Schools of Democracy?

Comparative analysis of local projects In Hungary encouraging cooperation in the field of political participation of young people

**Theoretical Framework**

Following the considerations of John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville my research deals with one of the key concepts of democracy political participation in local communities. From the approach of public policy the study focus on local participatory structures aiming to encourage political participation of Hungarian young people aged between 15-29 years.

The concept of the research is based on the idea that young people's participation in democratic decision-making is largely determined by political institutions. In this respect Hungary is an interesting case because 22 years after the economic and democratic transition of the country still does not exist any institutional structure of the civic-governmental dialogue in youth affairs at national level, and the coordination of local and regional institutions is incidental. For any international research on the topic little reliable information is available, so my comparative research can provide important new informations.

Concerning youth’s political representation there is a clear territorial division among the ’old’ and ’new’ member states of the European Union. In ’old’ member states arenas for youth involvement in political life are numerous. Low participation level of young people in these countries brings evidence that institutionalisation has a strong tendency to limit participation, and it seems to be this weakening social anchoring that, over time, affected the legitimacy of democratic institutions (Forbrig, 2005:13). Therefore the main concern in these countries is to expand the institutional realm and to ameliorate connection between political institutions and their social environment. In ’new’ member states the economic and democratic transition has abolished former structures of the youth sector. In these regions the main question is not how to expand the former institutional realm but how to establish adequate structures for youth involvement. (Kovaceva 2000: 74).

Encouragement of young people’s participation is a permanent objective of the youth policy of the European Union. Youth policy related international researches of The Council of Europe stress the importance of understanding the new forms of political participation. Researchers agree that the idea of “citizenship” and “community” are integrally connected (Williamson 2002:42) so in order to develop democratic processes policies have to focus on local level. The Open Coordination Method of the EU is based on cooperation among member states facilitated by EU institutions. In this frame several projects have been launched in order to stimulate youth participation (denstad 2009:32). Results of these projects are different in the Member States. The research evaluates means of application in the field of promoting participation. Following five approaches of Europeanization defined by Olsen (2002: 923-924) the research includes policy analysis of polymerization of European multi-level governance that occur at lower levels of institutional structures, and policies. Due to the politicized transposition practice of Central and Eastern EU member states there are systemic failures of application and enforceability. Research investigating the question how EU legislation is put into practice in the region (Falkner- treib 2007) entitled the practice of these countries as the "worlds of dead letters" implying that most formal decisions remain on the paper.

The main objective of the research is to investigate how the common European youth policy objective of designing political institutions that enable young people unleash their creativity and participate in democracy is put into practice at local level in Hungary. The research aims to to capture how europeanization effected structures for young people’s active participation in Hungary in the SouthGreat Hungarian Plain Region at regional and local level. What are the features of laws and institutions created for Hungarian young people to participate in public life? How did the projects encouraging youth participation influence decision-making processes in Hungary?

The hypothesis of the research is that the politicized transposition typical to the practice of Central and Eastern EU Member States also apply to the objectives aiming to encourage youth participation. Application of legal provisions and the use of development plans is incidental. The implementation of common objectives at local level is largely determined by the legal agreement between local youth organizations and local government, the electoral process of youth representatives, the conciliation procedure between the two organizations, the autonomy of the youth organisations, and the legal form of the organizations. The more time the agreement is put into practice, the greater the autonomy of the youth representative structures, the more likely that the stated objectives are applied in practice.

**Research design**

The research strategy is based on process tracing. Following theories about Europeanization assumptions are made about what might happen, how and when. Then assumptions are compared with the empirical data of the case studies. The research follows Radaelli and Pasquier’s fourfold typology (2008:37-38). this way the empirical analysis of policy change is done in institutional context and provides clues in terms of empirical research. Temporal patterns are particularly important so the research controls the sequence, timing and tempo of changes that occurred in the structure of the organisation. (Schmitter-Santiso 1998).

Current research has not been conducted to discover the organisational form of Hungarian youth structures. To generate data for selecting cases Regional Officies of Mobilitás, the national coordinator organisation of EU Youth Policy in Hungary will be contacted. The screening process will be done trough the document analysis of regional, county and local youth strategies and action plans. The study aims tofind out the most important factors influencing supportive youth structures facilitating political participation. To detect networks of youth organisations and to understand causal relations, qualitative data needs to be generated from the most developed structures. Eight descriptive case study will be conducted in one Hungarian region. In depth interviews will be conducted in the sampled municipalities with mayors and municipal youth council leaders, the municipal youth workers and leaders of local NGOs committed for the political participation of young people. The collected data will be analysed through document analysis and qualitative content analysis.

**Expected results of the research**

While doing case studies the research might widen the scope of research methods on youth participation patterns, which up to now seem to be dominated by quantitative designs. Kovaceva (2005:27) stress the importance of doing more case studies of youth participation projects, indepth interviews and group discussions, and multi-country comparative studies. Since there is simply no appropriate quantitative data for analysing the “street-level” aspects of implementation, the research devote efforts to the neglected area of enforcement and application. The study written in Hungarian provides feedback to the Hungarian youth policy about the "street-level" level aspects of the implementation and application of the objectives, while the database and the English version of the study allows to compare developments of youth structures in Hungary in frame of the evidence-based youth policy making of the EU.

## Working Schedule

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| --- | --- |
| Year | 2013 |
| Month | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| Data collection and document analysis. Analysis of the sampled municipalities ( rules, internal regulations for institutions and organizations) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Case studies. 20 in-depth interviews and participant observation in the chosen eight municipalities |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Focus group interview with young people members of participatory institutions of the sampled municipalities  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Monitoring of the results, data processing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Period of writing the study |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Dissemination of the results, participation at national and international conferences |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Figure 1 The Gantt diagram of the research**

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