Youth Participation in Europe : The interplay between Discourses and Policies

Abstract

In the European context, there is no one accepted definition of *youth participation* either in the political arena or in academic debates. This chapter analyzes whether the current discourses consider reshaping youth involvement in both public and individual spheres. It presents empirical findings on youth participation's discourses as they emerge in exemplary interviews with experts, contrasting them with comments from young people collected through focus groups conducted in different youth social spaces in eight European cities. The goal is to analyze whether the claim for youth inclusion and engagement is inspired by the socio-pedagogical principle of participation as an empowering tool for young people, groups, and communities or by an adult-driven agenda focused on young people's future as adults rather than their actual way of living, their needs, and their desires.

Keywords: youth participation, adult-led involvement, decision-making, empowerment, self-expression.

Youth Participation in Europe: The Interplay Between Discourses and Policies

Morena Cuconato

Introduction

Youth is a social construct of modern industrial societies, which are mainly adult-centered societies because they are focused on work and production. Thus, youth is a historically constructed category (Gordon 2007; Lesko 1996) that implies a power relationship. Bourdieu (1993, 95) remarks that "talking about 'the young' as a social unit, constituted group, with common interests, relating these interests to a biologically defined age, is in itself an obvious manipulation." It is therefore not surprising that most activities designed to promote youth participation follow an adult-led model (Gordon and Taft 2011) and occur within institutionalized and formalized spaces (youth and student councils, community-based youth organizations, schools, after-school programs, issue-based advocacy groups, etc.).

However, since the 1990s, scholars have recognized that orientations and practices of youth participation are changing (Hoikkala 2009), and nowadays young people tend to engage more in concrete one-off actions than in formal mechanisms and collective expressions requiring membership (Benedicto 2013; Hooghe and Dassonneville 2013). These changes are ascribed to the individualization in modern societies, to a cultural shift from materialistic to post–materialistic values (Inglehart 1990), while the increasing de–standardization of life courses—especially of transitions to adulthood—has contributed to a suspension of full citizenship status for many young adults (Loncle et al. 2012).

This chapter analyzes whether and to what extent youth participation's discourses are aware of the reshaping of youth involvement in both public and individual spheres. Attempting to answer this question, it presents some empirical findings drawn from qualitative data gathered in the framework of a cross- country project, Spaces and Styles of Participation: Formal, Non-formal and Informal →Possibilities of Young People's Participation in European Cities (PARTISPACE, Horizon 2020). Its leading hypothesis rests on the assumption that all young people do participate, although not all participation is recognized as such. The young people taking part in PARTISPACE, all aged between 15 and 30 years, are viewed as active and meaning-making individuals who define their own situations and reflect on themselves, their actions, the goals they strive for, and more generally on their lives. Following a socio-pedagogical approach. This study asks about the different ways in which young people's active participation is supported or inhibited by local youth policies and the discourses inspiring them. Are they really involved in decisions that concern them and, in general, their communities?

The research involved the following cities: Bologna, Italy; Eskişehir, Turkey; Frankfurt, Germany; Gothenburg, Sweden; Manchester, United Kingdom; Plovdiv, Bulgaria; Rennes, France; and Zurich, Switzerland. They do not represent but secure contrasting contexts of

young people's growing up as well as differing orientations toward Europe. Although embedded in different national and local contexts, these eight cities are comparable in terms of dimension and relevance in their respective countries. This ensures a sufficient provision and diversity of participatory settings without being too close to representative national government institutions and umbrella structures.

This chapter matches the analysis of youth participation's discourses emerging through the review of European and national documents with the empirical findings collected through exemplary interviews with experts and focus groups conducted with young people in different youth social spaces. The chapter first provides a review of existing research on youth participation. It then presents the project's methodology.
Next, it clusters the main representations of youth emerging in the national and European discourse and then reports the expert assumptions on potentiality and challenging youth participation, contrasting them with the voices of young people reflecting on their participatory experiences. Finally, the chapter discusses the findings, proposing some socio-pedagogical reflections that could inspire stakeholders and policymakers in promoting better tailored and meaningful youth policies.

The European Trend of Young People's Participation
The prevalent idea about youth participation emphasizes a global decline of youth civic and political engagement, expressed by a growing apathy, loss of interest in civic and political affairs, avoidance of electoral and other democratic responsibility, and little investment in community well-being (Macedo et al. 2005; Stoker 2006; Bermudez 2012). However, other studies have questioned this picture (Sherrod et al., 2010; Watson et al. 2011). Some scholars argue that young people are not apathetic because they have been developing their own views and engaging in a variety of ways that, although not situated within a frame of traditional forms of politics, evince a high level of civic and political engagement (Bennet 2007; Dalton 2009).

Although it is true that young people have become more apathetic toward party politics, it is also evident that they participate in protest politics and express their opinions online more than does the general population (Sloam 2014). They are more likely to sign petitions, join boycotts, and participate in demonstrations to develop local volunteerism, ethical consumption, and support for issues and causes (environment and human rights) through the development of grassroots activities, community involvement, horizontal and networked organization, and online activism (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Bennet 2007; Spannring et al. 2008).

Overall, there seems to be a shift from overarching collective interests toward a more individualized form of politics, reflecting the changing life experiences of young people toward personally meaningful causes guided by their own lifestyles (Furlong 2009; Bermudez 2012). Research suggests that young people's political participation depends on whether and to what extent they succeed in influencing and being involved at the local level in the issue of their community (Jamieson and Grundy 2005; Spannring et al. 2008). Due to this experience of self-efficacy, scholars argue that young people will probably be more inclined to engage in wider communities (Loncle et al. 2012). Further analysis reveals that few young people—mainly the more educated ones—participate in formalized settings (parties, trade unions, or youth councils), which are probably too rigid and normative to satisfy individualized concerns, biographies, and lifestyles, while reflecting patterns of social inequality (Diemer 2012). In this last regard, Sloam (2014) posits the "increased social–educational inequalities inherent in these alternative forms of participation" (p. 680) as a negative consequence of this turn toward non-institutionalized forms of politics. Young people who develop alternative ways of participating tend to be highly educated and politically literate (Flanagan and Levine 2010; Levinson 2010).

According to research findings, education is the most influential factor in issues of inequality: The lower their education level, the less young people are likely to engage (Spannring et al. 2008). Education

depends on social class, migration, or ethnic minority positions; in cases of refugees and asylum seekers, it intersects with fragmented residence and citizenship status (Lagrange and Senovilla 2011). In policy discourses, this is ascribed to a lack of information and competence. More differentiated studies have shown that success in education goes along with feeling (more or less) familiar and self-efficacious in formal and public situations across different socialization contexts (Walther 2012; Cuconato and Zannoni 2017).

Beyond political and civic participation, young people's use of public institutions (school, youth work, public care, social security, and health and housing services) is considered in terms of participation as a practice connecting the personal with the public. In this regard, the question is whether such institutions are organized in a participatory way: To what extent do young people have rights and options of choice in how to use these services and to what extent are they involved in the steering of such institutions?

Gordon and Taft (2011) highlight that despite the great deal of research and policy focus on how adult-run institutions can enhance youth civic engagement, little evidence exists regarding the ways in which young people construct their own meaningful political socialization. What emerges is a lack pf research exploring practices both within organizations that promote youth participation (Wong et al. 2010) and in unorganized spaces. In particular, there is the need for deeper knowledge of the biographical meaning of participation and active engagement for young people, their effectiveness in terms of power and their compatibility with identity construction and lifestyles. PARTISPACE represents an attempt to close this research gap, investigating whether the existing structures really aim at helping young people develop participatory strategies and acquire decision-making skills that enable them to choose their own way of being and engaging in and with their community and the wider world.

PARTISPACE Research Design

The PARTISPACE project has been conceptualized as a mixed

methods study combining the analysis of survey data with document and discourse analysis at the national and the European level and local case studies. The latter include expert interviews, focus group discussions and city walks, as well as biographical interviews with young people, and ethnographic case studies of different participatory settings.

In the first phase, contextual information on national youth policy contexts and discourses on youth and youth participation were collected and analyzed (Andersson et al. 2016). National contexts have been further related to the level of European discourses on youth participation (Becquet et al. 2016). Two phases of local case studies were conducted in one major city per country (Batsleer et al. 2017). The first was a mapping process in which 20 expert interviews and 12 group discussions and city walks with young people were carried out to provide insight into the functioning of local youth policies and local discourses on youth and youth participation. Sampling was organized so as to ensure broad coverage of different perspectives on youth by experts with diverse functions and representing various institutions, as well as from youth who were recruited in different school types and levels and diverse out-of-school contexts.

The second phase consisted in six in-depth case studies per city involving ethnographic fieldwork (mainly participant observation), group discussions, and biographical interviews with two young persons per case. The sampling of these cases was a result of the mapping, whereas guiding criteria were a reflection of social categories such as age groups, gender, educational level, and social milieus, as well as coverage of formal, non-formal, and informal settings. The latter was a heuristic distinction in order to allow more than just settings formally recognized as participation to be analyzed. Already during the mapping phase, this distinction revealed its narrowness and was further differentiated in terms of regular versus episodic activities, open or closed groups, issues of general versus particular interest, and organized versus spontaneous forms.

All observations have been documented in extensive field notes,

and all interviews and group discussions have been audio recorded and fully transcribed. Selected data (10 data sets per city) have been translated into English so that comparative analysis was not just based on national reports.

Because comparison across cities and countries requires a certain degree of functional equivalence, the model of qualitative multilevel analysis was adopted as a contextualization tool, providing a rationale according to which data collected at individual, interactive, institutional, local/regional, and society level can be integrated (Helsper et al. 2010).

This chapter draws mainly on the reports on national youth policies (NRs) and discourses, on the local study reports, and on selected translated expert interviews (EIs) and group discussions (GDs) with young people in different youth participation settings.

The Representation of Youth: From the National to the European and Back to the Local Level

The analysis of national and European discourses on youth and youth participation (Andersson et al. 2016; Becquet et al. 2016) highlights three main representations of youth that have evolved from the interplay of traditional and modern, national and European discourses. The first refers to young people as a precious and necessary *resource* for their country's development. This discourse addresses young people as a key element in institutional innovation, democratic renewal, and economic growth. Within this discourse, a certain mystification of young people's participation emerges, charging them with the mission of struggling against apathy, corruption, and the desertification of values characterizing the adult world.

The opposite discourse is the representation of young people as a *problem* or even a *threat*. This discourse interprets youth both as a difficult phase of the individual life course and as a problematic social group— problematic for themselves (e.g., self-harm through

drug and alcohol abuse) and/or dangerous for those around them (e.g., antisocial behaviors such as vandalism and aggression). In the first interpretation, young people are supposed to have deficits that have to be compensated for, justifying the need for protection in areas such as education, health, sexuality, market, and the internet. The second image of youth as a dangerous category reflects a strong deficit model justifying control and repression and leading to polarization between threat and respectability. Some young people are "active citizens in becoming," whereas others are problematic bodies outside the "norm."

A third discursive image refers to young people as *vulnerable* or *victims* and can be considered as a updated variation of the problem discourse. It constructs young people as subject to disintegrative social, political, and economic developments such as unemployment and precariousness. However, in this discourse, there is also a different interpretation of young people either as *guilty* or *innocent* victims. In the first case, they are blamed for being unable to solve their problems due to a lack of self-activation; in the second, they are absolved by highlighting the negative effects on their lives of labor market restructuring during the neoliberal decades.

These three representations are present in all eight cities and often appear side by side, causing a somewhat confusing and ambivalent effect. While acknowledging young people's "positive" and "emancipatory" potential, the importance of fitting in and adapting to pre-established social behavior and political action also emerged. As a result, different governmental and professional machinery is set in motion to guarantee that children and young people cope with what is expected from them—to become well-integrated contributors to society and to the labor market. For example, in Manchester, the pressure to succeed and integrate (*resource*) has generated discourses on mental health problems (*vulnerability*) and revolt (epitomized by the 2011 Manchester riots; NRM, p. 18). In Plovdiv, the harsh Bulgarian economic reality is interpreted as the main challenge forcing young people to focus on individual projects for

survival rather than working together for the common good (NRP, p. 20). However, the picture also includes youth that is growing increasingly more distrustful of public institutions due to the opaque criteria for awarding grants. In Rennes, the focus lies on the tension between the two dominant groups, students and young people from disadvantaged areas, expressed in a "competition for legitimacy between the two groups for access to public funding and resources" (NRR, p. 25). In Bologna, disappointment dominates the image of young people because the national austerity policy is "penalizing young people more than the rest of the population" (NRB, p. 14). This is particularly evident in the increase in unemployment among young people, which is causing their attitudes of resistance and resignation. In Eskişehir, simultaneous images of youth as both a resource and a threat reflect the trend of political polarization between traditional authoritarianism and modern liberalism. In the end, family is referred to as the most "important institution in the lives of young people" (NRE, p. 68) from which they often cannot escape until they gain financial independence.

However, the discourse of youth as a resource also places pressure on young people "to perform, be it in school, at work or in their recreational activities" (NRZ, p. 19). In Frankfurt, "everybody is extremely ambitious to achieve a higher level of education" (NRF, p. 17), and even leisure can take on a compulsory character—a "nicer type of stress" (NRF, p. 20). The Gothenburg report adds the issue of self-identity: "Present-oriented learning is about enriching the self, creating a competent identity for the future (the self as project), which is in line with the ideals and demands of the changing and demanding knowledge society" (p. 22). The discourse of young people as a threat provides a justification for the creation of spaces and activities that keep them occupied in "meaningful activities." On the other hand, it characterizes the efforts of young people to create their own spaces due either to the lack of public resources or to dissatisfaction with the existing ones. For instance, in Gothenburg and Zurich, there is a dense infrastructure of spaces as well as sometimes competing offers and services. In other cities, there is no

such infrastructure (e.g., Plovdiv and Eskişehir). There, young people cannot rely on an institutionalized offer of spaces but instead create their own. As a result, activities and engagements in groups are, inter alia, often only temporary or episodic. In the Plovdiv report, this is expressed as follows: "The lack of special buildings for youth activities such as youth centers is a significant barrier to participation" (NRP, p. 20). This is more likely to cause conflict in cities in which young people perceive a massive decline in public spaces and public services (as in Bologna and Rennes). In these cities, the search for spaces usually implies a struggle with local authorities to reconquer opportunities that have eroded since the recent economic crisis. In Rennes, there are "increasing tensions between young people and the municipality which is afraid of new squats or alternative places" (NRR, p. 32). Young people who have been fighting for informal spaces constantly fear they may lose them again.

In summary, the main factors influencing the participation settings in the eight cities studied include overall and individual wealth versus precariousness, access to the labor market as much as to education or training, the size of the city as well as the share of young people in the total population, and the way in which policymakers and institutional actors consider and address them. Through the voices of experts and young people, in the next section we reflect on the extent to which youth policies are in line with the life conditions, needs, and demands of young people in the eight cities.

Local Youth Policies and Young People: Still a Missing Alliance?

Such a huge question cannot be comprehensively answered through the findings of PARTISPACE, which focused on exploring different settings, experiences, and practices of youth participation rather than providing representative pictures of coverage, use, and satisfaction with youth policies. Therefore, this section is limited to highlighting some lines of *correspondence* and *discrepancy* between youth policies and young people.

Because young people attend the youth work programs and provisions on which we conducted our case studies on a voluntary basis, we have to presume that they meet their needs and interests at least partially. Although not all participants expressed their satisfaction with their involvement, there were many statements by young people referring to youth centers as their "second family" or their "second home" (Batsleer et al. 2017). During the interviews, young people who were actively involved in formal settings of youth participation explained the reward for this engagement in terms of personal development, skills and competence development, or even occupational careers. However, our qualitative data confirm survey findings that reveal that most young people do not consider public youth policies as relevant to their lives. The secondary analysis of European Social Survey data carried out in the first phase of the project, however, reveals significant national differences. In Sweden and Switzerland, young people display higher levels of trust in formal institutions, whereas rates of civic and social participation are the lowest in Bulgaria. These values not only express higher satisfaction with public policies but alto correlate with better economic life conditions (Kovacheva et al. 2016).

In contrast, both experts and young people have reported discrepancies occurring at many levels. Regarding the limited effectiveness and coverage of youth policies, in all contexts, experts criticize the underfunding and understaffing of youth services and youth work, whereas most young people criticize a lack of spaces to spend their leisure time. Hierarchical top-down structures are perceived as a challenge, and criticism is expressed toward "one-time events" (NRG, p. 28):

> Burn a car, get a job….It's a classic thing. If you burn a car, or if there are shootings, then you throw money at the problem until it goes away. And as soon it is gone, no money. For youth influence and participation much more long-term work is needed. (Gothenburg, EI—youth worker)

Despite this quote, this criticism was less accentuated in Sweden and Switzerland.

Another general criticism refers to the *tokenistic character* of youth or student councils. A youth worker from Bologna explains:

> Over the last few years, we have observed an increasing use of the word participation . . . but we have rarely noticed real participatory decision-making processes . . . without pre-defined dynamics and outcomes

Similarly, a Manchester expert warns that "participation needs to be about debate and dialogue. It's been about ticking boxes." In contrast, in Frankfurt, a representative from local authorities blames youth work providers for contributing to a tokenistic approach: "Nobody says 'we have problems with participation' . . . as long as the only form of control is ticking boxes to get further funding." Young people do not criticize but, rather, express their distance through nonparticipation, ignorance, or by assessing such mechanisms as "meaningless" or "false" as in Plovdiv (NRP, p. 21). At the same time, they express disapproval for the limited power-sharing existing in formal participatory settings: "The school council is to keep the traditions of the school as the teachers see them" (Plovdiv, GD—high school). In Gothenburg, members of the Formal Youth Representation admit being a "lapdog of politics." In some cases, distance includes distinction where "normal" students say the following about student representatives: "They don't care for anything. They think they are special because they are student representatives" (Frankfurt, GD—middle school).

This discrepancy is reinforced by the moral impetus with which adults endow youth participation: "By participation we mean an individual's voluntary and active contribution to a collective process, that she or he experiences as important and meaningful to herself and others" (Gothenburg, EI—youth worker). The combination of attributes in this quote implicitly reflects expectations by excluding other activities— categorized as enforced, passive, individualized, or extrinsically motivated.

A media activist from Bologna connects this to the increased distance between institutions and young people: "Participation can be bought and sold, the linkage is temporary." This critique refers to a *paternalistic approach* visible in the open or latent expectations of prior learning and training by which adults restrain the possibilities of youth participation. These are articulated especially among experts in Rennes and Frankfurt: "In any case, students have the right to get involved, also here in school . . . formal rights can be claimed—but in the right tone" (Frankfurt, EI—teacher). A youth worker specifies, "If you burn for an idea that is quite realistic, I don't think it is difficult to find institutional or professional partners who will support you" (Frankfurt, EI—welfare agency). Even those who aim at empowering young people, such as social workers concerned with young people's mental health, are trapped in the paradox of pedagogization while downplaying power issues: "Young people can't always make decisions in the outside world but can make decisions within themselves, within their own mindset" (Manchester, EI—social worker).

Behind such a paternalistic approach are deficit-oriented images of young people in terms of knowledge, competence, and attitude. According to experts in Eskişehir, young people need "to be saved, protected, oriented, emancipated, and empowered" while young people express ambivalent feelings of being "held back" and "not having the proper means" (NRE, p. 19). Deficit orientation applies especially to young people in conditions of social disadvantage to whom many youth and social workers ascribe attitudes "between overestimation and 'I am completely unable,' always in between" (Frankfurt, EI—social worker), blaming parents for their children's imbalance. Paternalism creates a subtle discrepancy where professionals/adults perceive themselves as generously offering spaces for participation, which young people do not use. A director of a Frankfurt youth center said,

> I don't know what they want. They have criticized everything.
> Yet, they have come….But when they called us "sons of bitches"

they got a one month ban….And they are so difficult to motivate although the center offers so many opportunities.

However, deficit orientation is found not only in experts' accounts but also among young people who are engaged in civic and social participation and who ascribe passivity and consumer-oriented attitudes to other young people: "Those who are going well and others who are going wrong, who are still hanging around" (NRR, p. 28; cf. NRP, p. 29).

Of course, precarious life conditions narrow public spaces down to coping with everyday life. Here, the dissent between what counts as participation and what is important in young people's worlds and everyday lives is reinforced by the neglect of existential needs. For example, in Manchester, many experts and young people refer to conditions of homelessness, mental health problems, and poverty. In a group discussion, youth workers characterized their work as "trying to do a difficult dance" and "making sure things don't explode" (NRM, p. 15). A social worker in residential care (Frankfurt) explained that "her" girls "have too many urgent and pressing issues. Everything else is too far away. It's not disinterest, rather, 'I have to care for myself first, my small life before I fight for somebody else or women's rights.' "

The discrepancy between institutions' and young people's perspectives on participation is best illustrated by the *role of school*. As mentioned previously, citizenship education is part of the curriculum in all countries, yet participation in school is limited. In Bologna, with its lack of youth work infrastructure, schools are the main institutional context of young people's citizenship education but "schools do not play any role in promoting student participation" (Bologna, EI—youth worker). In Gothenburg, too, there is criticism, even if the formulation reveals different expectations:

Children should be citizens in school. It is their school . . . school needs to be organized in a way that children's

experiences, thoughts, choices and all of that become an integral part of the work done at school….And that, according to me, is participation." (Gothenburg, EI—youth worker)

The differentiation of issues of participation goes together with *spatial differentiation* and *segregation*, which have been addressed in terms of "divided cities." The most obvious is the division between center and suburbs. For many young people living in peripheral areas, city centers represent ambivalent spaces. In Frankfurt, they refer to the center as a transit zone on their way to school or work, with few qualities because it tends to be either institutionalized (most public institutions are located in city centers) or commercialized. Many young people from disadvantaged neighborhoods feel alienated and intimidated by the center and refrain from using youth facilities there: "Many f***ed up and never leave the neighborhood" (Frankfurt, GD— youth center 3). At the same time, segregation is ethnicized. In Gothenburg, young people state, "You belong to a suburb, and that is where you are" (GD). Experts are concerned that few young people in the suburbs consider themselves Swedish "and those are young people who live and in some cases are born in Sweden….If you don't feel yourself in relation to where you are, then we have an uphill struggle ahead of us" (Gothenburg, EI—youth worker). In Manchester, both "white" and "black" young people refer to a specific coding districts:

What was seen as a "safe" area by young people who lived there, was projected as "dangerous" by those who did not….They saw [area X] as a no-go area where there is a threat of harassment ("quite intimidating, male Arab dominated") and that [area Y] is "very black orientated." (NRM, p. 18)

The same applies to young Muslims: "Since the Paris attacks some of them had experienced incidents of abuse or their headscarves had been pulled off and they were now choosing to come by car" (NRM, p. 18). In "student cities" such as Rennes, the city centers are

dominated by the campus and student life; in Eskişehir, the whole city is referred to as campus (NRE, p. 18), and disadvantaged youth remain on the outskirts. In Bologna, however, "the students experience the same problems as the inhabitants: decay, lack of safety, and crime. They have a generic wish for 'gentrification' …a sort of controlled 'movida,' but this is not accepted by the non-student population" (Bologna, EI—student association).

Right-wing groups have used this struggle to call for more rigid social control:

> The city center is systematically avoided by many young people who are scared of being bothered or robbed by immigrants or drug-users….Many youth participation activities in Bologna have exceeded the limit of legality and should be stigmatized rather than promoted. (Bologna, EI—right-wing group)

What is experienced as a safe or unsafe space depends on various differences and boundaries between inside and outside. Although many young people feel unsafe in schools, job centers, welfare offices, or youth councils, they feel safe in what they experience as "their" place:

> Here in (the project) and here in Manchester, not the small town or place I come from, not school, college, or university, I am not out as trans anywhere. This place is my community…we choose our own families and make our own communities. (Manchester, GD—LGBT)

A last aspect of discrepancy regards *political protest*, which was rarely referred to as participation by experts. This is particularly noteworthy in Frankfurt, which was a hotspot in the 1968 German student movement and still hosts a large left-wing scene, and where older youth workers long for the times when they were young and spent

their time in self-managed youth centers (NRF, pp. 16 and 22). In Zurich, current youth policy emerged from protest movements in the 1960s and 1980s (NRZ, p. 15):

> Youth were once conformist, then they turned rebellious….Until the first decade of the new millennium—courted by the state and overwhelmed by the great variety of leisure activities—they became completely upstanding and obedient. Nowadays young people are again looking for more autonomous spaces. (NRZ, p. 20)

Eskişehir is one of the cities outside Istanbul where the Gezi protest movement had a significant impact. To some extent, this may have supported the development of youth work in the city (NRE, p. 17). The only case in which political protest has been mentioned (at least by some experts) as a form of youth participation is Bologna:

> Bologna has never been deaf to the claims of its younger population. Since the 1970s, the most politicized groups of young people have occupied buildings….Local institutions have generally opted for a dialogical solution…even when carried out through non- democratic actions. (Bologna, EI— left-wing party)

As a result, squats turned into self-managed social centers (*centri sociali*) responding to young people's needs for social services and spaces of socialization, among other things. However, this dialogue has never materialized in terms of social infrastructure: "It hardly leads to a local system of youth policies, with adequate coordination and a shared vision" (Bologna, EI—policymaker). Nowadays, "local institutions (university and municipality) are moving toward a more repressive approach" (Bologna, EI—left-wing party). The initiatives react by institutionalizing to gain stability: "It is fundamental to structure participation with rules and instruments, avoiding 'shortcuts' such as permanent assembly-

listing, in which decisions are taken by organized minority groups" (Bologna, EI—local policymaker).

What we have learned from the interviews is that youth policies only partially cover the diversity of young people's conditions, needs, and styles, and this shortcoming reproduces and increases inequalities in terms of segregation and underrepresentation of socially disadvantaged groups. Formal youth participation settings are criticized as tokenistic "box ticking" by experts and as irrelevant by most young people. School as the main arena of growing up seems to produce limited opportunities for autonomous participation, despite the citizenship education on the curriculum. This reveals the paternalism and pedagogization inherent in youth participation that, when introduced as a school subject and not as a transversal classroom practice, becomes "cold" content taught through authority structures in which pupils learn the proper role and identity they are expected to carry into the wider world. In other words, students learn the discourses required to conform to school practices and purposes and are not considered as legitimate co-constructors of those practices and purposes. Therefore, it is not surprising that political protest tends to be neglected as a proper form of youth participation, except where—for some time, as in the case of Bologna—it has compensated for the lack of social infrastructure.

Socio-pedagogical Remarks

From a socio-pedagogical perspective, what clearly emerged from the interviews with experts and young people is that the latter are expected to prepare "for the real thing" but are not yet recognized as political actors. Rejecting an approach to participation as an everyday practice, many models of civic engagement do not seem to accord any real political power to youth at present. They create a moratorium, in which young people are trained in conventional politics. Participation and learning thus represent a paradoxical issue. On the one hand, participation programs are developed to allow young people to experience a participatory environment, whereas on the other hand, the scope and possibilities of participation in learning

contexts, such as schools, are limited to sociocultural activities and do not have any influence on curricula, assessment, and classroom and school management (Becquet 2012; Walther 2012). Therefore, young people feel a contradiction between what they are taught in terms of *democratic participation* and *institutions* that seem not to encourage or do not allow the full exercise of these democratic skills. According to Bermudez (2012), "Something in the emerging construct of civic competence must account for the crucial capacity to navigate the pervasive incongruence between the philosophical principles and political discourses of democracy and the failed practices and promises of democratic systems" (p. 540).

This is also evident in student government (student councils or unions, etc.), in which 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" (Gordon and Taft 2011).

In the face of the constraints involved in adult-led youth participation, in PARTISPACE it emerges that to be fruitful, youth organizations and youth work need to actively engage young participants in collaborative decision-making process, to give voice to their needs and demands, and to promote their initiative and agency. When adults interact with young people within an institutional framework, it is highly important to establish a logic of true collaboration. An "active" participation requires involving youth participants in decision-making by including them in the determination of organizational goals and purposes and providing roles of leadership and responsibility in projects and activities.

The freedom to make decisions, while experiencing trust and power sharing with adults, is also indicative of a meaningful participatory experience, as well as the establishment of a culture not focused on youth's troubles but, rather, concerned with establishing a common goal and a shared outcome. The findings of PARTISPACE are also in line with those of the multinational study by Zeldin et al. (2014, p. 870), who posit that youth are more likely to feel empowered and connected

when they consider themselves to be partners with adults in community organizations. For youth workers and educationalists, this means shifting the relation between adults and young people from *a logic of professionalism*, according to which young people are the subjects of care, to *a logic of partnership* in which adults and young people are supposed to be potential partners, who in a given situation solve problems and make decisions jointly.

From our research, it has emerged that by privileging normative forms of civic engagement, many politicians, youth workers, and scholars implicitly prioritize adults as the main societal subjects. It is time to problematize the ways in which adultism and generational differences make it difficult to engage youth in politics. The simplistic top-down approach of adult-led political socialization is short of breath and lacks a proper vision to solve the problem of youth political (dis)engagement. Promoting participation needs to seriously consider peer-based, youth-led political socialization and alternative models of generational alliance. In particular, more knowledge is needed on the meaning of the issues for young people, their effectiveness in terms of power, and their compatibility with identities and lifestyles.

References

Andersson, B., Cuconato, M., et al. (2016). National contexts of youth participation. Comparative Report, PARTISPACE Deliverable D 2.2. Zenodo. Retrieved from http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.48113

Batsleer, J., Ehrensperger, K., et al. (2017). Claiming spaces and struggling for recognition: Youth participation through local case studies. Comparative Case Study Report, PARTISPACE Deliverable 4.3. Zenodo. Retrieved from http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1064119

Becquet, V. (2012). 'Pupils' participation in French secondary schools: The interplay between tradition and innovation. In P. Loncle, M. Cuconato, V. Muniglia, and A. Walther (Eds.), Youth participation in Europe: Beyond discourses, practices and realities (pp. 207-226). Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Becquet, V., Kovacheva, S., et al. (2016). European discourses on youth participation and their national interpretation in the countries-members of the PartiSpace project. Unpublished working paper, PARTISPACE Deliverable 3.1.

Benedicto, J. (2013). The political cultures of young people: An uncertain and unstable combinatorial logic. Journal of Youth Studies, 16(6), 712–729.

Bennett, W. L. (2007). Civic learning in changing democracies: Challenges for citizenship and civic education. In P. Dahlgren (Ed.), Young citizens and new media: Learning democratic engagement (pp. 59–77). New York, NY: Routledge.

Bermudez, A. (2012). Youth civic engagement: Decline or transformation? A critical review. Journal of Moral Education, 41(4), 529–542.

Bourdieu, P. (1993). "Youth" is just a word. In Sociology in question (pp. 94–102). London, UK: Sage.

Cuconato, M. and Zannoni F. (2017). Styles and spaces of youth participation in Europe: An educational challenge. Educational Reflective Practices, 7(1), 63–80.

Dalton, R. (2009). The good citizen: How a younger generation is reshaping American politics (Rev. ed.). Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Diemer, M. A. (2012). Fostering marginalized youths' political participation: Longitudinal roles of parental political socialization and youth sociopolitical development. Community Psychology, 50(1-2), 246-256.

Flanagan, C. and Levine, P. (2010). Civic engagement and the transition to adulthood. Future Child, 20(1), 159–179.

Furlong, A. (2009). Revisiting transitional metaphors: Reproducing inequalities under the conditions of late modernity. Journal of Education and Work, 22(5), 343–353.

Gordon, H. (2007). Allies within and without: How adolescents conceptualize ageism and

navigate adult power in youth social movements. Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 6, 631–668.

Gordon, H. and Taft, K. (2011). Rethinking youth political socialization: Teenage activists talk back. Youth & Society, 43(4), 1499– 1527.

Helsper, W., Hummrich, M., and Kramer, R.-T. (2010). Qualitative mehrebenenanalyse. In B. Friebertshäuser, A. Langer, and A. Prengel (Eds.), Handbuch qualitative Forschungsmethoden in der Erziehungswissenschak (3rd ed., pp. 119–135). Munich, Germany: Juventa.

Hoikkala, T. (2009). The diversity of youth citizenships in the European Union. Young, 17(1), 5–24.

Hooghe, M. and Dassonneville, R. (2013). Voters and candidates of the future: The intention of electoral participation among adolescents in 22 European countries. Young, 21(1), 1–28.

Inglehart, R. (1990). Culture shift in advanced industrial society. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Inglehart, R. and Welzel, C. (2005). Modernization, cultural change, and democracy: The human development sequence. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Jamieson, L. and Grundy, S. (2005). Political participation and European citizenship identity. In J. Forbrig (Ed.), Revisiting youth political participation (pp. 121–133). Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe.

Kovacheva, S., Kabaivanov, S., et al. (2016). Commonalities and differences in the forms of youth participation in Europe. Unpublished working paper, PARTISPACE Deliverable 3.2.

Lagrange, P. and Senovilla, D. (2011). The legal status of unaccompanied children within international, European and national frameworks: Protective standards versus restrictive implementation. PUCAFREU project.

Lesko, N. (1996). Denaturalising adolescence: The politics of contemporary representations. Youth & Society, 28(2), 139–161.

Levinson, M. (2010). The civic empowerment gap: Defining the problem and locating solutions. In L. Sherrod, J. Torney-Purta, and C. Flanagan (Eds.), Handbook of research on civic engagement in youth (Vol. 1, pp. 331–362). New York, NY: Wiley.

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

Macedo, S., Alex-Assensoh, Y., et al. (2005). Democracy at risk: How political choices undermine citizen participation, and what we can do about it. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Sherrod, L., Torney-Purta, J., and Flanagan, C. (Eds.). (2010). Handbook of research on civic engagement in youth (Vol. 1). New York, NY: Wiley.