



pidop

Processes Influencing Democratic Ownership and Participation
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Policy Recommendations of the PIDOP Research Project

Introduction

PIDOP is a multinational research project funded by the European Commission under FP7. It ran from May 2009 until April 2012. The project investigated the processes which influence political and civic participation in eight European states – Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Turkey and the UK.

- ❖ **Political participation:** activities which are intended to influence political governance
For example: voting, election campaigning, signing petitions, demonstrating, writing letters to politicians, etc.
- ❖ **Civic participation:** activities focused on helping others or achieving a public good
For example: attending meetings about issues of concern, raising money for charity, helping neighbours, consumer activism, voluntary work, etc.

The project analysed data from existing survey datasets, and collected new data on political and civic participation among youth aged between 16 and 26 years. Within this age range, we also explored variations in participation associated with gender and with ethnicity. We examined the role of large-scale contextual factors (including historical, political, electoral and policy factors), social factors (including family, educational and media factors) and psychological factors (including motivational, cognitive, attitudinal and identity factors) in facilitating and/or inhibiting political and civic participation. A distinctive focus of the project was the psychology of the individual citizen and the psychological processes through which the large-scale factors and social factors exert their effects on the participation of citizens. In total, the project examined citizen participation by young members of 27 different ethnic majority and minority/migrant groups living in 9 national locations across Europe.

The project identified a range of factors which promote participation, and a range of factors which inhibit participation. The following policy recommendations concern the actions which may be taken by politicians, political institutions, media producers, educational professionals, schools and civil society actors to enhance young citizens' political and civic participation.

All of these policy recommendations are based directly on the findings from the project. They are broken down under the following four main headings:

- ❖ Recommendations for politicians and political institutions
- ❖ Recommendations for media producers and media organizations
- ❖ Recommendations for ministries of education, educational professionals and schools
- ❖ Recommendations for civil society actors, including youth workers, youth and leisure centres, youth and education NGOs, and leaders of ethnic minority communities

❖ Recommendations for politicians and political institutions

1. Our findings show that young people often feel that they are not taken seriously in political terms by politicians and other older adults. This lack of responsiveness reduces their belief in their own ability to have any influence politically or civically and is experienced as a significant disincentive to engage any further with political issues.

- Young people should be treated more attentively and with greater respect by politicians and other adults. Politicians need to show young people that they do listen and pay attention to their views on civic and political matters, individually and as a group.
- There should be better and more concrete responses by politicians and political institutions to specific forms of youth participation – such as public protests or student demonstrations – so that young people can feel that their voices are being heard.
- At national and European levels, mechanisms should be found to allow a greater involvement of young politicians (through political parties and through appointments to policy-making and decision-making bodies) which could support the identification of young people with leaders of government and with political decision-makers. For example, age quotas are one such mechanism which could be introduced. This is especially important in countries where politics and decision-making are dominated by older generations and younger people are marginalized by political institutions.

2. We also found that young people below the age of 18 years often perceive themselves as excluded from political processes and institutions, and feel disenchanting due to the fact that they are denied fundamental forms of political and civic participation on the grounds of their age.

- In order to encourage greater levels of political and civic engagement among youth aged between 16 and 18 years, national governments should consider lowering the age of voting to 16 years.

3. Our study revealed that young people frequently feel that politicians make little or no attempt to communicate with them, and are not interested in utilising those means of communication which young people themselves use to communicate with each other.

- Politicians and political institutions at all levels (local, national and European) need to engage in better and more effective communication with young people, so that young people can feel that political systems are interested in and concerned with their needs and perspectives on civic and political affairs.
- Such communication between politicians and young people should take advantage of the new social media which are popular among young people themselves (e.g., Facebook, Twitter and YouTube).

4. Our study found that young people are more concerned with civic and non-conventional forms of participation (e.g. charitable activities, consumer activism, demonstrations and petitions) than with conventional forms of participation (e.g. voting).

- Politicians and policymakers should view civic and non-conventional forms of participation as equally important as conventional forms of participation, and should

address, and provide feedback on, issues which have been raised through these alternative forms of activism.

5. Our study also revealed that membership of organizations is a major predictor of both civic and political participation. Greater involvement in organizations is associated with more interest and attentiveness towards civic and political issues, and with higher levels of civic and political participation among young people.

- National, regional and local governments should ensure that all youth have access to membership of a range of organizations, including youth and leisure centres, sports clubs, cultural centres, local community centres, etc., and should encourage youth to take up membership of these organizations.

Issues relating to ethnic minorities and migrants

6. Our study revealed that young members of ethnic minority and migrant groups often perceive themselves as being excluded and alienated from political processes because of the prejudice and inequity which they commonly experience.

- There should be a more systematic and consistent implementation of EU anti-discrimination laws, which would help to counter the development of feelings of exclusion and alienation among ethnic minority and migrant communities as a consequence of the prejudice and inequity which they experience.
- Political institutions should make more effort to promote equal access to politics for minorities and migrants, for instance by developing more effective links between political parties and ethnic minority and migrant individuals.

7. We found that young members of ethnic minority and migrant groups often feel resentful and disenchanted about being denied fundamental forms of political participation (such as voting) because they do not possess citizenship of the country in which they are living.

- European countries should re-examine the legal framework surrounding the granting of citizenship to permanent residents within their borders, with the view to making citizenship as inclusive as possible.
- Non-nationals and third country individuals who have been in residence within a country for a specified period of time should be included in the political and civic spheres to a greater extent by granting them voting rights, particularly at the local level.

8. We discovered that young recent immigrants frequently lack knowledge about majority group laws, conventions and regulations pertaining to civic and political participation.

- More information directed specifically at immigrant groups should be disseminated by government institutions through NGOs working with immigrant communities.

Issues relating to women

9. Our study revealed that there are many obstacles that hinder the civic and political participation of women. Female youth often perceived biases against women and in favour of men both in the workplace and in the political sphere. In addition, in some countries, and among

some ethnic groups, we found that young women's participation was further hindered by the need to undertake paid employment at an early age, early educational dropout and/or early marriage.

- National governments, political parties and political institutions should promote and implement equal rights and equal access policies more effectively, with the goal of achieving equal access to education, work and politics for women.
- National governments, political parties and political institutions should guarantee gender equity in the political and institutional spheres, not only in fielding candidates for election but also in their own internal administrative and institutional structures.
- Government institutions should use an approach to the monitoring of political, civic and work issues which is sensitive to the interests, approaches and needs of both men and women.

Issues relating to all groups

10. Our research revealed that the participatory experiences of young people are often specific to particular subgroups defined in terms of gender, ethnicity and age (e.g., specific to younger females from an Angolan background, or to older males from a Bangladeshi background).

- Political and civic institutions and policymakers should give more support to specific groups defined through the intersection of gender, ethnicity and age in order to encourage greater levels of participation by particular groups that have specific needs and concerns.
- Political and civic institutions and policymakers need to be more aware of the internal diversity which exists within all national and ethnic groups, and alert to the fact that different policies may be required to meet the needs of different subgroups, including those of girls and young women as well as those of boys and young men. This should occur at all levels in the political and civic systems, but it is especially important that institutions and policymakers at the local level are aware of this variability and internal diversity.

European citizenship

11. On the specific issue of the European Union, we found that youth often view the EU as an entity which takes decisions following a top-down process. The consequence is that there is a perception of exclusion and distance and thus a very low sense of belonging to a civic EU sphere. In addition, in some countries, there are high levels of Euro-scepticism and a marked lack of knowledge of European political institutions (for instance, about MEPs, the European Parliament, the European Commission, etc.) among youth. These perceptions and lack of knowledge hinder the construction of a European citizenship and restrict the willingness of young people to participate at the European level.

- The European Commission should take steps to promote greater knowledge of the mechanisms and role of the EU. More information about European politics and institutions should be disseminated by European institutions to schools, to youth or leisure centres, and to NGOs working with youth, in order to challenge pre-conceived ideas, misinformation and lack of knowledge about European institutions.

- The European Commission should take steps to involve young EU citizens in its activities more directly, for example, by mounting a Youth Internship scheme through which young people would be able to gain first-hand experience of working within the Commission and other European institutions.
- The European Commission should also consider expanding, strengthening and extending the lifetime of the Youth in Action programme, especially those activities within the programme (such as Youth Exchanges, Youth Initiatives, Youth Democracy Projects, and European Voluntary Service) that are dedicated to promoting young people's social, cultural, educational, political and voluntary service experience either in their own country or in other countries. These activities provide significant opportunities for youth participation, intercultural exchanges and experiences, and the construction of a European identity through direct personal experience.

12. Additional recommendations addressed specifically to ministries of education are included below under the heading 'Recommendations for ministries of education, educational professionals and schools'

❖ **Recommendations for media producers and media organizations**

13. Our research revealed that the mass media and new social media are important for young people, and that TV, radio and the Internet are among the main sources of influence and points of reference for youth in developing an understanding of other groups within society and for developing opinions on civic and political issues. There is a considerable responsibility on those who produce content for the mass media to represent individuals and groups, and civic and political matters, in a fair and just manner.

- Those who produce content for the mass media should avoid using distorted images and stereotypes of youth, women, ethnic minorities and migrants in their media productions, and should ensure that they do not contribute to the dissemination and perpetuation of myths about these groups.
- Media organizations should set up and effectively publicise communication channels to enable youth, women, ethnic minorities and migrants to have the opportunity to provide feedback on how they have been represented in the media.
- Media organizations should ensure that youth, women, ethnic minorities and migrants have the opportunity to express their own points of view on civic and political matters within media productions.
- Broadcasters, journalists and media organizations should help to establish a higher public awareness of those youth, women, ethnic minorities and migrants who are actively involved in the civic and political spheres, and who may therefore act as positive role models for young people to become involved.
- To address the disinterest towards political issues exhibited by many young people, there should be an incorporation of more engrossing political television productions into the programme scheduling of major national broadcasting networks, which would help to enhance the appeal of the political sphere in the perceptions of young people.

14. Our research also revealed that, when young people engage in acts of political participation, they often feel that the news media fail to represent their participatory actions with fairness and seriousness of purpose, and this is experienced as a significant disincentive to engage any further with political issues.

- The news media should represent the participatory actions of young people – such as participation in protests and demonstrations – with greater fairness, respect and seriousness, so that young people can feel that their arguments and positions are being accurately and impartially represented by the news media.
- The news media should not focus exclusively on the negative, disruptive or anti-social incidents that occur at young people’s participation events such as demonstrations, but should instead give equal attention to the positive and well-intentioned character of demonstrations and other social and political participatory efforts by youth.

15. Our research found that young people rely especially on the Internet and new social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) for obtaining information about the civic and political spheres. It is therefore important that they learn to recognise the risks and biases which may be encountered in these media.

- Media literacy programmes should be included as a core element in school curricula with the active participation of media organizations, and children and young people should be alerted to the risks and biases which they may encounter on the Internet and on popular web-based social networks.
- Broadcasters, journalists and media organizations should also provide more tools on how to evaluate the credibility of information provided, and they should also encourage critical interaction with young viewers/recipients rather than the passive consumption of media contents.

16. As has been noted already, we found that young recent immigrants frequently lack knowledge about majority group laws, conventions and regulations pertaining to civic and political participation.

- More information directed specifically at immigrant groups should be disseminated through those online, print and broadcast media that work with immigrant communities.

❖ **Recommendations for ministries of education, schools and educational professionals**

The role of schools

17. Our findings reveal that young people frequently feel that they do not know enough about political issues to be able to engage in effective action to influence political, civic and social change. This lack of knowledge is experienced by young people as a significant impediment to their own civic and political participation.

- Ministries of education should ensure that more effective education and information is provided by schools about political and civic issues, and about how to become involved in politics and other voluntary spheres of activity.
- Ministries of education should consider the introduction or the strengthening of civic/citizenship education in the school curriculum.

18. We also found that young people commonly report that they have relatively little experience of civic and political participation, and those experiences which they have had are often viewed negatively and being of low quality. This is worrying, insofar as we also discovered that the quality of participation is a significant predictor for many types of civic and political participation. Our research further shows that young people often have a pronounced interest in issues at the local (rather than the national) level (including issues of litter, graffiti, local transport, local amenities, etc.) and in broader environmental, humanitarian and human rights issues at the international or global levels. Their interests in these areas can be harnessed to provide them with high quality participation experiences.

- Schools should provide a greater range of opportunities for young people to obtain practical experience of active civic and political participation, and should facilitate positive high quality participation experiences through school projects and volunteering activities that are embedded in the local community in particular.
- Schools should also be more active in raising awareness among young people of campaigns and projects involving environmental, humanitarian and human rights issues at the international or global level, and should encourage young people to obtain participatory experiences by joining these campaigns and projects.
- Because the development of the skills which are required for active citizenship depends not only on the acquisition of knowledge but also on the accumulation of practical experience, students should be given more responsibility in schools through participation in democratic decision-making with teaching staff, so that they learn democracy and participation through their daily practical experience (and not only through formal civic/citizenship education classes).
- All schools should have a school council or parliament, in which elected students may gain experience of representing the concerns of their fellow students and experience of engaging in joint decision-making with teaching staff.
- The implication of the two preceding recommendations is that schools should consider adopting a whole-school approach to the practice of democracy.
- Schools should also disseminate to their students information about local and national youth parliaments and their role.
- Extensive materials on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education have been produced by the Council of Europe. These materials provide an excellent resource which could be used much more widely by teachers and other educational professionals both for teaching about civic and political issues, and for generating positive participation experiences for young people. Ministries of education should set up more effective channels for communicating information concerning the Council of

Europe's materials in this area to teachers, teacher trainers and other education professionals within their country.

- The European Commission and/or the Council of Europe, working in collaboration with ministries of education, should consider creating a programme of "Youth Ambassadors for Democratic Citizenship and Participation", aimed at raising awareness among young people of the value and importance of civic and political participation.

19. In addition, our research revealed that the low engagement of young people civically and politically is often related to lack of time and to involvement in other activities (mainly school work and paid employment).

- Schools should take steps to ensure that their students have sufficient time to undertake civic and political activities, and should consider the attainment of high quality participatory activity as a formal educational objective.

The psychological predictors of participation

20. Our study examined in detail the various psychological factors that predict the different forms of civic and political participation. We found that opinionation (i.e. having opinions on civic and political issues) can sometimes act as significant predictor of a range of different forms of civic and political participation.

- Schools and universities should identify and implement ways to stimulate opinionation. For example, they should consider:
 - the introduction, or expanding the number, of debating clubs in order to promote political interest and opinionation
 - hosting public question-and-answer sessions involving politicians to stimulate interest in political matters
 - organising 'mock elections' in order to encourage young people to form opinions

21. We also found that the predictors of participation sometimes also include both collective efficacy (i.e., the subjective belief that, working together as a group, citizens can achieve civic and political change) and individual efficacy (i.e. the subjective belief that, as an individual, one is able to understand and to participate in politics effectively).

- Schools should not only develop mechanisms for greater collective opportunities for civic and political participation, but also encourage opportunities for individual participation among students.

22. However, our study also revealed that the psychological determinants of participation can vary according to the specific type of participation concerned.

- Educationalists who are developing interventions aimed at enhancing levels of political and civic participation should be mindful that different forms of intervention may be required to enhance different types of participation.

23. We also found that forms and levels of participation, and influences on participation, can vary according to young people's age, gender and ethnic status.

- Educationalists who are developing interventions aimed at enhancing levels of political and civic participation should be mindful that different forms of intervention may be required for younger vs. older individuals, women vs. men, and minority vs. majority individuals.

24. Overall, however, our research revealed that, irrespective of the specific form of participation and irrespective of people's age, gender and ethnic status, the most consistent psychological predictors of political and civic participation are political interest and internal efficacy (i.e., the subjective belief that, as an individual, one is able to understand and to participate in politics effectively).

- Educationalists who are developing interventions aimed at enhancing levels of political and civic participation should focus on amplifying the political interest and internal efficacy of young people in particular. Thus, educational programmes in civic/citizenship education should be aimed primarily at:
 - enabling young people to acquire an interest in political and civic affairs
 - fostering their knowledge and understanding of political and civic matters
 - supporting the development of the skills which they require to participate effectively in the political and civic life of their community and country

Issues relating to gender and minority/migrant status

25. Our research also uncovered some further specific issues concerning the gender gap and minority/migrant individuals which educational institutions need to address.

26. We found that many youth are not aware of the gender gap in many aspects of the civic and political domains.

- To promote a more gender-sensitive culture, schools should provide training and education on gender issues in the civic and political domains.

27. We also found evidence that schools sometimes deal with minority issues in a tokenistic and simplistic manner, which is often resented by minority individuals themselves.

- Schools need to encourage young people from ethnic minority and migrant groups to take part in projects promoting participation and citizenship in an inclusive and non-tokenistic way. Following an inclusive approach to civic engagement and political participation, schools should avoid 'singling out' minority youth for special treatment.
- It is especially important for schools to ensure equal opportunities for minorities and migrants within the education system, and to take active steps to prevent the exclusion of minorities (such as the Roma communities in Europe).

28. There was also evidence in our study that teachers do not always understand the complexities of the subjective identities of minority and migrant youth.

- Schools should recognise the fact that minority and migrant youth may have a fluid sense of their own identities which combines the culture of their parents' homeland, the culture of the country in which they are living, and other cultures specific to youth.

❖ **Recommendations for civil society actors, including youth workers, youth and leisure centres, youth and education NGOs, and leaders of ethnic minority communities**

29. Youth workers, youth and leisure centres, youth and education NGOs, and leaders of ethnic minority communities often play an important role in relationship to youth, including hard-to-reach and disengaged youth. Their role in shaping youth engagement emerged clearly from our research, and the activities which they provide for youth need to be encouraged.

30. However, our research also found that these actors sometimes need to provide youth with better education about political issues and about how to become involved in politics and other voluntary spheres of social and civic life. There are some specific ways in which the activities of civil society organizations and actors could be channeled more effectively towards enhancing youth participation.

- Youth workers, youth and leisure centres, and youth and education NGOs should strengthen activities requiring shared decision-making between youth and adults in different community contexts, for instance in leisure, sports and volunteering activities. In particular, they should involve young people in decisions concerning the orientation of activities, their organisation, and the procedures which will be followed in their pursuit.
- Youth and leisure centres, and youth and education NGOs, working in collaboration with local government departments, should support schools in providing a greater range of opportunities for young people to obtain practical experience of active civic and political participation, and should facilitate positive high quality participation experiences embedded in the local community in particular.
- Youth workers, youth and leisure centres, and youth and education NGOs should also disseminate information about programmes designed to promote volunteering in civic issues and participation in campaigns on environmental, humanitarian or human rights issues. This should include disseminating information about volunteering opportunities across national boundaries, through programmes such as the European Voluntary Service.
- Youth and leisure centres, and youth and education NGOs, should also improve social inclusion processes and guarantee equal opportunities for women, minorities and migrants in order to increase civic engagement and political participation among these subgroups.
- Youth workers, youth and leisure centres, and youth and education NGOs should disseminate information about local and national youth parliaments and their role.
- Stronger links should be established between regional or local youth agencies and the European Youth Forum, to enable the youth for whom they provide services to benefit from the activities of the EYF and to give them greater voice, influence and opportunities for participation.

31. Our research also shows the importance of organizational membership for participation. We found that greater involvement in organizations is associated with more interest and attentiveness towards civic and political issues, and with higher levels of civic and political participation by young people.

- Civil society organizations should make greater efforts to attract young people, particularly disengaged youth who are not members of any organizations. Such youth should be offered a wide range of organizational opportunities for participation and the opportunity to obtain high quality participation experiences within organizations.
- Women’s organizations should also make greater efforts to reach out to girls and young women, and to offer them a wide range of organizational opportunities for participation and the opportunity to obtain high quality participation experiences.

Issues relating to ethnic minorities and migrants

32. We found that ethnic minority and migrant youth are often especially engaged with issues concerning or affecting their own ethnic community. This interest can be built upon to provide these youth with high quality participation experiences, to develop their participatory skills, and to raise their awareness about participation and citizenship through volunteering.

- Ethnic community leaders and youth agencies and NGOs should encourage young people from ethnic minority and migrant groups to take part as volunteers in projects involving their own ethnic community. Such projects might, for example, focus on heritage and cultural issues, promote the role of their own community in a multicultural environment, challenge ethnic stereotypes, or promote inclusion.

33. We also found that minority and migrant youth often have a high level of interest in their country of origin or the country of origin of their parents, even when these youth are themselves citizens of the country in which they are living.

- Ethnic community leaders and youth agencies and NGOs should encourage young people to become actively involved in environmental, humanitarian, human rights or governance issues in their families’ countries of origin.

❖ Conclusion

Harmonious living within culturally diverse democratic societies requires citizens to participate actively in the life of the societies to which they belong while simultaneously respecting the fundamental principles of democratic processes, human rights and the rule of law. There are many steps which can be taken by a wide range of political and social actors to enhance, encourage and support young people in developing appropriate patterns of civic and political participation. It is hoped that the current set of evidence-based policy recommendations will assist political and social actors to contribute towards this goal.

FP7 Project Identity

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