



European
Research Area

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



PIDOP – Processes Influencing Democratic Ownership and Participation

PIDOP Policy Briefing Paper No. 1: What can be learnt from the analysis of current policies on participation?

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SUMMARY

Objectives of the research

This research aimed to identify dominant policy discourses at European, national and regional levels relating to the civic and political participation of women, youth, migrants and minorities. It also aimed to assess narratives concerning participation in the official policy documents of civil society organisations.

Scientific approach / Methodology

The research employed a qualitative approach to analyse the contents of relevant policy documents. Elite interviews with policy makers and representatives of civil society organisations were also used to probe further into the findings of the documentary analysis. The interviews aimed to identify the nature and range of values attached to citizenship and to the political participation of women, youth, migrants and minorities.

New knowledge and/or European added value

The research has provided a detailed overview of key policy priorities and political intentions at the national and European levels, and has illuminated the impact of Europeanisation on policies concerning civic and political participation.

Key messages for policy-makers, businesses, trade unions and civil society actors

There are a number of dominant discourses becoming established at the national level. Although official documents make little reference to specific European policies, the overarching priorities of the Member States are aligned with those of the EU. The importance of enhancing active citizenship and political engagement of civil society groups emerged as a core value and, as such, should be used to direct the planning of EU public policies. The inclusion of traditionally marginal groups at the local level (e.g. in projects, civic activities, political activities, etc.) should be a key priority for policy makers.

Objectives of the research

The objectives of this research were:

- To identify key policy discourses at EU, national and regional levels which relate to the civic and political participation of women, youth, migrants and minorities
- To explore similarities and differences between the ways in which these groups are treated at EU, national and regional levels
- To investigate the extent to which there is coherence or tension between relevant policies at EU, national and regional level
- To analyse the extent to which formal, written policy in this area is congruent with the espoused views of policymakers and members of relevant policy networks at EU, national and regional level

Scientific approach / methodology

The methodology adopted for this research was qualitative in order to allow the multinational team to explore the role of discourse in the construction of political narratives and policy objectives. The research was conducted in eight national contexts (Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Turkey and the UK) and at the EU level.

Relevant policy documents from all eight countries were analysed, and elite interviews with policy makers and representatives of civil society organisations were also conducted in all eight countries in order to probe further into the findings of the documentary analysis. The interviews were aimed at identifying the nature and range of values attached to citizenship and to the political participation of women, youth, migrants and minorities.

In order to collect the data and to compare the results between the different countries, a protocol for the analysis of policy documents and for the transcriptions of the interviews was designed. This analysis tool was divided into seven main sections:

- Key actors
- Context
- Policies and political priorities
- Main objectives and values
- Key European debates
- Reference to EU policies
- Criticism of official policies

The key concept framing the analysis was Europeanisation. Using this concept, we looked at the processes of change,

alignment, convergence and criticism in respect to EU policies relating to citizenship and participation. As the emergence of European citizenship was a particular point of interest, we selected NGOs that are directly connected with Brussels-based organisations such as the Social Platform, Concord, Enar, the Migration Policy Group, the European Women Lobby and the European Youth Forum.

Discourse analysis was used to examine the European, national and civil society documents and to analyse the interview transcripts. The main assumption underpinning the research was that language reflects power structures and dynamics within wider society and politics. The analysis of established or dominant discourses in policy documents therefore allowed the identification of political priorities and their impact on policy outcomes.

In particular, the research focused on two key aspects that frame the Europeanisation of politicians' discourse in the eight countries:

- The crisis of European Integration, which we assumed started with the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 and ended with the approval of the Lisbon Treaty
- The development of counter-discourses and forms of criticism by civil society organisations' representatives in respect to policy makers at both the national and European levels

New knowledge and European added value

The research provided important insights into the context, priorities and actors that steer the policy process. In particular, it revealed the ways in which policy makers and civil society organisations have responded to the current debates on active citizenship, civic engagement, and political participation. These are important areas of analysis as the EU embarks upon a process which seeks to develop a more transparent and meaningful European public space/sphere.

The analyses evaluated the degree and level of policy learning and cross-national transfer taking place in the area of civic engagement and citizenship. The research uncovered:

- The visibility of European topics
- Alignment in respect to the European standards
- Criticism of the European policies
- Development of the 'European dimension', even though this was critical and not in line with that prevailing at the supranational level

In particular, the research revealed the value and prominence of the participatory processes recently enhanced by European Institutions, and the development of, and consequent obstacles to, the establishment of active citizenship at the EU level.

This is consistent with recent efforts at the European level to involve local actors more and to better effect in establishing the foundations of a shared, open and transparent participatory democracy at every level of governance. Principles such as intercultural dialogue and civil dialogue were considered to be the background principles which needed to be coherently established and improved. This was seen to require an enhancement of the relationships and links between grassroots organisations and Brussels-based ones.

The relationship between the Brussels-based and national NGOs was found to be a prominent concern. Issues such as the accountability of the former to the latter, and also the representation of the latter, were central points of discussion in relation to legitimacy. The exclusion from strong European networks reduces the possibilities for weaker groups to influence public policies and to make their voice heard. This is still perceived as something which needs to be improved.

Some of the most significant findings relate to four key areas:

1. Policy discourse

Three policy discourses emerged as dominant from the analysis of official texts: social exclusion; equal opportunities; and civic engagement. The way in which each discourse has been framed within national and EU priorities defines the reach and scope of specific policies in this area. These discourses therefore have a significant impact on individuals' access to rights and potentially on the way they see themselves as members of a political community.

2. Europeanisation

The analysis of national policy documents highlighted an absence of general references to European debates. Although official documents produced by governments and civil society organisation are, on the whole, aligned with EU political priorities, there is little evidence of open engagement with European meta-narratives.

3. The emergence of counter-discourse.

Criticism of the Lisbon Strategy (and of Social Europe in general) is common, but the policy texts produced by civil society organisations provide little evidence of any coherent or

consistent counter-discourse to current European policy discourses.

4. Intersectionality

A detailed consideration of how gender, culture, ethnicity, religion and age interact with one another in underpinning citizens' identifications and behaviours is absent from policy discourse, apart from the interaction between gender and religion.

Key messages for policy-makers, businesses, trade unions and civil society actors

These findings have important implications for policy makers:

1. Policy makers need to be aware that current national policies, which are broadly aligned with the European priorities, can have a significant impact on individuals' access to rights and on the way they see themselves as members of a political community. Policy makers need to be mindful of the fact that policies can influence the way in which citizens interact with both state and non-state actors.
2. At the policy level, a European narrative is currently emerging that aligns itself with the values entrenched within the European Treaties. However, there is little evidence of any open engagement with European narratives by civil society organisations. If such organisations wish to challenge the European narrative, they need to articulate a coherent and consistent counter-discourse to current European policy discourses.
3. Policy makers also need to give greater attention to the ways in which gender, culture, ethnicity, religion and age interact with one another in underpinning citizens' identifications and behaviours. Consideration of the interactions which occur between different identities is absent from current policy discourse, apart from the interaction between gender and religion.
4. At the local level, there is a clear need to establish measures and instruments to improve the basis for the participation of grassroots organisations represented in Brussels. Core funding as well as *ad hoc* programmes emerge as the most effective way to empower NGOs and civil society organisations. This message is very relevant both for policy makers and for the Brussels-based umbrella organisations, and drives to the need to establish a bottom-up participatory approach in the framing and drafting of EU social policy.

5. Policy priorities highlighted the following areas of activity that need urgent attention:

- intercultural dialogue and the establishment of common antidiscrimination frameworks across EU and non-EU states
- recognition of disadvantaged groups (such as ethnic and linguistic minorities, women and youth from minority groups), by guaranteeing the possibility for them to access the educational system and the labour market
- policy frameworks in the areas of healthy living and sustainability, and the establishment of concrete measures regarding Social Europe, with a consequent reconsideration of the Lisbon Strategy and the working plans that have been adopted recently (such as Europe 2020).

From this perspective, working plans in the field of equal opportunities are especially needed at the national level, insofar as key information campaigns and education programmes need to be established by national institutions and policy makers in order to develop better public communication on issues such as gender equality, rights of minorities, possibilities to access the labour market, etc.

6. The main policy criticism that emerged was related to the lack of a coherent bottom-up approach in the framing of the European Policies. The benefits of European regulative frameworks in such areas as antidiscrimination, employment, gender equality and the rights of minorities are generally welcomed, but these are still in need of improvement. The difficulties in translating legislation into practice undermine these frameworks' effectiveness.

PROJECT IDENTITY

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Related websites	European Commission website on citizenship: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/index_en.htm European Commission website on integration: http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/en/index.cfm European Commission website on youth: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm European Commission website on gender equality: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=418 Council of Europe website on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (EDC/HRE): http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/ Council of Europe website on youth: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/default_en.asp Council of Europe website on gender equality: http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/default_en.asp
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