

**Conclusions, scientific findings, abstract**

**Masterthesis – “Learning democracy – Participation of juveniles in Dornbirn”**

**Elmar Luger/Christian Weiskopf, October 2012**

**”Democrats won’t fall from sky”**

**(Prof. Dr. Herbert Dachs, University of Salzburg)**

**Handout**

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**NOTE: In this abstract the term “participation” is used as a synonym for “involvement” and “contribution”.**

**1 Annotation**

More than 850 adolescents (out of a maximum of 1.350) of school level eight and nine (age 13 to 16) from all schools in Dornbirn, Vorarlberg, Austria were asked about their sympathy with democracy, their will of changes, working in clubs and their possibilities in participation at school and hometown in June 2012. Fifty per cent of the juveniles come from the city Dornbirn, fifty per cent live in the region “Rhine-valley” in Austria (near the Lake of Constance). The city of Dornbirn has 48.000 inhabitants, the region “Rhine-valley” 237.000

inhabitants and Vorarlberg has a population of 372.600. Vorarlberg is the most western province of Austria, located in the triangle of Switzerland, Lichtenstein and Germany.

20% of the juveniles declared having a foreign mother-language. 55% of the adolescents were male, 45% female. The sample shows the population of Vorarlberg and Dornbirn in all questions asked.

Excellent cooperation between school – hometown – adolescents: Class representatives were questioned and briefed in a workshop. When being back at school they had to give questionnaires to their classmates. The questionnaires had to be filled in without influence of teachers or help except through the class representatives.

## **2 Conclusion – Participation at hometown**

### **2.1 Potential and will for changes**

In Dornbirn the participation of juveniles is quite good although efforts should be stepped up. We can see high potential by thinking about a rate of 39% of the adolescents having a strong will for changes. Counting up with the adolescents having marked „medium will of change“ we can see, that 68% of the questioned want to have influence on changes. Every second of the 13 year old have the will to change something. That’s why teenagers should be involved in participation early on. Positive experiences are important!

### **2.2 Satisfaction with possibilities of participation**

Adolescents are satisfied with the possibilities of participation in their hometown. 35% announced they were highly satisfied. Adding those having said they were medium satisfied we get a number of 64%. Nonetheless we have to mention that 36% of the adolescents are definitely unsatisfied. It seems clear that, if young people have a negative attitude to democracy and democratic habits, it is difficult to reach them. We have, however, to make an effort on this to minimize. Adolescents living in Dornbirn are as satisfied as the rest of the questioned living in other cities and villages of the „Rhine-valley“.

We can see that the efforts of the administration of Dornbirn and the club “JugendDornbirn” through various activities have a positive influence on the base setting. 79% of the class representatives say they are very well trained for their job in class and they know about their rights and duties. Females are more active.

### 2.3 Quantity of participation

The quantity of participation has an important influence on the attitude towards participation and democracy. Without quantity there is no chance to get quality due to positive experiences with participation and satisfaction. Possibilities of participation at school is the basis for participation in the hometown and home-country.

Contrary to the “Bertelsmann-Studie – Participation of children and adolescents in Germany” we can see a high percentage of juveniles (55%!) thinking that the quantity of possibilities of participation in their hometown and at school is good or very good. 30% of the adolescents say that they often or very often get the possibility of participation in their hometown whereas only 24% of the questioned juveniles think so about school. So we have to think about how to widen up possibilities of participation at school.

Females are more involved with participation at school than males, but at hometown it is vice versa. At this point we have to think about how to organize attractive projects dealing with juvenile participation for females.

It is a fact that pupils of the “Polytechnische Schule” (a pre-vocational school for students at the age of 14 and 15) think that the quantity of participation in their hometown is very good. We can see a high significance at this point. It would be interesting finding out, whether these pupils are involved actively in clubs or not.

Another significance can be seen in Dornbirn. Contrary to the adolescences living in other towns or villages of the „Rhine-valley“, 59% sometimes / often / very often participate. Nonetheless we have to think about those juveniles not feeling any quantity or quality of participation in their hometown.

### 2.4 Importance of clubs

52% of the adolescents are involved in clubs. This seems to be a good basis for participation in general. Promotion of clubs is important. There are various clubs having excellent juvenile labour such as sport clubs, JugendDornbirn, aha, Dornbirner Jugendwerkstätten and so on. We are pleased about the fact that 16% of the adolescents having a foreign mother-language are active participants of clubs. It would be interesting to know, which clubs they are part of and what are the influences of clubs of migrants and open-youth-labour.

## 2.5 Interest in elections

In autumn 2013 we will have parliamentary elections in Austria, in 2014 Austrian regional elections in Vorarlberg and in spring 2015 council elections in all cities and villages of Vorarlberg combined with election of the mayor. Most of the questioned adolescents having Austrian citizenship or citizenship of a country of the European Union have the right to take part in all elections. After the year 2013 all of them will have the right to vote!

74% of the juveniles will take part in elections in average. There is no difference between females and males, adolescents whether living in Dornbirn or not, or those having a foreign mother-language or not. We can see, however, a significance when we have a look on pupils attending the "Polytechnische Schule" (pre-vocational school): Only 6 out of ten will take part in elections and vote.

## **3 Conclusions – Participation at school**

We can find quite a lot of pseudo-participation at school...

- a) Pupils often are not included in decisions or in discussions about decisions. In simple possibilities to participate, pupils only get few rights to participate (e.g. rules during lessons, choice of excursions, choice of topics in lessons). Marks are rarely discussed. The mentioned topics, however, would fit to include students – even the topic about marks would be interesting to be discussed as this topic is an old fashioned „power of teachers“.
- b) Support of the primary social environment (family, parents, friends) is good. Participation at school must be widened: pupils only feel averagely supported by class teachers, head boys and girls and dedicated teachers. They feel bad supported by liaison teachers, school psychologists and social workers. The support through headmasters is in great need of improvement.
- c) The perception of democracy is very good. In future elections, however, we can find a significance concerning pupils of the "Polytechnische Schule" (pre-vocational school): 4 out of 10 won't take part in future elections.
- d) Females and pupils with a foreign mother-language are more satisfied with possibilities of participation than the other groups.

- e) It is important to expand the quantity of participation at school. Due to this point we have to increase the number of participation. Students of the “Polytechnische Schule” are statistically more likely to receive options of participation.
- f) Pupils believe it is worth to help form school. The data is good – especially with females and students of the “Polytechnische Schule”.
- g) Pupils rate the contribution of the subject “Political education” for their perception of democracy very well. Pupils of the “Polytechnische Schule” rate this point extremely high.
- h) Suggestions by pupils are being rated as “considered quite to very often” at Secondary Modern Schools and Special Needs School.
- i) It is remarkable that students of Academic High Schools don’t feel well informed about their rights at school. Merely 25% of these students feel well informed whereas at other schools the rate is 33%.

#### **4 Adolescents with foreign mother-language**

Some results for adolescents with foreign mother-language are remarkable. We can see significance at the following items:

- Higher satisfaction with possibilities of participation in their hometown
- Strong involvement in participation-projects
- High satisfaction in participation appropriate for young people
- Hometowns are interested in their wishes and desires
- Suggestions are taken seriously
- Pupil’s representation is prepared well for their work at schools
- Well satisfied with possibilities at school

There is no significant difference concerning “understanding of democracy as found in Austria” and “turnout at elections”. An average of 71% of students with foreign mother-language will take part in future elections.

Are these students “more integrated” than often felt? How important are clubs and open youth work for this circumstance? Which differences are there between females and males? Has the survey been understood correctly? Which clubs are they part of? It would be interesting to examine these questions in special focus groups...

## 5 Recommendations

- a) There is a good basis for participation in Dornbirn. This basis must be used to excoitate framework conditions and to expand the contact between youth-work, school and networks. There are a lot of good aspects which have to be maintained – especially the support of the pupil-representation.
- b) Happiness is a main factor for juveniles to work on projects dealing with political participation. Happiness doesn't only affect the result but also the process. Therefore we recommend to clarify expectations and conditions with the juveniles.
- c) 13-year-olds show a higher motivation for changes. We have to think about projects, that involve younger students at this age. We also recommend to involve females and juveniles with a non-German-mother-language.
- d) The integration of juveniles with a non-German-mother-language in Dornbirn is well balanced.
- e) In the next few years there are a lot of elections (Parliamentary elections, Council elections, EU- Parliamentary elections, Council elections including the Mayor). Therefore we have to animate juveniles to go to the polls.
- f) Transparency of possibilities if participation is an important task for the future.
- g) Clubs and associations have to be (financially) encouraged as in the past. They have an important function for integration.
- h) The "Bertelsmann-Studie" in Germany refers to the importance of participation at school. Experiences are transferred to the city or village juveniles live in. It is mandatory to observe the laws and to keep room for the juveniles to participate.

## 6 Contacts

Elmar Luger  
Jugendabteilung Stadt Dornbirn  
Rathausplatz 2  
A-6850 Dornbirn, Austria  
[elmar.luger@dornbirn.at](mailto:elmar.luger@dornbirn.at)  
<http://www.dornbirn.at/jugend>

Christian Weiskopf  
  
Niederbahn 32a  
A-6850 Dornbirn, Austria  
[christianweiskopf@tele2.at](mailto:christianweiskopf@tele2.at)

further information: <http://www.dornbirn.at/demokratielernen>