeting migrants and the areas they inhabit (cf. Dahlstedt & Eliassi, 2018).

Social Movements from the Periphery

In the context of an increasingly polarized urban Swedish landscape, several researchers have pointed to a wide range of social movement organizations emerging in the urban periphery in the last decade. These movements are engaged in a struggle of re-framing the contemporary problem of social exclusion and participation in relation to dominant discourses and thus making alternative strategies for the future possible (Kings, 2014; Schierup et al., 2014; Ålund & Lèon Rosales, 2017; Sernhede et al., 2019). In terms of the way in which these social movement organizations have framed the problem of social exclusion, we can observe a *diagnostic frame* that in a way turns both causes and responsibilities for the problem of social exclusion upside down, thus resisting dominant discourses and well-established problem representations. According to this diagnostic frame, it is not the urban periphery and its inhabitants that are the causes of the problem of social exclusion, but the exclusive society at large – a society which creates inequalities for the inhabitants of the urban periphery, rather than providing them with participatory opportunities they need.

'We Neither Can nor Want to Wait'

Among a range of organizations emerging in the urban periphery, in Malmö and the area of Nydala, we find the organization *All of Malmö* (*Helamalmö*). It is also on one of the walls of the organization's meeting place in Nydala that we find the words of Angela Davis which were quoted in the introduction of this chapter. The distance may seem long between Nydala of today, where All of Malmö operates, and the racial, urban polarization in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s which formed the context for the American civil rights movement for social change. Even if the Swedish historical and political context is radically different from the turbulent decades which marked the activism of the Black Panthers, there are in fact several parallels which connect Swedish segregated cities with American circumstances and racial tensions in the American society.

One such parallel is illustrated when Nicolas Lunabba (2021), one of the initiators of All of Malmö, describes the overall mission of the organization: 'We neither can nor want to wait for solutions for social justice that will never come, that we have been promised for so long'. In line with this mission, the organization has been engaged in a multitude of social mobilization activities in the local community, based on the experiences and needs of children and youth living in Nydala. The general purpose of the organization is to build trust, strengthen the local community and achieve structural change that responds to the needs of the children and youth of Nydala. As part of this mobilization, the meeting place where Davis' words are written on the wall was established in the autumn of 2018. Since then, a variety of activities have been conducted, aimed at and carried out together with the local population, not least the youth. The work has both been based on and aimed at local social mobilization. But it has also required the mobilization of a variety of resources that a range of actors in the surrounding society have had at their disposal.

> We had about fifty resourceful actors backing us up. With the support of these, we were able to quickly achieve a lot. We served three free meals a day (and were thus able to reduce the families' expenses by more than three thousand SEK a month). We opened the first library in the area for several decades. We developed a collaboration with Malmö University and the Department of Social Work. The idea with these collaborations was to show, especially young people in Nydala, that there are resources and opportunities and to, at least to some extent, break down the boundaries that exist between the 'area/the suburb' and other parts of Malmö. We also built a unit for the youth clinic and a complete gym, with sponsorship from a large gym corporation. And more to that. Thus, with a belief that we did not restrict the residents' sense of influence over the development, we had established a social infrastructure in the area, a kind of 'parallel society'. (ibid.)

We can here see how Lunabba actively relates to prevailing discourses on youth in the urban periphery – by adopting the usually stigmatizing term 'parallel society' as a means to describe the organization and its quest for social justice. By initiating cooperation, All of Malmö have been able to mobilize a broad repertoire of resources in order to meet the needs of children and youth of Nydala and thus to promote forms of participation on more equal terms (cf. Mešić et al., 2019). For instance, children and youth are by these collaborations provided free access to leisure activities, such

as gym, dance and gaming, that some of them otherwise might be more or less excluded from due to limited economic resources. In the meeting place, there are also possibilities for children and youth to borrow equipment needed for engaging in various leisure activities, which also makes participation on more equal terms possible.

Another important part of the organization's struggle for equal participation for children and youth living in Nydala is the provision of free breakfast. As the organization formulates in a statement posted on social media:

> Poverty hit some families so hard that many children in Malmö do not get to eat enough food. Children in Malmö are hungry. [. . .] We in All of Malmö believe that breakfast and preferably one more meal a day should be statutory. Especially in socio-economically vulnerable areas. It is not reasonably to expect children to feel good and to be able to concentrate at school without having eaten properly. [. . .] At the Meeting-place for All of Malmö in Nydala, we serve two meals a day; breakfast every weekday morning (open to all residents in Nydala) and snacks in the afternoons, combined with help with homework and study guidance (for children and young people). (All of Nydala, 2019)

The provision of free breakfast illustrates yet another parallel in time and space. Free breakfast for young people in the American ghetto was part of the prognostic framing made by the Black Panthers. With a decent breakfast, the youth would be able to go to school, get a good education and thereby be able to, in a better way, stand up for their rights. In this way, the provision of breakfast was part of a wider, political strategy. In parallel, All of Malmö frames the main problem in Sweden of today as a problem of poverty which affects the residents in areas such as Nydala particularly hard. To people outside Sweden, such way of framing the problem in terms of poverty may appear somehow surprising, considering Sweden's reputation for its egalitarian and universalist welfare regime. However, with the developments of the last decades, the gap between egalitarian policy ambitions and increase in inequalities has become hard not to notice. In order to meet this problem, local social mobilization by means of a broad participation among the youth in the community is seen as necessary in the struggle against poverty and segregation and for more equal opportunities for participation.

'By Any Means Necessary'

Another movement emerging from the urban periphery is The Panthers, an organization formed in Biskopsgården,[3] Gothenburg (cf. Sernhede et al., 2019). This social movement can be read as a response to the negative effects of the welfare policies in the last decades, in terms of privatization of the housing market and the closing down of social services such as libraries, health centres and youth recreation centres. Tellingly, the starting point for the organization was the closure of a vital meeting

---

[3] A neighborhood with similar characteristics as Nydala in Malmö.

point for local youth – the youth recreation centre in Biskopsgården. Eventually, the protests caused by the closure led to an occupation of the centre. Demands for change were raised and were soon met by broader support.

At the same time as the struggle of the Panthers was rooted in the specific locality of Biskopsgården, it was also, as indicated by the name of the organization, explicitly related to struggles elsewhere. When describing the emergence of The Panthers, one of the original members draws a parallel similar to the one we saw in the case of All of Malmö. In this case, a parallel is made between the situation of youth with a migrant background in the urban peripheries of Sweden today and the situation of youth living in American black ghettoes of the 1960s and 1970s – the historical context where the Black Panther Party was born:

> The Black Panther Party said they were a result of colonialism. Black people were in the US due to slavery and colonialism, and I can identify with that. We are not in Sweden because we are slaves, but because our parents were forced to escape from dictatorships supported by the US. So, we are also the result of colonialism and imperialism. I live in Sweden, I'm born here, but I'm neither Swedish nor Turkish. Black people are not seen as full citizens in the US, but they are not Africans either. We Kurds are children of the same colonial oppression and we are in exile in France, Germany, England and so on without being Europeans. Our parents were grateful that they got shelter here, but we young are no longer grateful, we do not want to be second-class citizens and that's why we think like the Black Panther Party and that's why we say change is 'by any means necessary'. (Sernhede, 2018: 204)

Even though the specific social circumstances in relation to which the organizations were developed are different, similar problems are identified. And further, quite similar strategies for how to address these problems are proposed. Thus, the diagnostic as well as the prognostic framing made draws on the identification of similarities between today's Sweden and the USA in the 1960s and 1970s. In this account, the ground cause of problems faced by black people in the USA and second-generation immigrants in Sweden is described in similar terms – with a general reference to patterns of Western colonialism and domination.

On the basis of these parallels, and inspired by the Black Panthers in the USA, a range of activities have been arranged by the Panthers in Biskopsgården, as means of dealing with the challenges identified, particularly for the youth. As in the case of All of Malmö, such activities are to a large extent based on mobilization of the local community with a specific focus on promoting participation among youth. Not least, a range of activities with the aim of developing a critical awareness among the youth have been initiated. For example, in line with a broad tradition of emancipatory pedagogy carried out in Swedish popular education, study circles have been arranged where youth get to read and discuss older as well as more recent literature and where they are encouraged to develop an understanding of their current existence in the light of an unequal, segregated social order. In line with the aim of challenging the unequal conditions that restrict the participation of youth, the organization has actively participated in the public debate – in Gothenburg as well as other parts of the country – articulating as well as politicizing the rights and needs of the youth. Further, football tournaments have been organized, new playgrounds

and football fields have been requested, and summer and winter camps have been arranged for children who cannot afford to leave Biskopsgården during vacations.

Negotiations Among the Youth

However, it is not only social movements emerging in the urban periphery that struggle against dominant discourses and current social inequalities. Youth living in the urban peripheries, confronting same discourses and inequalities which form the basis of the social movements, also engage in this struggle, not coordinated and based on collective action, but rather quite fragmented and based on individual engagement in everyday life. This topic will be elaborated further in the following. More specifically, I will examine how youth living in four areas in three Swedish cities engage in a politics of re-framing when they reflect upon their present living conditions and their possibilities in relation to the future. With respect to confidentiality, I will in the following refer to these areas as West area, East area, South area and North area.

In interviews with youth in these areas, we see a common *diagnostic frame* emerging. Rather than describing the urban periphery and its inhabitants as the cause of exclusion, the youth highlight a number of mechanisms that create inequalities, which in various ways make participation for people living in the urban periphery more difficult as compared to those living in other parts of the city. In line with such framing, these mechanisms are seen as the main cause of the problems that youth face in their lives, in the form of dominant discourses about the urban periphery and unequal treatment young people face in society at large. On the basis of such framing, different scenarios for the future are, in turn, made possible, i.e. a *prognostic frame* is articulated. However, in contrast to the social movement organizations, these scenarios are specifically based on individual rather than collective action.

'We Are Like a Family'

Among the mechanisms that create inequalities, youth repeatedly emphasize dominant discourses about the urban periphery as a dangerous and insecure 'parallel society', which causes a range of problems in their everyday lives. These discourses are described as not only misleading. They are also described as, in themselves, having a negative impact on the people whose reality they claim to describe. In relation to such dominant discourses, young people describe the area where they live in the opposite way – as a safe place, a home where there are friends whose presence contributes to a general sense of security – in contrast to the outside world, where discourses creating feelings of insecurity and difference circulate.

The relationship between dominant discourses about the urban periphery and the descriptions made by the youth is illustrated in the following dialogue, taking place in a focus group interview with youth living in the North area of the city:

> Researcher: How is life in North area?
> Ahmed: It's nice, you feel safe, because you are born and raised here.
> Emir: You know everyone around here.
> Vedat: All those prejudices, I think they're a bit excessive.
> Researcher: What makes you feel safe?
> Ahmed: We are like a family here, everyone knows each other.
> Researcher: What do you think about the views of North area from the world outside?
> Emir: Well, things might happen, but I think it's exaggerated.
> Selim: Things do happen, but media always puts a spin on things.

In this excerpt, the youth consistently identify themselves with the area. They repeatedly frame the urban area as a place where they belong – referred to as their 'home'. This sense of belonging is quite tellingly captured by the metaphor of *family*. As inhabitants of North area, the youth 'know everyone', and as Ahmed says, 'we are like a family here'. Such framing of North area as a safe place and a 'home' is made in sharp contrast to what is considered to be exaggerated prejudice from the outside society, framing their community as a place of violence, turmoil and insecurity – a place outside of law and order. In the last sentence of the conversation, Selim puts a specific focus on the media, as more or less responsible for such prejudice to emerge and gain popular support: 'media always puts a spin on things'.

The youth who were interviewed emphasize that they do not recognize the reality they encounter in media reports about the urban periphery. Rather than contributing to a sense of understanding and trust among the people who live in the places represented in the media reports, the reporting helps to create feelings of discomfort and alienation among the residents. Such argument is clearly illustrated in the following quote, where Dimen reflects on the media coverage regarding the situation in North area, the place where he lives:

> So, when I watch TV, the media describe North area as a ghetto... it's really horrible... they take pictures and film the shabbiest place. There are shabby places all over the country. If they come and really look at North area, in the schools, fields, everywhere, they will not see gangs destroying. That's not how it is. There are gangs everywhere. I cannot deny that gangs do not exist in North area, because they do. But I think North area is a wonderful place...

In the quote we can see how Dimen more or less explicitly accuses journalists of not properly knowing the areas they report on. If they had taken time to really visit the places they tell stories about, they would see that the description they give does not correspond to reality. Although gangs do exist, Dimen notes, it still does not prevent the North area from being a 'wonderful place' to live in. The argument reappears, if we turn to another two places, the West and the East area, each one characterized by specific local conditions. In the following two interview excerpts, there is a striking similarity in how the places are framed:

> I think life is pretty good, calm and sensible. Things do happen from time to time, but when you were young, you always heard bad things about West area. That it was a suburb where anything happened, basically. But that's not my picture at all. [...] I don't think it's bad, it's

calm. [. . .] I think it's pretty good, compared to the rumor. People are down-to-earth, different cultures stimulate one another, a will to be a part of society and in the context, kind of. I feel that it is very good, I just have a good impression. (Besar, West area)

What is written about the area where I live, East area, I don't believe in that so much. Because they have not experienced living here, for so long. Of course, there are bad people. Things do happen, now and then, that is not so great. But otherwise, I think it's a great place to live. (Ali, East area)

In both cases, the reflections actively relate to a dominant discourse and its framing of the area. Once more, the media is positioned as responsible for the emergence of such framing, at least implicitly. The reflections of both Besar and Ali are explicitly made in opposition to dominant framings of respective areas, characterized as too simplistic and problem-oriented. At the same time, they both partly confirm that some elements of these dominant framings may be justified. However, in relation to mostly negative framings of respective areas in dominant discourse, Besar and Ali present what appears as a counter-frame, stating that 'it's calm' and 'it's a great place to live'.

Turning to North area, Siana is even more straightforward in his account of media reporting on the suggested chaos and destruction in the urban periphery: 'In every country, there are excluded suburbs, which are generally referred to as: "Do not go there, it's dangerous"', she says. 'But it's just bullshit. There is more murder downtown than here. . . I don't think they are aware of it, but they really hurt us'. As suggested by Siana, the dominant framing of the urban periphery made in media reports has real and quite negative effects for youth living in these places, a topic that will be further elaborated in the following.

'Nobody Cares About Our Rights'

In addition to these dominant discourses about the urban periphery, youth describe the unequal treatment by people throughout Swedish society as causing many of the problems they face in their daily lives. Such treatment is often said to be based on dominant discourses which are linked to practices of discrimination. In this way, discourses may have a variety of material effects for the youth, in their everyday lives.

Myner, one of the young men interviewed, provides a range of concrete examples of the real life consequences that discourses of the dangerous and unsafe urban periphery may have for those actually living there:

It affects us, for example if you are buying a car and you see the cost of the insurance. When you are applying for a job, they very much ask where you live. Everything is getting more expensive because of these prejudices. (Myner, North area)

As we have seen previously, youth repeatedly describe the area where they live as a safe place, where they belong and feel at home. Such descriptions are based on comparisons referring to previous experiences, in contrast to the unsafe world of the

outside, surrounding society. Some of the youth describe how they might not feel at home when they move in other parts of the city. In the following dialogue, Siana, Hamid and Younes, living in North area, reflect upon their experiences of being treated differently when they move through the city because of the way they look and dress:

> Siana: You don't feel safe. Here, nobody cares about how you dress. That's how it is.
> Hamid: Yeah, it's a matter of what you wear, what clothes you wear. Like Siana says, they always look.
> Siana: They judge you beforehand. They don't even know your surname. But they judge you.
> Hamid: When you go to a bar or something downtown… It's always like, ah if you look right, then you are let in. If you're dressed differently, like you're from the hood, then you'll never be let in. That's the way it is.
> Younes: Just like they're saying. You just feel outside. You really don't want to be part of that.

In this dialogue we can see how experiences of being looked at and treated as different make the youth feel uncomfortable outside of the area in which they live. Experiences of such treatment, in turn, make the urban periphery even more appear as a place where 'home' is.

Another illustrative example of discrimination is provided by Faduma, living in South area. In the following quote, she reflects upon her experience of being treated as a second-class citizen, not being listened to and constantly being questioned:

> As soon as you ask for help, they will step on you. The police can stop you anywhere and take you to some unknown public space and just leave you there. Nobody cares about our rights. Then when you get upset and the kids do something stupid, you just focus on that. Why don't you see the whole picture? Unemployment, crime, everything is related, but instead you only focus on when someone is throwing the stone. (Faduma, South area)

In the quote, Faduma cries out her desperation: 'Nobody cares about our rights'. Who, then, is to blame for this neglect? Once more, there is an unspecified 'them' referred to, without a clear indication concerning who might be included in this category. However, when Faduma goes on to further elaborate on the question of who is to blame for the problem described, she specifically directs her focus on the police. On the basis of what is said during the interview, there is no indication that Faduma herself has committed the kind of illegal action she describes – i.e. throwing a stone. Nor would she advocate such an act. However, what Faduma does in the quote is to describe the illegal act of throwing a stone as a response to the frustration caused by having to experience being treated as a second-class citizen. In order to understand how this action becomes possible in the first place, Faduma suggests that there is a need to see the action in relation to the 'whole picture', i.e. in the light of the mechanisms that create inequalities, and the effects they have on youth living in the urban periphery.

A similar argument is developed by Saladin, when reflecting on the present conditions in East area, the place where he lives. In his account, there is a reality of a divided city emerging, where living conditions are very unequal, restricting the participation of youth living in East area and other similar places:

> If I am completely honest, considering that I have lived here for so long and grown up, it
> feels like home. . . But if you look at East area, compared to other countries, other cities, we
> have an upper-class, middle-class and under-class. A society built on profit. So, then we will
> have certain areas that look like East area, due to the circumstances, here is where crime is
> high, where exclusion is even higher, where those with more resources in their pockets
> choose to move away, instead of helping the area to be developed. And there is also a
> xenophobic policy. So, in East area, just to summarize: Why crime and all this has increased,
> it is because many have felt this exclusion. Many have experienced this 'us and them'. Not
> only felt, but also seen it. [. . .] What you need is to find something valuable, that suits each
> individual. What may give some hope. Because hope and making plans in life is of great
> importance. And if there is no hope, between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, then you will
> fall. You will most probably end up in crime. . . (Saladin, East area)

Like several other young people who were interviewed, Saladin describes the
place where he lives as 'home'. However, in his framing of life in East area, there are
several dimensions, not all very positive. First and foremost, Saladin describes East
area as a place where people live under quite different conditions compared to other
parts of the city. Not least, the economic resources are described as significantly
scarce in East area. Even though the conditions are locally specific, Saladin under-
stands the current situation in the area as part of a larger pattern, where cities are
unequal in terms of economic resources. According to Saladin, these inequalities in
turn have a number of negative effects in the local environment. One of the negative
effects raised is that the residents who have the opportunity and economic resources
choose to leave the area and move to other parts of the city, which in turn makes
further development of the area hard to achieve.

Under the current living conditions in East area, feelings of exclusion are
developed among the residents. The world appears as divided into 'us' and 'them',
where the residents in East area make up the latter category. In this context, feelings
of hopelessness emerge and spread, particularly among youth, a situation described
as a breeding ground for crime. In Saladin's account, for youth without hope for the
future, the criminal path may become a possible alternative. Feelings of resentment
and exclusion not only shape the present but can also shape the future.

'What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Stronger'

The ways in which youth reflect upon their current lives in the urban periphery and
the problems they face also relate to their ideas about the future. In other words, their
diagnostic framing of problems in the present relates to their *prognostic framing*
concerning how these problems may be dealt with in the future. Youth may describe
themselves as being in a vulnerable position in relation to dominant discourses about
the urban periphery as well as in relation to unequal social conditions. However, they
do not position themselves as passive victims. Quite the contrary. This becomes
evident when the young people reflect upon the future, a future often described as
both difficult and uncertain, but at the same time hopeful. In their reflections they
express a strong will to make a change, a will that in various ways challenges both

dominant discourses about the urban periphery and the unequal social conditions which characterize it.

The desire to make a change is further illustrated in the following dialogue, between Siana and Hamid, both living in North area:

Siana: So, it hurts us, but it makes us stronger. It's like, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, kind of. That's it. We're young, we see, and we know.
Hamid: That is, we have a future.
Siana: Exactly. I don't know how to explain, but we can change it. We will change, we're going to change it and we're about to make a change. It's not that we haven't started. We have started a long time ago. [. . .] We have to be strong.

When Siana and Hamid talk about the future, there is a distinction made between 'us' and 'them'. As illustrated in the dialogue, there is a strong responsibility put on youth living in the urban periphery. Siana emphasizes that youth need to 'be strong'. In the quote we see a dialogue being developed between Siana and Hamid as spokespersons for marginalized youth, on the one hand, and an unarticulated 'them', on the other. Both Siana and Hamid emphasize the need of developing a sense of solidarity and belonging among 'us', the young people – in relation to those 'others'. Who these 'others' are is not made explicit during the course of the interview. What is made explicit, however, is that it is the youth who *are* the future, as Hamid emphasizes. Siana and Hamid both express a strong belief that young people can and will bring about change.

When youth reflect about the future, they say they expect greater difficulties and challenges as a result of who they are and where they live. However, as illustrated in the following quote, the future is not completely one-dimensional:

I'm a woman from Thailand and I don't have a Swedish surname. Few people can pronounce my last name, and nobody knows how to spell it [laughter]. I'm also working class. Sure, some people are fighting for equality, that immigrants should have the same opportunities, and some are struggling for the working class, but I am at the bottom of all three categories. . . I'm a little afraid of the future. If there are a thousand job applicants and I am one of them, how far will I get? It's a little dark, but I hope it will get better. If you live with that dream, there is still a chance. (Mara, North area)

Mara describes the future in terms of difficulties as well as opportunities and hopes for change. As illustrated in her reflection, current life conditions shape her situation not only in the present but also in relation to the future, as her plans for the future are perceived as being restricted by the fact that she is a young, working class woman from Thailand. At the same time, for Mara, as well as for other young people living in the urban periphery, there are hopes as well as dreams in relation to the future.

In contrast to the framing made by the social movement organizations emerging from the urban periphery, we can see that in the reflections about the future made by the youth, most scenarios are based on individual, rather than collective, action. According to the views expressed in the interviews, individuals need to take responsibility and stand up for themselves, if they really want change to happen. Otherwise, change will not be possible. While youth in individual and focus group interviews do challenge both dominant discourses and current inequalities, in their

reflections, there is a significant absence of specific actors (besides themselves) who are held responsible for current problems and consequently positioned as targets of critique and organized, collective action.

Discussion

This chapter has focused on struggles for equal participation of youth in the Swedish urban periphery. In the context of an increasing urban polarization, accompanied by political discourses which blame the inhabitants for their own problems, social movements as well as young people are involved in struggles where these developments are made visible, reflected upon and contested (Schierup et al., 2014; Sernhede et al., 2019). In line with ideas developed in an emancipatory pedagogical tradition (cf. Freire, 1972; Shor & Freire, 1987), we can here see how both social movement organizations and young people in the urban periphery engage in practices of learning and critical reflection. By engaging in such practices of learning, social movement organizations and young people develop diagnoses of the present reality, which in turn make possible the development of strategies to transform reality. Thus, critical reflection becomes a means of both understanding and changing the world.

As for social movements, we can see how they challenge current inequalities by representing them as illegitimate and caused by mechanisms and structures in society. The focus is thus redirected *away* from the urban periphery and the effects of social exclusion, *to* the surrounding Swedish society and the mechanisms which generate inequalities (cf. Schierup & Ålund, 2018). In response to this particular framing of the problem, the social movement organizations make the urban periphery into a place of critical reflection, social mobilization and politicized collective protest, with the aim of developing a critical consciousness among the residents in the urban periphery, not least among young people (cf. Tahvilzadeh et al., 2018). In their struggle for young people's participation, organizations such as All of Malmö and The Panthers actively connect their struggle to historic activities and struggles of the Black Panthers in the USA. While each situation is specific, of course, the problems faced by black people in the USA and second-generation immigrants in Sweden are partially conceptualized in similar terms: as a matter of second-class citizenship and a lack of equal conditions to take part in society (cf. Sernhede et al., 2019).

Critical reflections concerning unequal conditions of participation are also made by the youth. In interviews with young people living in the four areas, we could see how the main focus in their framing of current living conditions is redirected, *from* conditions located in the urban periphery *to* the multitude of mechanisms producing inequality (such as dominant discourses about the urban periphery as well as experiences of discrimination). According to the diagnostic frame that emerges in the interviews, these mechanisms cause a range of problems for the youth in their everyday lives. This description of living conditions takes shape in contrast to a

dominant discourse reinforced by media reports portraying the urban periphery as a different and dangerous place on the outskirts of the mainstream Swedish society (cf. Andersson, 2003; León Rosales, 2010). At the same time, youth stress that current inequalities can be overcome. In terms of prognostic framing, the main scenario for the future that emerges is directed towards the individual level and towards the youth themselves. Accordingly, young people have to initiate change by themselves – as nobody else will do it *for* them.

When it comes to the strategies emerging, we can see both similarities and differences between the social movements and the interviewed young people. One significant difference concerns the matter of how change can be achieved. While youth put emphasis on individual action, the organizations highlight the importance of collective action. But there are also similarities, not least in terms of who has the responsibility for making change come about. In both cases, a strong focus is directed inwards, towards the urban periphery – towards the youth and the population at large, as individuals and as a collective.

In order to bring about change, both organizations are actively engaged in activities with the aim of influencing public opinion and decision-making. But most of all, they initiate a range of activities with a focus on mobilizing the local community, often in the shape of social work carried out on a voluntary basis (cf. Sernhede et al., 2019). Such work can be seen as both a response to and a symptom of a wider, ongoing transformation of Swedish welfare policy (cf. Dahlstedt & Ekholm, 2021). Such work can be seen as a *response* to a need of social support among residents in these areas, a need which has increased following welfare cuts and sharpened demands for individual responsibility. At the same time, such work can also be seen as a *symptom* of ongoing developments in welfare policy. Both organizations conduct work – on a voluntary basis – that could be part of a public responsibility of the welfare state (cf. Mešić et al., 2019).

This chapter has illustrated how problems such as social exclusion are constantly renegotiated and how both social movement organizations and young people are engaged in learning how to understand and to change these problems. There is not *one* problem of social exclusion, but rather a variety of ways of *framing* this problem. Depending on how the problem is framed, different scenarios for the future emerge. Current conditions and developments are not given – rather, they are the result of a *politics of re-framing*, a constant struggle. Social movements as well as young people in the urban periphery are active participants in this struggle. Although the struggle for equal participation takes on different forms, it is based on same critical analysis of current circumstances which are perceived as unequal, illegitimate and in need of change. In these critical reflections of reality, possibilities for transformation emerge. The outcomes of these struggles are yet to be seen.

References

All of Nydala. (2019). Helamalmös frukostprogram på Nydala, Facebook, 2019-03-09. https://www.facebook.com/helamalmo/posts/2337968139599499/. Accessed 21 Apr 2021.

Ålund, A. (1997). *Multikultiungdom: Kön, etnicitet, identitet*. Studentlitteratur.

Ålund, A., & Lèon Rosales, R. (2017). Renaissance from the margins. In A. Ålund et al. (Eds.), *Reimagineering the nation*. Peter Lang.

Andersson, Å. (2003). *Inte samma lika*. Symposion.

Andersson, R., Bråmå, Å., & Hogdal, J. (2009). *Fattiga och rika – segregerad stad: Flyttningar och segregationens dynamik i Göteborg 1990–2006*. Göteborgs stad.

Blomqvist, P., & Rothstein, B. (2000). *Välfärdsstatens nya ansikte: Demokrati och marknadsreformer inom den offentliga sektorn*. Agora.

Boréus, K. (1994). *Högervåg*. Tiden.

Bunar, N. (2009). *När marknaden kom till förorten: Valfrihet, konkurrens och symboliskt kapital i mångkulturella områdens skolor*. Studentlitteratur.

Dahlstedt, M. (2015). Discourses of employment and inclusion in Sweden. In E. Righard et al. (Eds.), *Transformation of Scandinavian cities*. Nordic Academic Press.

Dahlstedt, M. (2018). *Förortsdrömmar*. Linköping University Electronic Press.

Dahlstedt, M., & Ekholm, D. (Eds.). (2021). *Idrottens kraft? Ungas livsvillkor och ojämlikhetens problem i en segregerad stad*. Studentlitteratur.

Dahlstedt, M., & Eliassi, B. (2018). Slaget om hemmet: Värden, utanförskapanden och förorten som folkhemmets periferi. *Sociologisk forskning, 55*(2–3), 203–223.

Dahlstedt, M., & Fejes, A. (Eds.). (2021). *Utbildning i migrationens tid: Viljor, organisering och villkor för inkludering*. Studentlitteratur.

Dahlstedt, M., & Neergaard, A. (2019). Crisis of solidarity? Changing welfare and migration regimes in Sweden. *Critical Sociology, 45*(1), 121–135.

Davidsson, T. (2010). *Utanförskapelsen. Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift, 17*(2), 149–169.

Freire, P. (1972). *The pedagogy of the oppressed*. Penguin Books.

Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation*. Sage.

Herz, M., & Lalander, P. (2019). *Rörelser, gränser och liv: Att lyssna till de unga som kom*. Studentlitteratur.

Karlsson, T. S. (2017). *New public management – ett svenskt 90-talsfenomen?* Studentlitteratur.

Kings, L. (2014). Förortens organisering och kampen för förnyelse. In Myndigheten för ungdoms- och civilsamhällsfrågor (Ed.), *Fokus 14: Ungas fritid och organisering.* Myndigheten för ungdoms- och civilsamhällsfrågor.

Lalander, P. (2009). *Respekt: Gatukultur, ny etnicitet och droger*. Liber.

Larsson, B., Thörn, H., & Letell, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Transformations of the Swedish welfare state*. Palgrave Macmillan.

León Rosales, R. (2010). *Vid framtidens hitersta gräns*. Mångkulturellt centrum.

Lunabba, N. (2021). Till parallellsamhällets försvar – om Helamalmös uppkomst och riktning. In M. Dahlstedt et al. (Eds.), *Socialt arbete – rörelse, förändring, motstånd*. Lund.

Lundström, C., & Hübinette, T. (2020). *Vit melankoli: En analys av en nation i kris*. Makadam.

Mešić, N., Dahlstedt, M., Nyström, S., & Fejes, A. (2019). Use-values for inclusion: Mobilizing resources in popular education for newly arrived refugees in Sweden. *Social Inclusion, 7*(2), 85–95.

Montin, S. (1997). New public management på svenska. *Politica, 29*(3), 261–278.

Ristilammi, P.-M. (1994). *Rosengård och den svarta poesin*. Symposion.

Scarpa, S. (2015). *The spatial manifestation of inequality*. Department of Social Work, Linneaus University.

Schierup, C.-U., & Ålund, A. (2018). Re-imagineering the common in precarious times. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 39*(2), 207–223.

Schierup, C.-U., Ålund, A., & Kings, L. (2014). Reading the Stockholm riots. *Race & Class, 55*(3), 1–21.

Sernhede, O. (2018). Förorten och det sociala arbetet som försvann. In M. Dahlstedt & P. Lalander (Eds.), *Manifest – För ett socialt arbete i tiden*. Lund.

Sernhede, O., León Rosales, R., & Söderman, J. (2019). *"När betongen rätar sin rygg": Ortenrörelsen och folkbildningens renässans*. Daidalos.

Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1987). *A pedagogy of liberation*. Bergin & Garvey Publishers.

Snow, D. A., & Benford, R. D. (1988). Ideology, frame resonance, and participant mobilization. In B. Klandermans et al. (Eds.), *From structure to action*. JAI Press.

Stigendal, M. (2016). *Samhällsgränser*. Liber.

Swärd, H. (Ed.). (2017). *Den kantstötta välfärden*. Studentlitteratur.

Tahvilzadeh, N., Dahlstedt, M., & Kings, L. (2018). Orten och stadens demokratisering. In M. Dahlstedt & P. Lalander (Eds.), *Manifest – för ett socialt arbete i tiden*. Lund.

Tedros, A. (2008). *Storstadsproblem: Konkurrerande framställningar av förorten i svensk storstadspolitik 1988–1998*, Förvaltningshögskolan, Göteborgs universitet.

Magnus Dahlstedt is Professor of Social Work at the Department of Culture and Society, Linköping University, Sweden.

Chapter 11
Young People's Spatial Practices as a Key to a Different Perspective on Participatory Educational Landscapes: Reflections on Graffiti and Parkour

Yağmur Mengilli, Christian Reutlinger, and Dominic Zimmermann

Abstract This chapter explores the complex relationship between institutionalized and formal education on the one hand and the flexibility or adaptability of the city in reference to aspects of young people's participatory practices on the other. It builds on insights from two empirical cases from the EU Horizon 2020 research project PARTISPACE, which focused on a broad exploration of youth participation and its relationship to public space: namely, a crew of sprayers and a training group of parkour runners. The discussion of their unfolding relationships to the city shows that if young people's spatial practices are viewed from an educational and self-educational point of view, not only do the places that are relevant to them become visible but their own educational landscapes also begin to become evident. These are educational landscapes that are created through young people's own educational practices according to the relevancies of their everyday lives. These proper landscapes may differ from official ones, which eventually allows the relevance of the latter to be questioned. While this is evident in this article's depiction and comparison of youth cultural scenes, it must not be restricted to specific scenes.

Keywords Educational landscape · Participation · Learning · Youth · Spatial practices · Graffiti · Parkour

Y. Mengilli (✉)
Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main, Germany
e-mail: mengilli@em.uni-frankfurt.de

C. Reutlinger
Institute of Social Work, University of Applied Sciences, St. Gallen, Switzerland
e-mail: christian.reutlinger@ost.ch

D. Zimmermann
Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Lucerne, Switzerland
e-mail: dominic.zimmermann@hslu.ch

This chapter explores the complex relationship between institutionalized and formal education (as *Bildung*) and the flexibility of the city in reference to aspects of young people's participatory practices. It builds on insights from two empirical cases from the EU Horizon 2020 research project PARTISPACE,[1] which focused on a broad exploration of youth participation and its relationship to public space.

Education is closely related to the city. As Mack (2017, 205) explains, "thanks to their central spatial function with regard to their surroundings, cities fulfil relevant functions in the field of formal education, and act as important places and opportunities for non-formal and informal education". Except for monasteries in the Middle Ages and reform schools in the early twentieth century, educational institutions have predominantly been located in cities. Education is also an important location factor for the city's economic success, while it is also vital for citizens' upward social mobility (Mack, 2017, 206).

More recently, particularly in German-speaking countries, education and cities—or, more generally, municipalities—have been related through discourses on so-called educational landscapes, which underscores the importance of an integrated socio-spatial conception of education including educational practices outside formal educational bodies like schools and universities. Such educational landscapes can be found, for example, youth centres where young people can articulate their ideas and appropriate space in a space where they also hang out and relax. These places have enormous learning potential, as learning happens by doing and is accompanied by guidance through a non-formal pedagogy. Furthermore, the reconstruction of young people's informal activities, such as the appropriation of public benches and their way of organizing themselves around and in between the city (districts), offers the possibility to understand processes of learning among young people (cf. Mengilli, 2021).

The concept of educational landscapes promises to allow for more inclusive learning in the sense of a broader recognition of places and institutions of education but also in the sense of ensuring people's access to education:

> In an educational landscape, all persons and institutions that educate, care for or accompany a child or adolescent work together. They exchange information, plan new offers together and work together systematically. The aim is to support each child or young person and to give everyone a fair chance for education. (Education21.ch, n.d.)

The term "educational landscape" refers to various developments in the field of education which came to the forefront in the wake of negative results from international education studies on young people's scholastic performance, such as PISA, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This concerns both the broader understanding of education as a lifelong process and different educational bodies' responsibility to support this process or to steer it through national, municipal and local politics. Along with these developments, the entire city has increasingly come under the spotlight of educational processes and debates, which moves education beyond the classroom and see, as Coelen et al. contend, the "city or urban spaces as a space

---

[1] http://partispace.eu/

for education" (Coelen et al., 2019, 38). Educational landscape is "linked to educa-
tion policy goals, theoretical considerations, models and reports from practice"
(Bollweg & Otto, 2017, 195). It aims at securing beneficial conditions for education
and at the provision of new approaches and options for children and young people's
cognitive, social and emotional development (Bollweg & Otto, 2017, 196). Accord-
ingly, the concept accentuates the interaction between various educational activities
within and outside different educational bodies usually within a local setting like a
municipality. The concept emphasizes the modernization of the educational system
by involving other "municipally rooted institutions, organizations, clubs and/or
facilities from civil society, seen as actors in the field of education" (Bollweg &
Otto, 2017, 197). The corresponding territorial governance is geared towards the
establishment of overall joint strategies that are binding for all involved parties and
thereby marks a joining of forces that seeks to improve the circumstances in which
learning and education take place. As such, "the 'ideal' landscape opens up new
constructive options for municipalities, offering increased social justice and ways for
all citizens to develop, but is also blocking paths [which are supposed to be
challenging]" (Bollweg & Otto, 2017, 195).

Education in an educational landscape is not spatially limited to formal learning
processes in institutions. Instead, it understands the term education in a more
interactive spatial dimension (within a given place), "involving access, use and, in
the end, democratic rights to participation and involvement" (Bollweg & Otto, 2017,
196). The spatial dimension of learning goes beyond territorial coordination among
different educational bodies and professionals and therefore requires the recognition
of all places where learning and education happen regardless of whether they are
formal, non-formal or informal. With this perspective, non-institutionalized and
non-functionalized spaces become relevant "where the subject goes to gather expe-
rience and opportunities for development, or which are produced through the flexible
use of spaces, such as public spaces" (Bollweg & Otto, 2017, 196) and thus lend
itself to looking at education in the "occasions and opportunities for educating
children and young people; hangouts and places where they can meet" (Mack,
2008, 743).

In this context, education needs to be understood as a process that affects
individual subjects, which equally entails "not only discovering their identity and
the skill to live their own, independent lives but also relationship skills, solidarity,
public spirit or the ability to take on social responsibility" (Otto & Rauschenbach,
2004, 23). Education within the educational landscape is tied to a focus on practical
values (cf. Otto & Ziegler, 2004), to the subject's life contexts and trajectories and to
spatial settings that "leave spaces and create spaces in the sense of contexts of
enablement" (Reutlinger, 2009, 20). As the shift to educational landscapes has
coincided with a heightened understanding of the importance of young people's
subjective experiences, it is indispensable to comprehend the relational means by
which such spaces are constituted, depending not only on structural elements but on
the practices and experiences of youth (c.f. Zimmermann et al., 2018). By contrast, if
the perspective of the people who should be educated is neglected, the concept risks

a disconnect between young people's actual everyday practices and, worst case, becomes irrelevant for the analysis of their lives outside formal institutions.

Thus, we argue that the concept of educational landscapes must be understood from a youth perspective to clearly capture its innovative, inclusive and participative value in education policy and planning. Re-envisioning a spatial concept from a youth perspective that takes into consideration young people's social geography or spatial sociology can be achieved by reconstructing their spatial practices, that is, by understanding how the young people themselves create spaces and how this, in turn, influences them.[2] It is important to note that young people's everyday spaces outside school often do not include any educational professional or other adults. Thus, education in and through these spaces is thus often self-education and peer education. An educational perspective that values the young people's lifeworlds, therefore, uncovers how young people create space to better understand their processes of education, which are to a large extent self-formation or self-cultivation outside the realm of formal education (c.f. Gadamer, 2001).[3]

In sum, discourses on educational landscapes stipulate that education and learning happen everywhere, in formal as well as informal settings in public space, and often without any guidance or the assistance of educational professionals. To understand the spatial configurations of educational experiences, it is key to identify the relevant spatial practices that lead to the conception of these informal spaces. By exploring such practices, we can more fully distil the relationships between the creation of spaces and self-education.[4] In this chapter, we illustrate such relationships through a case study of two peer groups of young people, graffiti writers (sprayers) in Frankfurt, Germany, and parkour runners from Zurich, Switzerland. Both groups have important educational experiences in public space—beyond school, youth work arrangements or other spaces usually considered in the planning of educational landscapes. While both have a very direct relationship to public space,

---

[2] Such a perspective, which is grounded on the reconstruction of children's or youth's spatial practices or their views on space(s), can be traced back to the first studies in the 1920s on the "living space of the big city child" (Muchow & Muchow, 1998 [1935]) and has received new impetus since the 1990s through the Spatial Turn. The basic tenor of this perspective is that interlocking negative chains in urban settlement development lead to monofunctional, stimulation-poor places in public space, and the disappearance of open spaces results in the displacement of children into enclosed, institutionalised, isolated, mediatised places that are often controlled by adult caregivers (c.f. e.g. Zeiher & Zeiher, 1994; Reutlinger, 2015).

[3] Gadamer focused on the educational ideal of cultivating oneself through communion with others, and thus "Bildung" for him was foremost self-cultivation or self-formation. Gadamer calls upon the individual to take responsibility for his or her education. He insists that youth address educational needs by strengthening their own resources instead of relinquishing their "responsibility to teachers, schools, society, or to anyone else to make such improvements. They must take ownership of their education and cultivate themselves" (Johnson, 2014, 72).

[4] In some other languages, this can be formulated more elegantly using two nuances of the corresponding term, such as, e.g. *Bildung* in German, which means both education and formation, creation or constitution: then *Raumbildung* (the creation of spaces) is interrelated with *Selbstbildung* (self-education and the formation of a self).

they differ in the ways they relate to the urban infrastructure around them and thus how they constitute spaces of their own.

Due to their high involvement in the creation of their own spaces and their access to the important societal goods they obtain through this, the space-making practices of graffiti and parkour groups can be considered an enlargement of the concept of educational landscape in entering/reconstructing youth spaces. Hence, besides exploring the relationship between spatial practices and self-education, we will also highlight the participatory potential of these spaces, more specifically, the group's spatial practices. Exploring the potential for participation further contributes to a more robust understanding of educational landscapes that is based on young people's practices and perspectives since participation and involvement are supposedly key aspects of educational landscapes (Bollweg & Otto, 2017, 196). As less-formal educational settings are integrated into educational policy and planning, the concept of educational landscapes therefore promises to allow for more youth involvement and participation, which, in turn, allows for spaces that can potentially be more participative. This eventually invokes the question of "which opportunities occur for the subject to determine or help determine the shape of those places?" (Bollweg & Otto, 2017, 199). In the next section, how young people can participate in the shaping spaces that are relevant for their education will be illustrated through the case of a group of graffiti artists in Frankfurt.

Spatial Practices of Graffiti Writers in Frankfurt

The *Hoodboys* are a graffiti crew[5] in the city of Frankfurt (Germany) comprising about ten young men aged between 20 and 26, who met each other through their shared interest in graffiti. The group runs a "legal" crew as a kind of business brand for paid commissions and an "illegal" crew to maintain their reputation in public space. Between May 2016 and April 2017, we conducted a group discussion, six biographical interviews and a city walk where the group showed us their places and did ethnographic fieldwork with the group. Based on this data, this section reconstructs the Hoodboy's spatial practices. It reconstructs significant "graffiti" places in urban space based on observed practices and the Hoodboy's own narratives. Following Martina Löw (2018), their spatial practices are differentiated into two distinct operations of space constitution: *spacing* and *synthesis*.

For Löw, space is firstly "constituted through the placing of social goods and people or by the positioning of markings that are primarily symbolic to identify ensembles of goods and people as such (e.g. street signs on entering or leaving communities)" (2018, 134). This is what Löw calls spacing. "Spacing thus means erecting, deploying, or positioning" (134). Young people's practices in public space

---

[5] A crew is a group of people who have a common task. Within the context of graffiti, it is common to organize oneself in a crew (cf. Hitzler, 2010, 75).

that could be categorized as spacing can include, e.g. how and where young people position or move their own bodies as well as objects like food, clothing, sports gear, etc. while they are involved in certain practices (e.g. hanging around, doing sports, making art) and how they use symbolic markings (e.g. tags, drawings, gestures, etc.). Secondly, space according to Löw is also constituted through an operation of synthesis, "that is, goods and people are amalgamated to spaces by way of processes of perception, imagination, and memory" (135). With this aspect in focus, it would be possible to look at how young people identify an ensemble of objects and people as *their* spaces, e.g. as their neighbourhood or as spaces that they perceive to be for other groups, and uncover the aspects of certain youth practices that contribute to the perception of certain spaces as a (suitable, good, bad, etc.) space. For example, street-hockey players' spatial synthesis will be probably closely linked to the quality of the pavement that acts as the rink, and the resulting space will likely end with the pavement; for another group, the space might not be useful as their practices are linked to other meaningful objects and people, which would thereby contribute differently to group's spatial synthesis. It is important to underline that this distinction is purely analytical and that the related processes giving rise to the spatiality of human life are far more complex in reality. However, as this conceptual distinction has proven to be of considerable analytical value, it shall be adopted here for a first approach to the Hoodboy's spatial practices.

Diverse phenomena are referred to as graffiti: from prehistoric cave paintings of people from the late old Stone Age to today's modern and often illegal forms of expression on public surfaces. Modern-day graffiti dates back to New York's suburban hip-hop youth culture in the 1970s. According to legend, the graffiti story began in New York in the early 1970s with a messenger boy who used the pseudonym "TAKI 183" during "forays" through the city. In 1971, the *New York Times* published this "odd scribble" and made it popular. Other young people took up this idea and made it to their leisure activity and painted the city with abbreviations called "tags" (cf. Hitzler & Niederbacher, 2010, 71). Even today, graffiti plays an essential role in the cityscape, as the illegal painting of graffiti is generally considered to be property damage and is therefore discussed in connection with the political question of property (Klee, 2010). By law, graffiti falls under vandalism and is punished as property damage. This criminalization makes graffiti writers delinquent and stigmatizes their practices as a criminal offence (cf. Windzio, 2010). However, this chapter details, the graffiti group Hoodboys' practices which reflect young people's ways of "city-making".

The Hoodboys pursue their youth cultural interest together as a crew through the spraying of legal and illegal graffiti throughout the city. The group's graffiti making is, in illegal contexts, often referred to as "spraying", and, in a legal, relaxed setting, it is seen as "painting". In accordance with their name, the group paints graffiti in their own area, that is, their neighbourhood, or in areas that they acquire through marking the territory with their work. In graffiti culture, there are different forms of markings, which can be differentiated by the terms "tags" and "pieces". A tag is an abbreviation, often sprayed under paintings as a "signature", which is understood "as a symbolic character of the possession" (Skrotzki, 1999, 32). Pieces are large-format

sprayed murals that require substantial work and effort and high-level spraying capabilities to be recognized as such (cf. Skrotzki, 1999, 31ff.). Tagging is faster, as the sprayer only needs one marker or spray can. As such, a graffiti writer can "tag" almost anywhere and can therefore mark many different surfaces. Pieces, on the other hand, are often multi-coloured and are almost exclusively attached to surfaces using at least two or three different spray cans.

The Constitution of Space

For the group, the synthesis of space is associated with their everyday practice of seeing their own markings in public space. Additionally, the group has developed a different cityscape in terms of topography and their group-specific orientation in providing directions for their meeting places, whereby they do not mention street names but area nicknames related to the image that is found at that certain location. Richard and Paul exemplify this practice during the group discussion:

> Richard: "You also learn to get to know the environment differently so when you grow up with graffiti in your youth you also drive through the city differently and have a different cityscape and so on".

> Paul: "I gotta tell ya it's like an orientation when I call and ask, 'where's dis and dis?' Then he doesn't tell me, 'Yo, it is next to this and that street.' No, he says: 'That's next to the 'tag' and you have to walk further, fifty meters further it's right next to that 'piece' and then left at the diplex house where my 'tag' is, right there, yeaaaah you have to go there.'" (Group Discussion)

For the group, moving within the city is directly related to the synthesis of space and the development and establishment of a different environmental perception. Buildings and markings in the surrounding area have an internalized orientation, the understanding of which is part of the group's everyday practice as they move through the city. The reconstruction of the markings in everyday life has different functions for the group members: the recognition and assignment of markings within the graffiti scene, as well as an alternative perception of their environment, a demarcation from "normal people" as they establish a parallel system and city identification through spatial practices. Lukas, the group's founder, describes that the synthesis of space (the mental constitution or perception of a space) is associated with driving to certain places and looking at markings:

> Lukas: "We also drove partly through the city on purpose, just to look at things so while others were sitting in front of their computers and playing whatever, I don't know what, we were on tour in the city, we were looking at things, so we're driving around just to see the pieces. Back then, there was already internet and so there were one or two pages where you could look at graffiti, but in the end, we were still on the road looking around". (Group Discussion)

The group's collective practice of looking around can be seen as a learning process. The group members must constantly identify new territorial markings

such as pieces or tags and incorporate them into their city map. This also leads to a distinction in relation to other groups and peers: they are actively moving around and looking at pieces while other young people only sit indoors and play computer games. This form of spatial practice has different functions in the group's everyday life: the recognition of another group member's markings or even other sprayers and their assignment to specific groups and the revival of memories and collective stories. As graffiti is a youth cultural practice, there are marginal institutional structures for learning it. Therefore, the importance of a collective, such as a crew, is fundamental to becoming familiar with the relevant system and to learn spacing practices such as marking the city:

> Richard: "Letters [such as *tags*] state something and for us this statement is just our hood, the crew, the guys who are in the crew, the different names, the different places where we paint, the different people we paint with, that's what these letters say to us". (Group Discussion)

The spatial practices connected to the synthesis of space are learnt by practising graffiti in the crew and their relation to spacing practices. The establishment of a system, such as rating graffiti within the city or painting a high-rated piece to earn fame within the scene, is constitutive for doing graffiti in public spaces. Therefore, a graffiti writer needs to learn where to place the *pieces* and *tags* and what good and bad *pieces* are. Through the group members, we can see the reciprocal process of spacing and synthesizing space, the (re)productive character of the markings and the negotiations and the spatial practices of shaping the city: The crew becomes part of the city and the city is part of the crew.

Spacing Through Markings

Spacing (the positioning of social good and people, including one's own body) is related to the practice of marking surfaces. For these markings, the appropriate equipment (markers or spray paint) is required, which the group members carry with them or place in hidden *spots*.[6] In the case of markings, the selection of *spots* (places) where markings will be made is crucial since they are linked to recognition, identification and reachability.

The group focuses on marking public space. The placing of an illegal marking in a specific *spot* is not arbitrary; it requires a structured division of labour based on

---

[6] Spots are central for graffiti as graffiti writers need to identify and appropriate them for writing graffiti. Ferrell and Weide analysed certain graffiti spots and developed a "spot theory". Remarkable skills are needed to find spots, as Ferrell and Weide state: "This ability rests in part on a writer's knowledge of the city in which the writer paints—an intimate knowledge of back alleys, freeway interchanges, interconnecting rooftops, patterns of light and human movement, neighborhood policing tendencies, lines of visibility, major routes of commuter travel, and phases of urban development and decay" (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, 49f). This ability is required to participate in the graffiti subculture and for an understanding of the significance of these places for the graffiti culture within a city.

speed, reliability and precision. Group member Paul describes the decision to place markings on specific surfaces as follows:

> [. . .] where one is at home, where one drives, where one knows, one feels at home, there must also be pictures or at least *tags* [. . .] just where I hang out, where I feel comfortable, to see the things so I know I was here, here I am at home. (City Walk)

Central to the group is not just the spacing practices in the sense of coded markings, but "home-making" (cf. Piro et al., 2020) through the visibility of *pieces* within the city. The identification and decoding of *signs* are related to home-making and place-making of the city. Such markings are, however, not only visible to group members but also to other sprayers and city residents. The group members incorporate the practice of marking surfaces and describe it as almost habitual during the group discussion:

> that [marking] is actually a side effect, you do that, but not on purpose, no one is obsessed with spreading us [the crew's markings] everywhere intentionally, we are somehow used to it. It just happens anyway, if you hang out and you just have a pen then you just *tag* without doing it on purpose. (Group Discussion)

While spacing is often related or connected to a person, a marking in itself must be perceived as being decoupled from a person. A marking should not be made in public, as it risks punishment. It is the function of marking that should be focused: the mark suggests home and location regardless of the marker. The claim to a certain place is made via an anonymous attachment to the general public, but addresses an exclusive group of sprayers who can interpret and recognize the tag as home. Marking is connected to a placing of the *pieces* on a prominent and visible *spot*; its genesis needs to remain unseen. *Pieces* are conceptualized in advance, as illegal graffiti in particular requires consistent planning, as speed, pre-arranged agreements and time play a central role in their creation. Richard describes a paradox in this regard, namely, that the group cannot spend time in some places where graffiti is painted:

> I like to hang out where there's graffiti, but you can't always hang out where you do graffiti. So, if I'm driving around the city like that, I see graffiti now and then, but I don't necessarily hang out there. But then there are also ghetto spots[7] all over the city, places where you can hang out, so to speak, and nobody notices it, nobody bothers you there when you paint. (City Walk)

Through the *ghetto spots*, the group seems to have opened up the possibility for *home-making* (Piro et al., 2020) and *living* at the same time: they can do hidden illegal graffiti in the public and at the same time hang out as a group where graffiti is. Spacing and the synthesis of space are deeply connected and reciprocal processes, which can be outlined by the Hoodboys and their way of perceiving and doing graffiti. For them, spacing is connected to home-making in the sense of appropriating and re-shaping the city and living in the sense of doing what they do at home in

---

[7] Spots in public spaces hidden from view.

public (Piro et al., 2020), taking and making oneself part of the city through visibility within the crew:

> So, at the end of the day, within the crew it is like that: maybe everyone has their own name internally, but then you just notice you did not just do it for yourself, but also for the rest of the crew because ninety percent of the people don't know the individual as you just see the crew's name. (Group Discussion)

The individual marking process goes along with the socialization in the crew and ultimately denotes the group in public space. Thus, the Hoodboys learn how to do graffiti (spacing) and position and identify the *spots* for doing graffiti. Changing the surface and the city and establishing their own city topography means synthesizing space. The group's practices are therefore connected to recognition of the individual activity during this appropriation and engagement, through which they create a specific collectivism in reference to the crew. Education in this sense comprises the self-constitution of the subject by "appropriating reality and developing a profile of their life through this appropriation" (Thiersch, 2014, 240). Thus, the case study of the graffiti crew highlights the importance of visibility in learning through the educational landscape of the city in processes of home-making. By contrast, the importance of invisibility comes to the fore in the case study of a group of parkour runners in Zurich (Switzerland).

Parkour Runners' Spatial Practices in Zurich

Movefree is a training group with about a dozen traceurs who belong to a larger parkour organization. The training group in this case study meets several times a week at different locations for joint training. The group's participants, the majority of whom are male and under 30, are instructed by a trainer, and they pay for the training sessions.[8] The case study on the training group was conducted between 2016 and 2017 and comprised ethnographic participant observation (including the active participation in the training), group discussions and individual interviews.

Parkour focuses on skilful movement through urban space without the use of any auxiliary means. The aim is to get from one point to another as efficiently as possible. The discipline is strongly based on the movement didactic method, the *méthode naturelle*, developed by the French naval officer Georges Hébert, which not only enables overcoming obstacles in impassable terrain efficiently and quickly (Hitzler & Niederbacher, 2010, 108) but also seeks to train the body and mind by completing the obstacle course (Hébert, 1942). The "méthode naturelle" originated from military-didactic contexts that David Belle, who is often mentioned as the founder of the discipline, came into contact with when he was a teenager.

---

[8]The fact that the parkour training group pursues its shared interest by participating in a commercially oriented and formally established parkour course is not representative for the whole parkour scene, in which there are differently formalized forms of organization.

The founding history in parkour circles is told in broad outlines as follows: David's father, Raymond Belle, a veteran and former firefighter, passed the "méthode naturelle" he had learned in the military onto his son. When David Belle moved to Lisses, a suburb of Paris, in the late 1980s, he and his friends began to adapt the method to the urban environment. From this, a group of nine *traceurs*, as parkour runners call themselves, from different Parisian suburbs was formed, which adopted the name "Yamakazi" in 1997. They took part in shows and film productions and thus gained fame. Soon after, however, the group's various members began to go establish their own methods (FPK—Fédération de Parkour, 2017; Lauschke, 2010; Lemhoefer, 2008). At the same time, the term *Le Parkour* was established for this new form of movement in urban conditions (see ibid.). This was accompanied by an increasing mediatization of both the term and the practice (especially in the form of spectacular photographs and video clips) and the commercialization of parkour, after which many of its practitioners took on the sport as a profession.

Although the training group in this case study remained within legal realms during the observations, this cannot be generalized for all parkour runners. Even if respect and consideration are fundamental values in the scene, parkour can involve, for example, entering private property (e.g. house roofs, terraces or walls), which is punishable under law as trespassing. It can also result in property damage or the violation of traffic laws, etc. Unless otherwise indicated, the following explanations refer to the characteristics of parkour observed among the *Movefree* training group.

Learning to Conceive Space

Similar to the graffiti crew members' practices described above, the conception of space is also important in parkour. How traceurs conceive, or in Löw's terminology *synthesize*, space, is unsurprisingly closely related to their use of material infrastructure for their activities. A hint to how traceurs approach urban infrastructure is already present in their self-designation. The term traceur (which can also be used in the female French form, *traceuse*) stems from the French verb "tracer", to trace, draw or sketch a line, to trace, to create a route or to lay out a path. Indeed, "traceurs follow their own chosen path and constantly draw and design new paths in their environment, which they then follow with the greatest possible efficiency and whose traces always remain as ideas" (Lemhöfer, 2008, 36). Perceiving the city's material infrastructure is all about finding lines that facilitate the most efficient movement in public space from one point to another. Obstacles are not only accepted but are thought of as training opportunities. In doing so, the traceurs reinterpret benches, ping-pong tables, walls, trees, boulders, etc., as sports equipment and obstacles to be surmounted. The mental pathfinding and the best possible use of such paths through an individual's own physical movement characterize this practice.

To engage in parkour, traceurs have to get to know their environment by reading the different material properties and matching them with their own skills. Similar to

the sprayers, who look for the best place to spray in advance, parkour training ideas for overcoming obstacles are often developed in advance—just as climbers read a wall first and establish a route before they attempt to climb it. This demands a great deal of learning concerning the properties of material infrastructure. A member of the training group describes this process as follows:

> It is actually also important to learn exactly how to deal with different conditions, that is, you first of all have to get to know your limits [. . .] and you need to learn that when something is freezing cold, how it is has to be handled, or when something is wet, when it is slippery, you know how all these situations are and then you don't suddenly feel frightened when—let's say—you are in an emergency situation. It's actually about always being prepared and knowing exactly, "how will the surface react? how is this and that?" (Group discussion with members of the training group)

Besides social aspects (e.g. avoiding private property), the material nature of the physical space has to be considered in order to first mentally outline a path of potential movements and to then perform them physically. Sometimes, participants remember the pathways and occasionally discuss them during their training in so-called feedback rounds. Furthermore, as the extract from the group discussion above shows, weather and changes in surface conditions have to be considered when choosing a route. In sum, moving in the most efficient way requires, on the one hand, the practice of self-perception and spatial perception and, on the other hand, a number of movement techniques that are automated through continuous training.

The group is of great importance for many of the members: it offers mutual inspiration and encouragement and enables social learning of physical and mental skills through the trainer-led joint exercises. The trainer has a central function, as he has and imparts knowledge about material characteristics and prerequisites for certain movements and can also assess the group members and their skills. In the end, learning parkour and socializing in the training group and the parkour scene allow individuals to explore the city in a new way. The newly gained movement and perception skills give the city a new adventurous dimension. This also has a significant impact on everyday life. One participant describes the integration of parkour into everyday life and orientation in the city as follows:

> It's really like this: you discover something on every corner and you can imagine everywhere how you could move there, [. . .] I think it follows you around a bit, like . . ., exactly because you always train in the city, you always take it with you and you think, "Ah, I can do this there, I can do that there!"[. . .] I think that way you also get more ideas for training later, really. (Group discussion)

Parkour can therefore be seen as a means to explore the surrounding environment, which is closely related to an individual's own physical and psychological possibilities. Furthermore, by getting to know the nature of the city, the collaborative development of ideas of how to move through the city and the implementation of these ideas, the city is perceived differently than before, namely, as a separate training location with constantly varying challenges. The development of such a changed spatial synthesis implies different learning processes during which the traceurs not only learn movement skills but also improve their own knowledge of

their environment and themselves. They learn to assess their abilities, they develop concentration, attention and awareness, and they improve their discipline.

Traceless Spacing

Now we want to turn our attention to the other spatial constitutive operation Löw developed: spacing—the positioning of social goods or people, which in the case of parkour mostly refers to individuals' position in terms of their own bodies. In this regard—and in stark contrast to the sprayers—it is important to note that the traceurs of the observed training group try to leave no visible traces in public space. Not changing the environment is a fundamental demand that is propagated in the parkour movement (see Witfeld et al., 2015, 34). This is connected to the scene's larger values of respect for others and the environment as well as concern that if they were to impact their environment, their movement might be seen negatively, which would eventually impede their training possibilities. A group member describes this problem as follows:

> I believe that the thing that bothers people in the cities is the trash. It also bothers us, because we are always touching the ground with our hands and so on, we notice trash much more and that's the other thing: When we're training and all this trash is lying around and the people watching us have the feeling that we were the ones who threw it there. It's already happened, in [another Swiss city]. There is a really perfect spot, and there are signs everywhere, "forbidden!" You're not allowed to do anything anymore, you're not even allowed to stand there, because they've had problems with waste, with cigarettes, with beer bottles, everything just lies on the ground. (Short conversation during a period of participant observation)

Correspondingly, the effort to leave no traces behind can also be interpreted as a conflict avoidance strategy, which corresponds to parkour's design as an escape. This strategy should ensure access to good spots (places for parkour) while also avoiding conflicts. This prudence and prevention of possible conflicts go so far that, at least in the observed training group, they also pick up waste that they have not thrown on the ground. That means, in order not to be disturbed by garbage or confrontations, the spot must be clean. The parkour group thereby takes responsibility for the training location and must remain compliant, because even prohibition signs, at least in the group observed in the case study, keep them from doing parkour.

These particular spatial practices, *to space* in the sense of Löw, of removing trash that could hamper their training directly or indirectly demand much knowledge on the perception of public space and interactions in public space. The participants' direct involvement in the urban public space under the trainer's guidance therefore teaches the young parkour runners the dynamics of urban spaces, including conflict prevention. This not only concerns the spacing through the removal of objects (the trash) but also through the positioning of their own bodies in relation to other users of public space. Traceurs occasionally collide with passers-by who use the urban space to cover distances. The collision is not to be understood here in the physical

sense but as a *collision of expectations* in the use of public space. The trainer and founder of the parkour company comments on this as follows:

> In this respect, the traceurs leave only fleeting traces, namely when others observe them during their activities in public urban space. This means that in the city, the traceurs are only perceived selectively, for example, when pedestrians suddenly see someone balancing on a railing or when they see people suddenly running up the stairs using the "spider's walk" [parkour technique]. Then, by-passers mostly react in astonishment for a short moment. (Extract from ethnographic fieldnotes taken during participant observation)

The traceurs' presence in public space can raise by-passers' attention or brief irritation. Considering the unusual appearance of their moving style as they willingly break movement conventions in urban space, and the resulting attention it gets from by-passers, parkour can easily become a source for self-expression through movement. It is the spectacular forms of movement, which are often seen in YouTube videos but rarely in the training group, that generate the most attention, interest in the sport and recognition from the outside. Spectacular visuals also have important functions within the group and for individual traceurs: they inspire them to try new tricks, techniques and new routes, and they connect themselves to the wider scene. For the ones who create such visuals, they are resources on which other traceurs can create and project their own image. Thus, in both senses of the term *Bildung* (education and self-cultivation), parkour is a resource for self-formation that is closely related to space formation.

In conclusion, parkour is a visible practice in its execution, which does not change the materiality of the places but the spatial experience of the traceurs. The *spacing* and the operation of spatial *synthesis* are directly connected to each other: The path is practiced and memorized as a mental pathway is created and the trace is found again and continued through further parkour training. This creates a new space, perceivable at least to the traceurs. In this process, the traceurs can learn mental and physical skills, and they participate in the shaping of these learning spaces through their own way of using the material infrastructure and their own spatial synthesis. These learning processes are ultimately part of a (self-)education in public space, in which education is also accompanied by self-formation as the next section depicts.

Self-Education and Participation in Youth-Led Spatial Practices

So far, the spatial practices (analytically separated into operations of synthesis and spacing) have been presented and moments of self-education and participation have become evident. By comparing the two groups in terms of their practices, the relationship between "young people's space creation" and practices of self-education and participation is given a closer look using the example of the "spot"—a concept that stands for the ideal place in both cases.

In the graffiti scene, the concept "spot" designates an ideal place for doing graffiti through its "visibility and the choice of places to write; the quality of the surface including how often it is buffed; and, most importantly, the hierarchy of placement (i.e., the respect afforded to writing on trains compared to walls, and walls compared to legal walls)" (Iljadica, 2016, 119). In parkour, a so-called hot spot describes "places that offer a variety of training opportunities for different techniques or also mystified places" (Lauschke, 2010, 87).

Learning to Recognize the Right Spots

The importance of spots is connected to the fact that the group members pursue interests and practices that are initially perceived as "not normal" and as being without a purpose or are just not well-known in mainstream society. Accordingly, there are no places for their practices provided within urban planning. Identifying good spots depends on the ability to recognize the potentialities in light of the respective practice. To use Löw's terminology, the identification of a good spot is also a question of space synthesis, which both groups link to particular modes of orientation in and through the city.

In the case of the graffiti crew, this orientation is linked to recognizing graffiti. The recognition of these markings serves to classify the local graffiti scene, to establish their own aesthetic value system and to both identify with and differentiate themselves from other peers as has been shown above. The parkour group also develops an alternative synthesis of city spaces linked to their mental path, the tracks they draw in certain places in the urban infrastructure. The sharpening of the perception of the urban environment happens in relation to possibilities to run a certain track which in turn is influenced by weather conditions, social aspects (e.g. property relations, disturbance potential) and the traceurs' physical condition and skills. Developing such a perception is a decisive part of the parkour learning process.

In both cases, the places where the group members practice must be carefully selected. Inadequate testing can lead to injuries in parkour; for the sprayers, their graffiti can result in physical harm as well as legal repercussions.

The Spot as a Training Place—And Participatory Educational Space

Learning skills, codes and other relevant knowledge is not only important for estimating a spot's suitability but also for the actual doing of the practice; learning the practice requires suitable training spots. Graffiti writers develop their style by learning artistic skills in the few legal places the city provides, which are occupied by

all groups. The training site is therefore heavily frequented and serves as preparation for illegal graffiti. It also acts as a shelter in the sense that testing one's artistic skills is consequence-free. Illegal spots also offer opportunities for various learning experiences related to the functioning of urban space in relation to property rights, visibility, the value of markings, policing of urban space, competences for swift navigation through the city and quickly executing tasks under pressure.

While the Frankfurt graffiti crew has access to a city-provided training site, the Zurich-based traceurs have to find ideal (hot) spots for training in the city themselves. Moreover, they have to control the spaces they create in these spots by, for instance, clearing the spots and making sure that their own bodies are not intimidating or bothering other users of public space in some other way. Like in the graffiti case, the eventual practice they train for is not limited to these training spots. Likewise, the moments when they set off to get from one point in the city to another as efficiently as possible can be seen as further learning experiences.

In sum, like in school, which is intended to be a place for learning competences that are needed for life after school, the two groups have training spots where learning experiences are concentrated as well as other spots where "the real action" happens. Like in school, there are more experienced people (teachers) who the newcomers (students) can learn from. In the case of the parkour group, this includes a trainer; for the graffiti crew, this role is taken on by more experienced peers. Often unlike school, the training spots and other sites where these skills are applied are closely linked to where others train and then apply the same skills. These spots, then, are highly participatory as they are established on the importance of learning by doing and the possibility to effectively create spaces within the city. The more or less horizontal group dynamic/hierarchy and that young people learn skills in peer learning practices voluntarily offer the opportunity to obtain the competences by which young people learn spacing and its synthesis and are deeply connected to the city and their everyday life.

The Spot as a Place of Self-Formation

Education is not only linked to learning in terms of the development of competences but also in terms of identification and thus self-formation, which can also be seen by comparing both groups. Identification because of skill is evident in both groups, but it is not an individual endeavour. In the case of the Hoodboys, spacing is linked to the permanent marking of spots which in turn become *their* spots and, thus, important places of home-making in the city in the sense of the domestication of public spaces and resignifying them for the crew (see Piro et al., 2020). Through the crew as an organizational form with corresponding "tags", the sprayers ensure that the focus is not on the individual but the group. The marking represents a crew of young men who appropriate the city and create their home and locality (their *hood*). In this way, spacing and the synthesis of space are learned as processes of territorialization and, at the same time, communalization. At *Movefree*, spatial practices are

learned in a community, too, which, moreover, is highly value-laden. Together, the group members open up new relationships to the urban environment with values such as group cohesion and solidarity as a key capital. Certain places in the city become places of common parkour experiences in the form of shared memories and, at the same time, in the form of clues for new possible movements for the individuals and their groups.

The communal relationship to space that both the sprayers and the parkour runners establish plays a formative role in the group members' everyday life: how they perceive or synthesize the city in relation to their spacing practices and their abilities. This becomes apparent when their own, or another member's, graffiti becomes important landmarks of territoriality and identification with certain parts of the city. It also becomes apparent when specific parts of the city's infrastructure—like walls, benches, trees, etc.—become potential springboards for interesting moves and thus for the testing and improving an individual's abilities. How the young people in the two cases perceive themselves is not independent of the way they perceive the city. This, in turn, cannot be separated from the learning they experience in the city.

Conclusion

The basic idea within the German discourse about educational landscapes as outlined in the introduction considers both the school and the "before, next to and after school" (Rauschenbach, 2009) as spaces for educating children and young people. Accordingly, the entire city is gradually being opened up from an educational point of view (Million et al., 2017). Educational landscapes are created with the aim of easing the trajectories between educational bodies such as kindergarten, school or institutions for children and youth welfare. Therefore, the individual educational actors and institutions should also take responsibility for all children and adolescents' educational biographies (Bollweg & Otto, 2017).

However, this educational policy perspective is often left on a programmatic level, as young people's educational practices and their underlying meaning remain hidden. In view of this deficit, the results discussed in this paper, as well as the perspective on young people's spatial practices, are of considerable importance: If young people's spatial practices are viewed from an educational and self-educational point of view, not only do the places that are relevant to them become visible, but their own educational landscapes also begin to become evident. These are educational landscapes that are created through young people's own educational practices according to the relevancies of their everyday lives. In short, these are *their* educational landscapes and may differ from official ones. While this is evident in this article's depiction and comparison of youth cultural scenes, it must not be restricted to specific scenes.

The two cases presented here show that certain places (spots) have great educational potential and are in this sense comparable to other places of learning, like

school or youth centres. The challenge, however, remains: the question is how can these two different landscapes be interrelated so that young people's places, which emerge from the inner logic of their practices, are not simply integrated into the institutional educational landscape and thus reshaped institutionally? This requires sensitive handling of the ways young people express themselves and clear positioning of all involved education bodies to recognize young people's own style of self-formation.

References

Bollweg, P., & Otto, H. U. (2017). Educational landscape straddling spaces and education. In A. Million, A. J. Heinrich, & T. Coelen (Eds.), *Education, space and urban planning. Education as a component of the city* (pp. 195–204). Springer.

Coelen, T., et al. (2019). Local educational landscapes in Germany: Interfaces and interlacings between education and urban development. S. 35–53 in *Geographies of schooling*, herausgegeben von H. Jahnke, C. Kramer, und P. Meusburger. Springer.

Education 21. (n.d.). *Bildungslandschaften21.* Available at https://www.education21.ch/de/bildungslandschaften21. Accessed 08 Mar 2021.

Ferrell, J., & Weide, R. D. (2010, February – April). Spot theory. In *City* (Vol. 14, Nos. 1–2). Routledge, Taylor Francis Group.

FPK—Fédération de Parkour. (2017). *Histoire du Parkour.* Available at http://www.fedeparkour.fr/historique. Accessed 08 Mar 2021.

Gadamer, H.-G. (2001). Education is self-education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 35*(4), 529–538. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.00243

Hébert, G. (1942). *Georges Hébert. L'Éducation physique, virile et morale par la méthode naturelle: T. II. Technique des exercices, technologie, marche, course, saut.* Vuibert.

Hitzler, R., & Niederbacher, A. (2010). *Leben in Szenen. Formen juveniler Vergemeinschaftung heute.* VS Verlag.

Iljadica, M. (2016). *Copyright beyond law.* Regulation Creativity in the Graffiti Subculture.

Johnson, A. (2014). Authenticity and self-cultivation as learning to be: The hermeneutics of lifelong education. *Philosophical Studies in Education, 45*, 66–73.

Klee, A. (Ed.). (2010). *Politische Kommunikation im städtischen Raum am Beispiel Graffiti.* VS Verlag.

Lauschke, A. (2010). *Parkour. Subversive Choreographien des Urbanen.* Tectum Verlag.

Lemhöfer, P. (2008). *Le Parkour—Entstehung und Entwicklung einer Trendsportart.* Magisterarbeit, Universität Gießen—Institut für Sportwissenschaft. Available at http://geb.uni-giessen.de/geb/volltexte/2014/10133/pdf/LemhoeferPhilipp.pdf. Accessed 05 Mar 2021.

Löw, M. (2018). *Vom Raum aus die Stadt denken. Grundlagen einer raumtheoretischen Stadtsoziologie.* Transkript Verlag.

Mack, W. (2008). Bildungslandschaften. In T. Coelen & H.-U. Otto (Eds.), *Grundbegriffe der Ganztagsbildung* (pp. 741–749). Das Handbuch.

Mack, W. (2017). Education in the city from the perspective of social spaces. In A. Million, A. J. Heinrich, & T. Coelen (Hrsg.), *Education, space and urban planning. Education as a component of the city* (pp. 205–214). Springer.

Mengilli, Y. (2021). "Nur n' bisschen chillen?!"—Rauminteressen im Konflikt. In J. Betz et al. (Eds.), *Frankfurt am Main—eine Stadt für alle? Urban studies.* Transcript.

Million, A., Heinrich, A. J., & Coelen, T. (Eds.). (2017). *Education, space and urban planning. Education as a component of the city.* Springer.

Muchow, M., & Muchow, H. -H. (1998 [1935]). *Der Lebensraum des Großstadtkindes*. Published by J. Zinnecker. Weinheim. Juventa.

Otto, H.-U., & Rauschenbach, T. (Eds.). (2004). *Die andere Seite der Bildung*. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Otto, H.-U., & Ziegler, H. (2004). Sozialraum und sozialer Ausschluss. (Teil 2). *neue praxis, 34*, 271–291.

Piro, V., et al. (2020). Making a home in the city: How young people take part in the urban space. In J. Batsleer et al. (Eds.), *Practices, power and pedagogies of young people in the public. Struggle for participation*. Routledge.

Rauschenbach, T. (2009). *Zukunftschance Bildung. Familie, Jugendhilfe und Schule in neuer Allianz*. Juventa.

Reutlinger, C. (2009). Raumdeutungen. In U. Deinet (Ed.), *Methodenbuch Sozialraum* (pp. 17–32). VS Springer.

Reutlinger, C. (2015). Sozialräumliche Sozialisation. S. 606–29 in *Handbuch Sozialisationsforschung*, Pädagogik, herausgegeben von K. Hurrelmann, U. Bauer, M. Grundmann, und S. Walper. Beltz.

Skrotzki, A. (1999). *Graffiti. Öffentliche Kommunikation und Jugendprotest*. Ed. 45 1.

Thiersch, H. (2014). *Lebensweltorientierte Soziale Arbeit*. Juventa.

Windzio, M. (2010). Warum begehen Jugendliche Graffiti-Delikte? Kriminologische und stadtsoziologische Perspektiven. In A. Klee (Ed.), *Politische Kommunikation im städtischen Raum am Beispiel Graffiti* (pp. 67–90). VS Verlag.

Witfeld, J., Gerling, I., & Pach, A. (2015). *Parkour & Freerunning: Entdecke deine Möglichkeiten!* Meyer & Meyer.

Zeiher, H., & Zeiher, H. J. (1994). *Soziales Leben im Alltag von Großstadtkindern*. Juventa Verlag.

Zimmermann, D., Andersson, B., Luigi, D., Piro, V., & Reutlinger, C. (2018). *A place in public spatial dynamics of youth participation in eight European cities* (p. 96). https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1240165

Yağmur Mengilli is M.A. in Educational Science, PhD Student and Lecturer at Goethe University of Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Christian Reutlinger is Professor of Social Pedagogy and Social Geography, and Head of the Research Institute of Social Work University of Applied Sciences, St. Gallen, Switzerland.

Dominic Zimmermann is M.A. in Social Sciences, Senior Research Associate at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Switzerland.

Editors' Post Scriptum

The starting point for this volume was to investigate connections and interplays between *participation* and *learning* in young people's lives. The book does not offer a systematic study of these multilayered phenomena, rather the different chapters represent a number of entries into a European context of youth involvement. In studying and analyzing these issues the concepts of participation and learning have been used as heuristic tools to explore a social landscape of young people's citizenship practices. We have looked for social processes, relationships, and contexts where young people's actions aim for, and result in, practices that transcend a purely individual level, where there is a commitment to collectivity and a wish to take part in the complex structure we call "society."

Most of the contributions are based on empirical material collected within the PARTISPACE project, which was carried out in eight European cities during 2015–2018. In some of the chapters, participation and learning constitute explicit goals that guide the studied activities, but in most cases the relationship between the two terms has been identified and analytically brought to the fore by the interest of the researchers.

To conclude the work on the book, we now briefly want to consider a couple of issues of a more general kind that have been raised throughout the different chapters.

A first reflection concerns the difficulties faced by *formal approaches* to youth participation when it comes to engaging young people and organizing efforts where actual influence can be put into effect. As demonstrated in Chaps. 2, 3, and 9, formal approaches have difficulties connecting to the life-worlds of young people. Instead, they are often perceived as limiting the space for action. In part, this shortcoming stems from the foundation on which the effort itself is built. It is based on the view that young people need to learn how to participate and that this should be done by participatory exercises, led and controlled by more mature and knowledgeable people. There is a striking resemblance here to the pedagogical model that Paolo Freire has called *banking education*:

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and
> the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and
> makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the
> "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends
> only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 72)

In this model, roles are divided between active (adult) leaders and passive (young) recipients. There are no requirements that the learning situation should address issues of importance to the receiver of the education. Instead, it becomes central that the young person concerned accepts and internalizes the form of subordination on which this kind of pedagogy is based:

> Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and
> the world: a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others; the individual is
> spectator, not re-creator. (ibid, p. 75)

As shown in Chap. 9, it is not always that young people oppose this pedagogical model. There may be a number of advantages to learning the game and there are contexts where this knowledge provides paybacks and a favorable position. The formation of participation is thus not just a question of pedagogical arrangements. There must be a political vision; participation must engage and rest on perspectives concerning human and collective values.

Freire's solution to avoiding the pitfalls of the banking model is a problem-posing education based on dialogue and an acknowledgment that all parties involved in educational efforts have something to learn from the situation (ibid, pp. 79–86). The discussion in Chap. 2 is very much in line with this perspective and aims at pointing out what a different pedagogy for participation could look like.

Another emergent issue concerns *recognition* (Chaps. 3 and 5). Young people must be recognized as competent actors and carriers of important issues; they are interpreters of the present. At the same time, as Chap. 3 clearly shows, this does not mean that young people are to be met with a constant endorsement; many important aspects of youth participation rather develop as a consequence of *resistance* in conflicting situations. Again, a trace goes back to pedagogy: an opposition to young people's attempts at commitment and involvement should never be designed as a kind of pedagogical tool of control. Space must be created for participation to evolve from actual disagreements about real issues and conditions. In short, young people must be taken seriously and legitimized as worthy dissenters.

Obviously, there are many pitfalls when it comes to the contributions of adults, leaders, and institutions when creating and managing spaces of youth participation. However, this does not mean that such engagement should be avoided. Chapter 8 shows how learning from more experienced and knowledgeable (not necessarily older) individuals can be facilitated through meaningful imitation and sharing. Here, the significance of recognition is convincingly demonstrated.

Chapter 7 provides another example of productive leadership, which developed hand in hand with increased independence and ability to act. Nevertheless, the

members of the theater group studied in this chapter did not succeed in their endeavors. To a large extent, the failure to achieve certain goals was linked to conditions that generally characterize adolescence as a social position: a combination of momentary freedom and future-oriented limitations. This points to the obvious fact that young people's participation and opportunities for influence must be understood in relation to *the phase of life* they are in. Perhaps this is why so many of the examples presented throughout the book are about young people's engagement in "cultural" activities (Chaps. 3, 5, 7, and 11). This reflects the decoupling of Western youth from the labor market, but also the importance of participation in culture as a way of promoting communication oriented towards change. As stated in Chap. 5, this mode of participation makes young people's everyday arenas important sites for social action. These arenas are affected by structural conditions which are sometimes quite far away from young people's social realities. The profound changes to the contexts of volunteering (Chap. 4) are significant reminders of this.

One issue that engages youth and drives their participation concerns the precarious situation and needs of people in exile (Chaps. 5 and 6). The engagement often starts with a rather limited task, but is gradually extended to cover also other areas of importance. Here, the participatory qualities of the effort much lie embedded in the widened responsibility taken by young persons.

Participatory activities must be situated; they must take place somewhere. In her review of participation and space, Andrea Cornwall (2002) separates between *invited* and *popular places*, which echoes the division between formal and informal participation we discussed earlier. Cornwall points to the importance of public spaces for young people's participation, which relates to the presentation of the *educational landscapes* of graffiti and parkour in Chap. 11. The neighborhood (Chap. 10) can pose a vital starting point for a social movement that creates powerful counter-images which young people use when resisting the processes of exclusion they encounter in other parts of their city. Here, young people can create what Cornwall (2002, p. 19) labels "sites of radical possibility."

In all, it seems that youth participation often works best and brings about a high degree of meaning when it takes place as a supplement, or extension, to an activity that primarily has its focus on something other than participation. In this context, Jon Elster's concept of *essential by-products* (1981) comes to mind. Elster claims that certain conditions cannot be deliberately evoked in social encounters, they arise as by-products of something else:

> Some psychological and social states have the property that they can only *come about* as the by-product of actions undertaken for other ends. They can never, that is, be *brought about* intelligently and intentionally, because the attempt to do so precludes the very state one is trying to bring about. I call these "states that are essentially by-products." (Elster, 1981, p. 431)

It would be a too far-reaching conclusion to claim that youth participation can't be intentionally evoked. However, it is important to consider that young people's involvement often seems to thrive best when there is another, profoundly meaningful, purpose embedded in the process within which participation evolves.

References

Cornwall, A. (2002). *Making spaces, changing places; situating participation in development* (Working Paper 170). Institute of Development Studies.

Elster, J. (1981). States that are essentially by-products. *Social Science Information, 20*(3), 431–473.

Freire, P. (1970/2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.

Index