Constructing AcTive CitizensHip with European Youth: Policies, Practices, Challenges and Solutions

Berichterstattung

Projektinformationen

CATCH-EyoU

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Dieses Projekt findet Erwähnung in...

RESULTS PACK
Understanding turbulent political times through innovative EU-funded research

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Periodic Reporting for period 1 - CATCH-EyoU
The CATCH-EyoU project aims to identify ways and means by which we can help cultivate a new generation of young European citizens, in a complex historical period, characterized by unprecedented challenges to the EU political project (e.g. UK vote to exit from the EU in June 2016). It is a context in which a strong and cohesive EU would be urgently needed in order to address emerging social and political issues that member states are struggling to address on their own (e.g. refugee crisis, economic crisis, youth unemployment, increasing inequalities, radicalization).

The current generation of European youth was born in the EU; however, the extent to which the EU is a real and concrete entity in their everyday life experience and awareness is still not clear. What does being member of the EU mean to youth? How do young people engage as active citizens in EU issues?

Clarifying the meanings and significance of active EU citizenship, beyond the “normative” existing conceptualizations that inform policy and educational efforts, seems necessary in order to build a different, more inclusive and equitable EU, towards the variety of its different citizens, including those ones who currently resist or oppose it.

Through a consortium of nine partners from eight European countries, (Coordinator University of Bologna, Italy), representing different disciplines (Psychology, Political Science, Sociology, Media and Communications, Education, History) the CATCH-EyoU project addresses the nature and processes of construction of active citizenship among European youth, including an analysis of the multifaceted factors influencing young people perspectives toward the EU, their sense of EU identity and membership and the different forms of youth active engagement in European politics at various governance levels. It aims to offer policy makers, professionals and young people themselves new “conceptual lenses” and instruments to better understand the factors that decide how the EU can be brought closer to its young citizens. These aims are addressed through a multi-methodological approach, and including young people as partners, in order to ensure that youth’s own perspectives and concerns are fully incorporated.

Arbeit, die ab Beginn des Projekts bis zum Ende des durch den Bericht erfassten Berichtszeitraums geleistet wurde, und die wichtigsten bis dahin erzielten Ergebnisse

The first year focused on two overarching activities: performing a broad integrative review of the multidisciplinary literature on active citizenship, and examining empirically three key contexts that are assumed to influence the construction of youth active citizenship in the EU. The analysis of the literature indicated that we may need to open the room to different ways by which young people can be (and become) active citizens in the EU. Attempts to draw an integrated model need to consider both normative and critical or dissenting forms of citizenship as European youth
active citizenship exists at the nexus of these. Enabling of youth participation through institutionalised representation: i.e. through mechanisms such as voting, structured dialogue, and youth councils, may be necessary to ensure formal representation of EU youth in Europe, but many young people’s evident lack of trust in institutional political structures, which they do not perceive as representing their interests, suggests that such representation alone is insufficient for ensuring a committed critical active citizenship capable of reinvigorating democratic structures and processes. A tentative theoretical model has been developed, including factors located at different levels of context, to inform subsequent studies.

The analysis of the policy context through documents and interviews indicated the presence of a multifaceted representation of the EU among policy makers, including positive and critical strains. The EU is perceived as distant and its policy appears too abstract and vague for practical use. The EU matters by setting norms and encouragement, and by providing financial support which stimulates national development to put youth issues on the national agenda. Policy makers agree that the Erasmus+ project and the encouraged ability to move across Europe are a privilege of contemporary young Europeans, but feel that such opportunities are not distributed evenly, and even blame the EU to force youth to move, thus draining the member states of competence. The structured dialogue is an effective method, but needs to be improved to include youth with lower socioeconomic resources.

Concerning the media context, the European Union and its institutions emerge as a dominating presence throughout the sample. This result, together with the findings regarding the national perspective adopted by the majority of the news media analyzed, reveals the extent to which the European Union is rarely identified with its political representatives and appears in the media discourse as a somewhat abstract entity. Young people are often represented as:

(a) A vulnerable collective actor: the main victim of the aftermath of economic crisis, prone to having problems with unemployment, housing, lifestyle, crime, and under the influence of extreme populism.
(b) The main beneficiaries of the most successful EU programmes, such as Erasmus+ and Youth Guarantee. Moreover, students-as-tourists are constructed as beneficial to national economies.
(c) Non-active and politically apathetic, except for isolated cases. The concept of active citizenship in relation to youth is practically absent from the whole corpus.

Finding of the analysis of school textbooks indicate that the EU is mostly represented in an historical perspective (i.e. construction of the EU). Active citizenship is a topic, but mostly it is not related to young people. Differences emerged across textbooks: English-as-a-second-language (EFL) textbooks denote an absence of contents regarding the EU and sense of belonging and identity issues. In History and Social Sciences textbooks the topics of active citizenship and intercultural awareness are predominant, but they also contain references to the construction and, especially, to the institutions of the EU, together with mentions to EU identity. Citizenship Education textbooks focus even more on the topics of active citizenship and intercultural awareness.

Fortschritte, die über den aktuellen Stand der Technik hinausgehen und voraussichtliche potenzielle Auswirkungen (einschließlich der bis dato erzielten sozioökonomischen Auswirkungen und weiter gefassten gesellschaftlichen Auswirkungen des Projekts)

The research conducted in the first year significantly contributes to advancing the state of the art in the specific issues examined. Moreover, as will become clear in the next years, significant innovations will come from the efforts of integration of the findings of the different studies.
The project so far produced an extensive multi-disciplinary literature review on the topic of (youth) active citizenship. This review represents a major achievement in terms of summarizing existing knowledge on the issue. The disciplinary literature reviews were interrogated from two different epistemological perspectives, one more attentive to the normative dimension of active citizenship, the other more reflective and critical, illuminating the perspectives and stances of the excluded youth. One outcome of this work, is the proposal of a provisional original typology of youth active citizens, which describes youth engagement through a series of positionings.

Concerning influencing contexts (policy context, media context, school context) each of the three studies provides significant contributions to advance the state of the art, both in terms on illuminating aspects insufficiently examined and in terms of methodology.
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