

# International Workshop on the Political Participation of Young People

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## Workshop Report

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The workshop was organized as part of a three consecutive workshops that has taken place between summer 2013 – winter 2014 under the Network (Sebeke) Project of NGO Research and Training Center in Cooperation with Youth Studies Unit of Istanbul Bilgi University. The main aim of the workshop was to organize a discussion on the relationship between young people and civil society.

The opening speech of the workshop under the heading of ***“Participation or nonparticipation? The power of concepts in empowering or disempowering young people in late modern capitalism”*** was delivered by **Andreas Walther** who is a Professor of Social Pedagogy and Youth Welfare at the Institute of Social Pedagogy and Adult Education at the University of Frankfurt . Mr Walther started his presentation with deconstructing a text based on youth participation that has been constructing a language of youth participation and policy. He argued that the general view on the issue is based on presumptions that claims youth participation is positive, youth do not participate enough and that this problem has to be addressed by pedagogical and policy practices. According to Mr. Walther the meaning of youth participation is very broad and changes from context to context and that there is a tension existing in modern politics due to the individualization, fragmentation of public sphere, the rise of international governance due to EU/UN, neoliberalism and the emergence of a participation industry.

Following these theoretical findings by giving reference to his previous research on the topic, he has provided Eurobarometer statistics on the current situation of youth in Europe both on voting patterns as well as involvement through CSOs. He argued that there are no break downs of political and social participation, there are more differences on different countries than generations, there are trends towards non-conventional forms of participation and that the disadvantaged youth have been under represented across all conventional and unconventional forms of social and political participation. He proposes that we need to look more deeply into youth cultures as forms and contexts of participation by looking at examples of 2005 Paris suburb riots, skaters in public spaces, youth doing “nothing” by chilling, He concluded that in order to understand participation deeply in the modern capitalist society one need to pay attention to biographisation, neo liberalism, fragmentation of the public sphere and identity work and that one needs to redefine the concept of youth participation through a new research understanding in which individuals relate to public, policy intervention for negotiating with adults and institutions, pedagogical youth work practice based on not teaching but experimentation and NGOs for reflecting of differences between interests.

In the first session, after the opening speech, **Ulla Grönlund** from UNV Turkey Office presented an approach under the title of ***“Defining Youth Volunteering: Role and Contributions”*** by trying to answer questions of how do we define volunteerism, key historical issues when defining it as well as the dynamics behind the young citizens' participation and volunteerism attitudes. She has started the discussion by providing definitions of volunteerism in legal, academic debates by giving references to the culture

and histories of different countries. By giving reference to the UNV's State of the World's Volunteerism Report (<http://www.unv.org/swvr2011>) she has discussed the purpose and relevance of volunteerism by providing insights from the side of the “doer” and “receiver” with an approach to attain well being. Ms. Grönlund argued that limited opportunities for effective participation, lack of participatory structures at a community and a national level, lack of trust between governments and youth, lack of capacity building support systems for youth organizations and lack of support and commitment to youth are the key challenges that are hindering their participation. In order to better the existing situation, she argued, fundamentals of a free society in the form of freedom of speech/rule of law should be realized, youth should be realized as active citizens and one should create a bottom up approach to development.

In the second session of the day, **Laden Yurttagüler** from Istanbul Bilgi University's Civil Society Studies Center and Graeme Tiffany from **The Federation for Detached Youth Work** tried to delineate the relationship between participation and welfare state in the modern times.

Ms. Yurttaguler provided a historical analysis of the changing meaning of volunteerism in her presentation in **“Discourse of volunteerism in a changing world”**. She argued that due to the changes both in the world capitalist system the welfare state has been shrinking and the real socialism collapsed. The space governed by the state and the first and the second worlds have been left to the mercy of the international/local NGOs. This power vacuum and the resulting environment created a new form of a contract between the state and the citizens that is different from the post war consensus in which citizens through volunteer organizations are expected to deliver services rather than advocate certain issues.

This development was in parallel with what has been happening in Turkey since 1980s. The emergence of civil society in the 1990s with the Habitat meeting in Istanbul, the earthquake in Kocaeli and the EU process provided a background for civil society organizations to flourish and that the tension between the service and advocacy approaches are also evident in the last 20 years of Turkey also. Service based CSOs provides a space for volunteers to meet with the “other”, based on the idea of empowerment of the target group, may provide a hierarchical relationship between the service provider and the target group and the “good” created is mostly for the one who is receiving the service. For the volunteers who are involved in the advocacy part of civil society, the discussion starts with discourse; volunteer of activist. The language this new civil society borrowed from the business world has also been evident as “management” of volunteers, the tension between the paid staff and the activists and possibilities of an internal democracy based on the very question of who is deciding for whom.

Mr. Tiffany in his speech titled **“How have changing definitions of the state affected how we see, and how we 'do', youth participation work? Can the philosophy and practice of Street Work 'keep it real'?”** based his arguments on the changing nature of society and particularly through the effects of austerity measures in the European context. He argued that too much emphasis has been given to measuring in youth work and that because of it content is affected. By arguing that CSOs of the modern times – generally - are agents of reform of a shrinking welfare state, he argued that youth is conceptualized as a trouble maker by this new form of rulers by giving concrete examples of surveillance measures, magazine commercials on security issues, drones. The budget cuts, target and not process oriented approaches according to Mr. Tiffany, criminalize youth.

By providing insight from his personal career, he has summarized the changes in his title in the past 30 years namely; community worker, community development worker, community education worker, community & youth worker, youth & community worker, youth worker, youth support worker, targeted youth support worker and targeted youth support (troubled families) worker. Based on this transformation and austerity measures he defended that voluntary participation turned into the surveillance for all, focus on the life of the association turned into focus on individual, informal relationship to bureaucratic relationship and lastly a concern with learning into a concern with case management. He also added that education/learning became an activity for a “better” workforce however youth work should provide a space for youth development on young people's terms.

The third session was based on **Airi-Alina Allaste's** presentation of “**Grassroots Activities of Young People**” who is from Estonia's Tallinn University. The heading of the session that she had provided a presentation was “**Mapping existing activism**”. She has provided insights from an ongoing research project (<http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/workpackages.php>) that analyzes grass root activism of 14 European countries as well as in Estonia. The research has been looking at the relationship between youth who have not faced an authoritarian regime and has not determine their political preferences and their relationship to radical populist parties. She has argued that the secondary literature on the issue of grass root activism looks at different types of movements of ecology, student, anarchist, gender, etc. and in some countries it is more related with radical right movements. Youth subcultures, protesting, political consumerism, internet activism, participation in voluntary groups have also been topics that were researched in these 14 countries under the umbrella of youth research. The trend has been an increase in the general grassroot activism especially in Western Europe. This trend has also been evident in Estonia also. High level of internet usage, rise of protests, community activism but the negative connotation of the work activism is evident in the Estonian context. She has also provided a case study done in Estonia in Tartu and Norva and have analyzed what internet activism, access to information, advocating petitions, boycotting, public demonstrations meant.

In the first session of the second day of the workshop under the heading of “**Who is participating?: Social Class, Culture and Participation**” **Asst. Prof. Demet Lukuslu** from Yeditepe University constructed her presentation by arguing against conceptualizing youth as a apolitical category especially in the 2000s under the title of “**The problem of participation of young people in Turkey**”. She argued that there are very few research projects on the topic especially and the ones existing were mostly about students and quantitative based. She continued by providing a historical analysis of the conceptualization of the category of youth by giving historical references starting with late Ottoman modernization period up until the 1980 military junta. By giving reference to her published book *Youth Myth in Turkey* (<http://www.iletisim.com.tr/kitap/turkiyede-genclik-miti/8222>) she argued that in that period in all students movements, the idea was to “save the state”.

Lukuslu argued that contrary to the general belief that youth are ignorant about the world she has found in her doctoral thesis research that they are conscious, are unhappy to live in this kind of a society, not totally obeying to the traditional political space and they see the political space as a devalued, corrupted and untransformable place. She argued by giving every day examples and discourses from the life of young people that we today do not face a conformist generation because youth according to Lukuslu use conformism as a

tactic.

In the second session of the day **Annegret Warth** from Frankfurt University and **Asst. Prof. Özlem Avci** from Usak University presented their speeches under the heading of “**Empowering or taming? Case studies**”.

Ms. Avci's presentation under the title of “**Unconscious Modernization of Pluralist Resistance: The Case of Islamic Youth Movements**” focused on the late Islamic youth movements in Turkey. Ms. Avci started her presentation by giving reference to how the political bans of the late 1990s provided the ground for political Islam to emerge as a social movement in Turkey. She argued that at this stage, this movement based its discourse and praxis on “teblig” (notification). However, due to the military intervention of February 28<sup>th</sup>, this phase has been followed by “temsil” (representation) that transformed itself into a more moderate discourse. With this background, she has provided an insight on the phases of changing perceptions of religiosity of the “activist muslim youth” by giving references to the pre and university periods, the cultural field in the form of communities/sects, gender, urban life and forms of women dressings.

She argued that this new model of Islamic pluralism is both modern and anti-modern and that the new movement of Islamic youth and the traditional religiosity has its own tensions among them. She has used her research titled and published “Religious University Youth In Istanbul: Between Two Worlds” (<http://www.iletisim.com.tr/kitap/iki-dunya-arasinda/8543#.U57flhajwI>) as a basis of her arguments.

In the last session of the workshop, **Soren Kristenssen** from Techne and **Asst. Prof. Ekrem Duzen** from Izmir University presented their arguments under the heading of “**Tools for Empowerment**”.

Mr. Kristenssen argued that education is a tool and that learning mobility is also a tool for learning although it is a myth in itself. He has focused on tools used in Europe that provided mobility opportunities to the young people namely; EVS, study visits, youth encounters, placements under Leonardo and school stays under Comenius and Erasmus. Although there has been a lot of money spent on mobility programs both on the European and national levels, he argued that there is no substantial research on the topic because mobility has been a privilege of well functioning young people, that there is a lack of theory development, targeted evaluative and longitudinal research.

From his perspective, policy implications that had program outcomes such as the youth program are only improvements to the existing learning environments, they are not new. He focused on the improving of quality of existing mobility programs such as providing support in the form of linguistic, cultural, practical, psychological and pedagogical interventions. During their stay, he focused on the monitoring and mentoring opportunities and after home coming evaluation, perspectivation, recognition in the form of a document of skills and competences and guidance/reintegration. He argued that these forms of opportunities are and should be an integral part of what we call a mobility opportunity and that should be implemented correctly in order to increase the impact of learning mobility programs.

Mr. Duzen presented a case study titled “**What changes the change agents? Designing activities for effective civic organization and participation**” that is based on two

research projects that he and his colleagues implemented 3 years ago (<https://drive.google.com/folderview?usp=sharing&id=0B0hxcXiMSAAbSWVIS21vY3puaTg#>) He summarized the first research that is the one that looks at the needs of the university students in Turkey, 4 main findings under the heading of basic services, academic life, accomodation and living spaces and socia life. He has also looked at the reasons of these answers and came up with two main set of groupings namely the insufficient means and supplies as well as bad management.

He has also provided the findings of another research that looked at the impact of youth work through again providing a case study based on the work of Community Volunteers Foundation of Istanbul. He divided the volunteers in the research into four categories of classmates, bystanders, novices and experts. With each category, he looked at headings of freedom of social approval, seperation of family, freedom from submissive behaviou, self esteem and self reliance. He further divided the opportunities provided to the young people by the foundation under the categories of projects, mobility and mobility projects and tried to generalize the total impact of the foundation on its volunteers.