DOCUMENTS

3

Reingard Spannring. University of Innsbruck (Austria).

"We vote and then we suffer." Survey results in the light of young people's views on participation (1)

This article presents and discusses qualitative and quantitative findings of the EU-funded comparative study "EUYOUPART: Political Participation of Young People in Europe - Development of Indicators for Comparative Research in the European Union" which was carried out between 2002 and 2005. It sets out to interpret the survey data on the basis of the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions of the 15 to 25 year old respondents in Austria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Slovakia and the UK. The institution-oriented perspective of a considerable part of mainstream participation research is thus challenged by introducing the young people's own perceptions of politics and participation. The results demonstrate that the reasons for non-participation are very complex and cannot simply be attributed to political alienation. Rather, they mirror the conditions of the political in late modernity which are characterised by an economisation of politics, dissolution of the traditional boundaries of politics with respect to territory, issues, targets and methods, as well as a deconstruction of traditional ideologies and de-politicisation of the public.

Introduction

Young people generally have a negative image in our society. Often, they are seen as the source of troubles or the carriers of problems or deficits. In particular, young people are seen as lazy, apathetic and egocentric. In the context of democratic participation they are charged with a lack of social and political commitment. A number of authors have stressed the fact that young people are fed up with politics, that they find politics irrelevant and boring and have little knowledge of political institutions and processes. In participation research, the perceived decline in political support and political participation during the past decades has to a large extent been attributed to generational change (e.g. Putnam, 2000) which implies the replacement of old values and behaviours by new ones as generations succeed each other. Policy documents echo the concern that this development may endanger the future of democracy and programmes have been started to improve citizenship education and foster young people's involvement in communities. (2)

However, research evidence and interpretations are controversial. The results of empirical studies are obviously strongly influenced by the definition of political participation. Political participation is commonly categorised into representative-democratic (voting, membership in

(1) This chapter is a summary of two chapters of the book "Youth and Politics in Europe" , edited by Spannring, R.; Ogris, G.; Gaiser, W. (2008) Opladen: Barbara Budrich

(2) For example the Council of Europe (http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_co-operation/youth/2._Priorities/participation.asp#TopOfPage) and the European Commission (http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policies/active_en.html) [accessed 15th Oct 2007]

political organisations) and direct-democratic forms (citizens initiatives, petitions etc.). They may further be differentiated according to their degree of institutionalisation, their legal status and their public recognition (Schultze, 1998). The latter criterion is expressed in the notions of conventional and unconventional participation or old and new politics. The past decades have seen considerable changes with respect to political behaviour in Western democracies. Most notably, traditional forms of political participation have declined, while unconventional, elite-challenging forms have gained ground. While some authors tend to support a general decline thesis (e.g. Norris, 1999; Pharr/Putnam, 2000), others (e.g. Stolle/Hooghe, 2005) have criticised the exclusive focus on traditional forms of participation of these accounts which conceals much of the new methods of participation, styles of political expression, new political issues and political targets. Especially in youth research attention has been drawn to the numerous forms of participation of young people (Roker/Player/Coleman, 1999). They are involved in single issues such as animal protection (Wilkinson, 1996), activities on the local level (Riepl/Wintersberger, 1999), in spontaneous direct actions, voluntary work (Hackett, 1997) and new forms of political protest such as "street-party-protest" (Brünzel, 2000) which interweave politics and culture. Increasingly, the analytical and empirical separation of the political and the social sphere is given up in order to capture a more encompassing picture of participation. Participation then means the capability to commonly create and shape the social environment. Obviously, this definition –while usefully allowing for the inclusion of many marginal, emerging or subversive forms of participation in qualitative studies- poses a problem for survey research in that it extends and blurs the boundaries of political participation so that an analytical demarcation becomes virtually impossible and risks resulting in empirical data with no meaningful statistical distribution.

Concepts and evaluations of political participation are dependent on different understandings of democracy and explanatory models for attitudes and behaviour. The empirical understanding of democracy is based on representativity and democratic elite rule: it is not the rule of the people but the rule of politicians with the consent of the people. Accordingly, voting is the crucial form of citizens' participation and serves to install a functioning government. Political participation is restricted to legal activities of citizens which "are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (Verba/Nie/Kim, 1978:46). The empirical approach sees the citizens more as spectators and consumers of politics and fears damage to the functioning and stability of the system through too much participation by the masses. The normative approach to democracy, by contrast, considers participation as an aim and a value in itself. It is not so much the functioning of the system and its institutions that is in the foreground but decision-making processes which involve the people so that their needs and interests are the focus of the decisions. Therefore a strengthening of direct forms of democracy is desirable. Active participation involves discussions, decision-making and common action (Barber, 1984). Moreover, the effects of political participation go beyond the political sphere by increasing citizens' self-confidence, social and political skills as well as their social and political integration (Schultze, 1995; quoted in Hoecker, 2006). In this approach, the dangers for democracy are spotted in a

hiving-off of elected politicians and –as a consequence– an increase in political disaffection (ibid.).

Differences are also found with respect to models explaining political participation. Form and extent of political participation is influenced by a wide range of factors located in the tension field between structure and agency. The socio-economic standard model (Verba/Nie, 1972) maintains that on the individual level education, occupational status and income are resources that foster conventional political participation. The unequal distribution of these resources in society implies a marginalisation of individuals with a low socio-economic status in the political processes. Similarly, it has been argued that subjective attitudes towards politics reflect the feeling of political competence and internal efficacy and determine the perception of individual action space, which is a precondition for participation. Internal efficacy largely depends on knowledge and information which is more difficult to access by individuals with a low socio-economic status.

Participation is further framed by institutional structures and the opportunities for participation inherent in the political system. Among them are situative factors, such as events which give rise to public concern and action. The oil spill at the Spanish coast in November 2002 and the subsequent "impassioned response from the public at large" (3) are one example. Institutionalised opportunity structures as, for example, youth organisations, youth parliaments and youth councils, further foster or limit participation depending on their accessibility and quality (Riepl/Wintersberger, 1999). The lack of responsiveness of the political system to the needs and articulated interests of citizens leads to a deficit in external efficacy which is associated with political disaffection (Almond/Verba, 1963; Montero/Gunther/Torcal, 1997).

Longer term perspectives on participation bring into view the influence of changing economic, social and political conditions and consequently changing attitudes and expectations towards political institutions. Inglehart (1977, 1997) argues that the sustained experience of economic growth and relative peace in Europe after World War II as well as rising educational levels have led to the new forms of political participation via the development of postmaterialist values and attitudes. The postwar period, in which basic material needs were generally met, allowed for a stronger focus on issues like self-realisation, quality of life, lifestyle choice and participation that were carried into the political sphere. Postmaterialists are critical of the hierarchic and structured nature of contemporary representative democracy, are more willing to articulate their feelings through protests and other forms of direct action and favour participatory political structures, collective decision-making and consensus-building processes. Moreover, they express more confidence in institutions that stress participation and the representation of public interests. The source of legitimacy is inclusion and participation rather than hierarchic authority (Dalton, 2004). The value change expanded the boundaries of politics by introducing new issues such as women's liberation and environmental protection and by broadening the range of political instruments used by citizens.

Processes of globalisation and de-traditionalisation have further changed the context within which politics takes place. Globalisation destructs traditional structures and reconstructs new ones with the effect that traditions are no

(3)
World Wild Life Fund:
http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/crisis/spain_oil_spill/index.cfm
(accessed 24 September 2007)

longer accepted as legitimate per se, but have to be explained, disputed and justified. There is no longer a pregiven alignment with interest groups or 'natural' trust in political institutions. While the legitimacy of the political institutions used to be partly produced by tradition, these institutions are now open to public scrutiny and criticism (Giddens, 2004: 94). At the same time risk and uncertainties such as global warming, pollution of the environment, overpopulation, food-related diseases and problems of the global economy are increasingly produced that do not respond to traditional problem-solving means and mechanisms of single nation-states (ibid: 78f). As a result, conventional national politics tends to cover only some of the citizens' concerns and anxieties, while it seems helpless in the face of many other global issues. Global movements and local activities, loosely structured networks and individualistic behaviour can be seen as an answer to this shortcoming of national political bodies by opening up 'spaces for public dialogues' and putting pressure on conventional politics as well as social and economic practices (ibid: 111).

The economic rationalisation and globalisation processes manoeuvre the nation-state into a dilemma between its industrial location policy and its fiscal crisis. This dilemma impinges on the ability of the welfare state to use resources for constructing and shaping society, in particular for ensuring the integration of all citizens, and leads to a steering and legitimisation crisis (Habermas, 1973). The seemingly unescapable crises of the economy, which the welfare state can no longer cushion, contribute to a global de-politicisation where political influence on social conditions seems no longer possible (Felgitsch, 2006).

Most of the large-scale comparative studies tackle the question of political participation through the eyes of political institutions and the needs of the democratic system and set it in the framework of the individualisation thesis. By contrast, this chapter will interpret the results of a quantitative study on the basis of the meaning of politics and participation revealed by the young people's own discourses and images.

The data presented in the following were generated by the research project "EUYOUPART: Political participation of Young People in Europe – Development of indicators for Comparative Research in the European Union" which was carried out between 2003 and 2005 and funded under the 5th framework programme of the European Commission. (4) In the course of the research project a total of 41 qualitative, individual interviews with politically active young people and 225 non-active young people in 38 focus groups were carried out in eight European countries (Austria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Slovakia and the UK) as well as a comparative survey with a total of 8030 young people aged 18 to 25.

Although the survey data do generally show low participation rates, the qualitative findings do not support the common wisdom that young people are simply too egocentric and disinterested. Rather, they show how their participation patterns mirror the complex and difficult conditions of contemporary politics.

Young people's picture of and relationship with politics

Before we turn to the young people's participation and their views on it we will take a general look at their relationship with politics. This relationship

(4) www.sora.at/euyoupart; (accessed 24 September 2007)

can roughly be characterised by three dimensions: external efficacy, internal efficacy and political culture. The first category, external efficacy, refers to convictions about the responsiveness of political authorities and institutions to citizens' needs (Almond/Verba, 1963; Gabriel, 1995; Montero/Gunther/ Torcal, 1997). Second, internal efficacy includes the subjective perception of the individual that it does not know enough about the matter and that it cannot access and process the right information. Internal efficacy is also influenced by the lack of positive experiences with participation which would convey the feeling of empowerment, the competence to actually participate in politics. Thirdly, comments on the lack of political culture reveal dissatisfaction with the efficiency of the political system.

Only a few politically engaged young citizens comment on concrete government activities, while most young people provide a vague evaluation of the system on the basis of their perception of political processes which is disseminated by media. The most frequently articulated criticism of the interviewees concerns the lack of external efficacy. The young people bemoan the distance between the politicians and the electorate. Politicians do not seem to know or care to know the real needs of the citizens. Issues arise and decisions are taken within a power structure that excludes the man in the street. Those who gain from this power structure are not only the politicians themselves but party clientele and lobbies in the economy. In addition, young people perceive a particular disadvantage in that the issues addressed by the (adult) politicians have nothing to do with the young people's lives, problems and ideals: "*They are a long way from our needs*".

Another dimension of external efficacy is the evaluation of the impact the individual is able to make on political processes. For all forms of participation discussed below, the efficiency is rated very low. Even voting as a relatively efficient form (5) in the eyes of the young people is regarded with scepticism: "*And in the end all look stupid, because it turned out very different from what they [the politicians, R. Sp.] had promised*". This feeling is not only harboured by non-active young people but shared by the politically active young people who are considerably disillusioned in this respect.

The feeling of distance and distrust is exacerbated by a lack of internal efficacy. Many young interviewees express their lack of understanding and unfamiliarity with respect to political institutions and processes. Some put their deficit down to the inadequate content and method of citizenship education at school or the lack of opportunities for co-determination at school. In the context of political information, many young people criticise the media for being rather superficial in their reports and not objective. There is doubt about the reliability of media information and suspicion that the media are political players with their own interests (Muxel/Riou, 2004). On the one hand, lack of information is a consequence of a lack of media competence and political knowledge which is necessary to access, process, understand and judge political news. Especially those young people who have a low educational level and a poor socio-cultural background are disadvantaged with respect to political information. Thus, part of this problem can certainly be mitigated through improved youth information, political education and real participation possibilities for young people. On the other hand, part of the problem is caused by politicians themselves who

(5)
The survey data show that voting in elections has the highest effectivity rates of all forms of participation: they range between 65% in Germany and 37% in Estonia (Spannring/Ogris/Gaiser, 2008)

give vague or partial answers which fit their competition strategies rather than supplying the voters with comprehensive information on their political aims and methods.

The young people's criticism of the prevailing political culture is largely based on the perception of a lack of efficiency in solving problems. Decision-making processes are characterised by competition, power games and quarrelling rather than by cooperation and constructive problem solving. The potentially productive element in political conflicts cannot be recognised and disappears behind the desire for peaceful, harmonious political processes. One of the reasons for this conflict-avoidance might lie in the visibility of political argy-bargy and –by contrast– the lack of clear political positions on relevant issues. This is in fact touched upon by those young people who criticise the lack of socio-political ideals and visions in politics or their sacrifice for power. One young Austrian Green activist, for example, referred to the German Green Party's decision to support the war in Afghanistan which was totally against their initial position and offended their grassroots level including the young interviewee himself. Authenticity and faithfulness to one's principles is of uppermost importance for the young citizens and the most eminent criterion for evaluating politicians. In real politics the young people's expectation of idealism and reliability is constantly frustrated. As a consequence, the trustworthiness of politicians is generally rated very low.

An issue which runs through almost all forms of political participation like a red thread is the young people's "generalised doubt". It consists in the refusal to take sides for a political idea or ideology without a critical distance. Young people recognise the fact that people and ideas cannot be categorised in "good" and "bad" and the world cannot be seen as black or white (Paakkunainen, 2004). Political arguments and ideas always call for counter-arguments or counter-views. Ideologies and political truths are discredited and suspected to attempt the legitimisation of dominance, intolerance and violence. This generalised doubt often causes an inability to take or support any political decision, for even if the counter-argument is not known to the individual there is an expectation that there is a "yes, but…". Caught in this negative relativism the possibility of a positive reconstruction of politics that is not based on universal truth but on the participation of individuals in a common process of social and political construction (Felgitsch, 2006) is not at disposition.

Young people's political participation

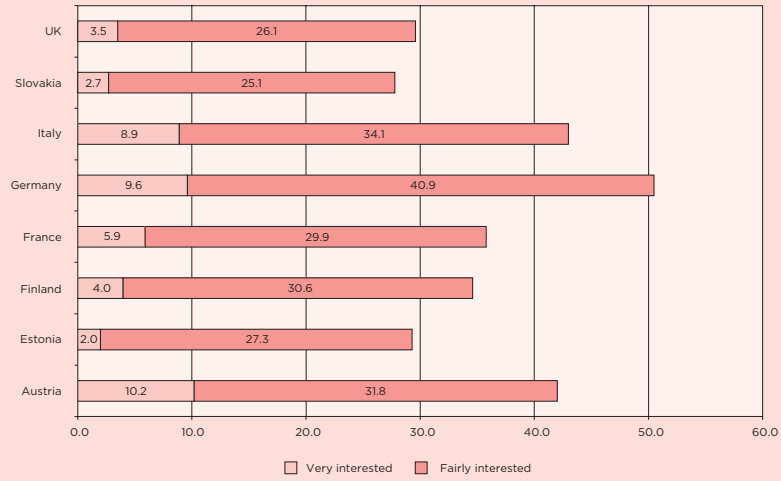
In this section the results of the EUYOUPART survey shall be presented and interpreted in the light of the young people's accounts of participation. The forms of participation that are dealt with are those commonly used in participation research: political engagement, voting, participation in traditional political organisations and in new social movements, political communication and protest as well as political consumerism.

Political engagement

Political engagement is commonly measured by "interest in politics", "following politics in the media" and "discussing politics" with friends and

family. The highest levels of interest in politics (very interested and fairly interested) are found in Germany (50.5%), Italy (43%) and Austria (42%); the lowest levels in the UK (29.6%), Estonia (29.3%) and Slovakia (27.8%) (see figure 1).

Figure 1: **Interest in politics by country in percent**



Source: euyoupart 2004

Following politics in the media daily or nearly daily is widespread in Germany (66, 3%) and Italy (64,9%). Estonia also shows a relatively high percentage of media consumption (55,5%). Young people in the UK are the least interested in political news (24,8%).

The highest rates of discussing politics are again found in Italy, followed by Germany and Austria. 60% of the young Italians discuss politics with their fathers at least sometimes, 43% with their mothers. Friends (62%) and colleagues (55%) are also frequent partners in political discussions. In Germany and Austria, the most important partners are friends, colleagues as well as teachers. In Estonia, teachers play a prominent role as discussants: They are even more important than friends and colleagues.

The complexity of young people's political engagement cannot be grasped by simple statistical distributions and correlation coefficients for age, gender, education or values. Indeed, the clarity with which the figures reflect the actual condition of the political system is usually underestimated and shall therefore be highlighted in the following.

Among the politically non-active focus group discussants' interest in politics is rather low. For most it is something abstract and unfamiliar, loaded with a negative image which arouses anxieties when put forward as a topic for discussion. This points to a lack of knowledge about the political system and practice in reflecting on and talking about politics. However, interest also depends on young people's perception that politics matters. Conversely, disinterest reflects the gap the young people feel between their everyday experiences and the issues that are brought up in politics: "*I feel rather little*

of any party or government." This does not mean that young people are impervious to social and political problems.

They do recognise injustice and unfairness, but often find it difficult to express their feelings and perceptions or they fail to see them as belonging to the political sphere, connecting them with the possibility of political solutions. One young secretary, for example, complains about the fact that her lunch break at work is too short to have a proper meal so that she has to resort to unhealthy fast food. Public debate does not give her the tools to think in a more general way about labour conditions and how they might be changed. The lack of public articulation and discussion of conflicting interests makes society seems to be given rather than the product of socio-political processes. Thus, the problem remains on the individual level (cf. Evers/Nowotny, 1987; Böhnisch, 2006).

What is visible is a passionless "management politics" which predominantly deals with tax reforms, fiscal management and cuts in social programmes. The 'big issues' presented by politicians are often not perceived as such by the young people: *"... on the whole, the news of politics, which you hear, is really irrelevant for yourself personally. For example the cuts in pensions. Why do they all cry out like that? On the one hand, I can understand, but on the other hand, it is not such a big change. I don't know how much they get less, I think it's €40,- per year or so. That's not so much.*? By comparison, many young people express strong feelings towards broad issues such as civil rights, anti-racism, environmental protection and peace. They are driven by a deeply rooted ethical belief (IARD, 2004): "*A sort of ethical spur, ethical motivation – it comes from the fact, I think, that the world you have in front of yourself does not stick to the way things should go. To change a reality essentially unfair and wrong ... not equal*."

While for the less politically skilled young people the absence of a socio-political debate which could give their vague sentiments a home, a means to give them a voice, seems a decisive factor for political disinterest, some of the more politically interested and active young people stumble over the lack of efficiency. They express their helplessness and resignation over the fact that politics has such a strong impact while they themselves have no possibility to influence the decision-making process. This leads to enormous frustration and in some cases to withdrawal: *"... there'll be at least ten topics I can't accept at all, from tuition fees to genetic engineering and God knows what else, the war in Iraq, for example, but I don't think I can change anything, well, I mean there'd be enough topics but I've simply given up, yes, that's how I see it.*"

Participation within the representative democratic system

Participation in elections

Voting is generally seen as the foremost political activity of citizens in a democratic political system. It is also mentioned most frequently as the manifestation of good citizenship by the young people. However, although voting is seen as a moral duty by many young people, other factors weigh more heavily for the decision to vote. The young people articulate a number of dilemmas, which arise in the context of the

dissatisfaction and disaffection discussed above. With respect to internal efficacy a dilemma exists between the demand of being an informed voter and the lack of knowledge and information: Many young people do not feel sufficiently informed in order to participate, but without the appropriate knowledge the choices have no meaning so that the lack of information seems to disqualify the young for participation (Waechter/Riegel, 2004): "*Before I'm forced to put a cross next to any old thing, I prefer not to vote at all*."

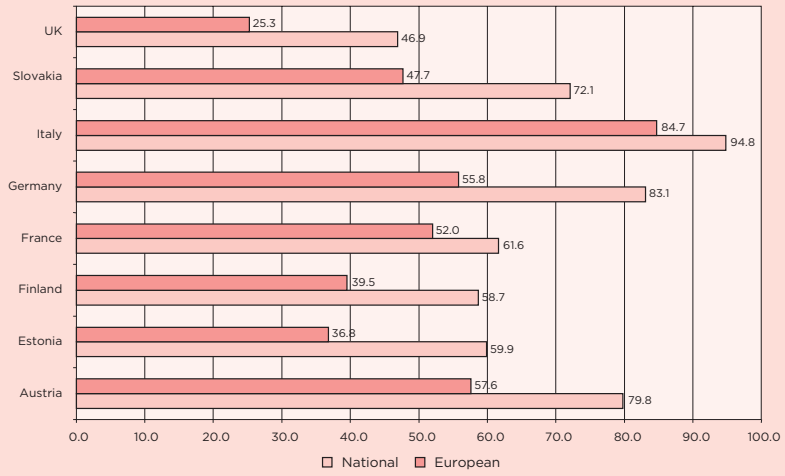
The effect of the lack of political knowledge on the young people's participation in elections which is so conspicuous in the narratives of the young citizens may be explained by a diminishing impact of other motivating factors such as civic duty, partisanship and integration in formal social structures. Howe (2006) finds empirical evidence that even those who lack familiarity with political affairs tend to vote if they have a sense of civic duty because they feel the obligation to cast a ballot. The lower this sense of civic duty the more the decision to participate in the election is made dependent on internal political efficacy.

Another dilemma is voiced by the young with respect to external efficacy. In the context of elections external efficacy refers to a lack of recognisable choices, often meaning too little polarisation between the parties, lack of appealing issues brought up by the politicians and lack of accountability of the politicians after the elections. For these reasons, voting is often seen as merely playing by the rules of the democratic game or even as an annoying chore (Sloam, 2004) rather than an opportunity to actually influence the political course. The reaction of some young people is to vote for extreme parties as a protest vote or to consciously abstain from voting: "*Abstention is a way of voting, it is understood as a vote for something else; this is to show that nobody interests us*".

Thus, casting an invalid vote and not voting out of protest are forms of political expression. Although the figures are generally very low, the two strategies seem to be taken up by the young Austrians, French and Italians more often than by their peers in other countries: 12% of the young French, 8% of the young Italians and 7% of the young Austrians have already cast an invalid vote. With respect to not voting as a form of protest the proportions are 8%, 5% and 9% respectively.

Actual participation in national general elections ranges between 95% (Italy), 83% (Germany), 80% (Austria) and 72% (Slovakia) at the high end and 47% (UK) at the low end. In every country, participation on the European level is markedly lower than on the national level. Participation in the elections for the European Parliament in 2004 is relatively high in Italy (85%), Austria (58%), Germany (56%) and France (52%) and lowest in the UK (25%) (see figure 2).

Figure 2: **Proportion of people eligible to vote who actually took part in the last general national elections and the election for the European Parliament in 2004**



Source: euyoupart 2004.

The reasons for non-participation given above are even more acute on the European level. The complexity of the political system, the lack of clarity concerning European (election) issues as well as the power structure which makes citizens' participation and real influence an illusion weaken the cognitive and motivational resources for participation: "*We elect the [national] governments and they go to the meetings of the ministers. And there is the Commission which is somehow there and decides on pretty much everything. But we have very little say in it. Apart from electing the EU Parliament every four years, which in principle has very few competences. They can talk a little bit...*" (6). The politicisation of the European Union as a precondition for identification and mobilisation is demanded not only by academics (e.g. Magnette, 2003) but also by the active young European citizens. They call for a Europeanisation of the media and political institutions such as parties and trade unions as well as the development and public discussion of "European" issues. The generation of public interest and political mobilisation thus hinges on a clear deliberation of issues based on the acknowledgement of social and political conflict: *"I do hope that if, for example, there is a massive loss of jobs, people start networking more, I mean a real European network, so that people learn to fight together for their rights and thereby develop a political consciousness, that this is their story*." (7) Of course, the bottom-up development of an active European civil society can be fostered by open and inclusive political processes in which different problem definitions, ideological approaches and strategic options are made visible and accessible for larger parts of the citizenry.

(6)
Quoted in Spannring/Wallace/Datler, 2004

(7)
Quoted in Spannring/Wallace/Datler, 2004

Party membership

Party membership is generally seen, apart from voting, as one of the most important forms of political participation, since it provides one of the major channels of integrating interests into the formal decisions-making processes.

Ideas and views that are not voiced through these formal structures are hardly heard and considered. The lack of acceptance and use of political parties and their youth sections leaves politicians at a loss over the question how to empower the young politically in a sustainable way. Alternative forms of political participation such as demonstrations, boycotts or youth cultural expressions may have some influence on political decision-making or social change, but they do not provide comparable political rights to influence and shape policy making as party membership does, since they are based on the special position of political parties within the constitutions and the structure of political authorities. Via their party membership citizens have an influence on the selection of the political elite on all levels and the content of party programmes (Wiesendahl, 2006). However, it is precisely the party structures and processes within and between parties that discourage young people from getting involved. Most of the interviewees, including politically active young people, formulate a range of arguments against joining a political party.

The main reason for not joining is that the young people have not made up their mind as to which is their favourite party or they refuse to make a definite decision. Often, they do not vote for the same party at every election, so that joining one makes even less sense: "*Well, parties, … and issues, I mean every party has more or less issues which are appealing somehow. Why should I be fixed on one?*" Young people like to remain flexible and autonomous to be able to give and withdraw support whenever they feel it necessary. Even if they feel close to one party they keep a critical distance. Political issues are not black and white, but there are always several perspectives on any one problem. This ambivalent attitude toward parties and ideologies, or 'objectivity', is based on the acknowledgement that there is not one infallible truth. Clear cut categories for enemies and "either-or" thinking are no longer credible (Paakkunainen, 2004).

Many young people refuse to support a party unless they fully agree with it. They fear that their opinion is not duly considered and gets lost in the group process of opinion formation or that they have to comply with the party discipline. In both instances they have no control over the party's activities. The result may violate their principle of loyalty with one's own values and responsibility for one's activities and opinions.

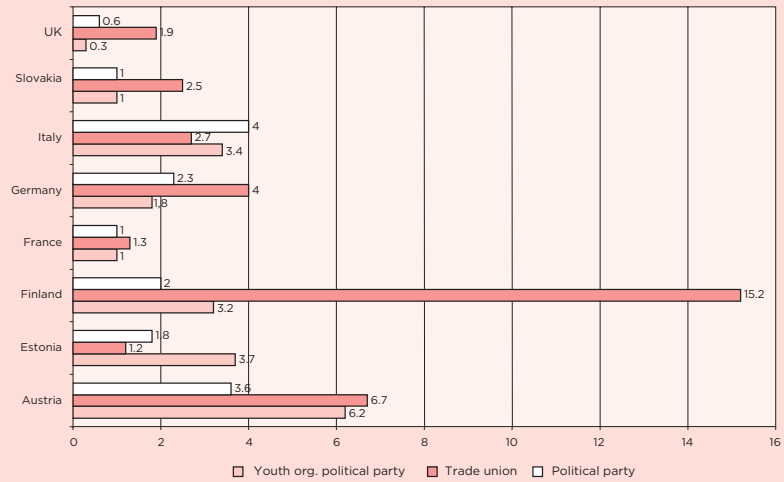
Party membership is further seen as hampering open communication with members of other parties, because political parties are more involved in strategic behaviour and power games than in solving problems. Most young people do not see party membership as an adequate means to achieve something in a community: "*It is rather in the way… when you want to do something together, as for example building the skater park. If I had gone to a political party, then maybe the other party would have been against it because I am member of this party*."

Another reservation mentioned by non-active interviewees is the (anticipated) difficulty to get access to an organisation and to be integrated in the organisation on equal terms with adults and not just as slaves for distributing flyers or sticking posters. Conversely, a number of politically active young people stress how important it was for them to be recognised as equal partners by the adult members of the organisation. Young people's expectations can thus no longer be satisfied by mass political organisations which use their members as party soldiers to execute tasks, programmes and aims dictated by the party leadership (cf. Inglehart, 1977). Neither can they

find a home for their drive for action in parties that are more and more professionalized and have difficulties in meaningfully integrating young people in their political processes (Hooghe, 2003). Young politically active people openly express their disappointment over the frustration of their demands and their experiences of ineffectivity, while non-active young people often cite the anticipation of this frustration as a reason for non-involvement.

These reservations are the background of the low membership rates of young people in traditional political organisations. Membership in youth organisations linked to political parties ranges between 6% in Austria and 0.3% in the UK. Membership in political parties is somewhat lower and lies between 4% (Austria and Italy) and 1% (France, Slovakia, UK). Trade Unions enjoy a similar membership rate as the political parties, except for Germany, where trade union membership is twice as high (4%) and Finland where it is three times as high (15%) (see figure 3). Membership in professional organisations is below 2% in all countries (not included in figure). This particularly low level probably relates to the fact that most of the young people have not reached a professional status in their work career yet, which would render integration in a professional association more meaningful.

Figure 3: **Membership in "traditional" political organisations by country, in percent**



Source: euyoupart 2004

Participation in the political youth organisation's activities and volunteering show somewhat lower rates than membership. On the one hand, this points to passive kind of membership. On the other hand, it may suggest that it is nearly impossible to be active or volunteering without being a member. For political parties the finding is the same, while for trade unions the activity and volunteering rates are still much lower than the membership rate.

With respect to party work supporting an election campaign is not common among young people. The highest proportion of these party political activists is in Italy (13%), Finland (11%) and Slovakia (10%). It is lowest in the UK (3%). Trying to convince others to vote for a candidate or a party is much more widespread by comparison, especially in Italy (34%), Germany (26%), Finland (25%) and Austria (25%). Again, the UK yields the lowest percentage (5%).

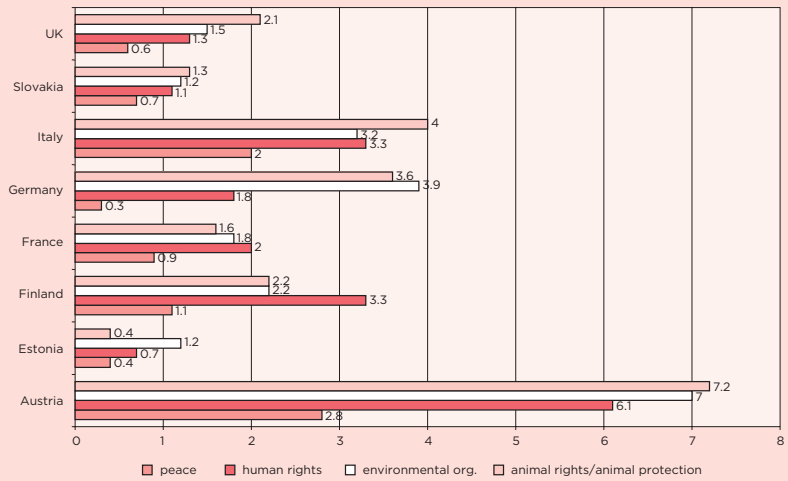
Altogether, in terms of party work, there is first the UK, with an overall low level of party campaign support as well as convincing effort. Estonia and France seem to show the same pattern, but less pronounced. Second, there are countries with a high rate of active young people in both dimensions of party work, like Italy and Finland. Third, there are Austria and Germany, where party work does not take place too often via campaign support, but rather via more or less informal convincing effort. Fourth, the pattern for Slovakia seems to be inverted: there is a relatively high level of campaign support, but only a mediocre convincing effort.

Membership in NGOs

While many young people with a low level of education do not consider NGOs as possible political players, they are recognised and welcomed as such by better educated and/or politically active young people. However, the same scepticism as in the case of political parties is expressed in the case of NGOs, that is, the lack of information and lack of control over the organisation's movements. Also, structures and group dynamic processes are criticised, in which the individual's views and activities are too much constrained: "*I left certain groups because I realised that in the microcosm of students' collectives, associations, social centres, there was a trend to recreate a structure that actually belongs to another tradition, say that of the Stalinist party, in a vertical sense … while in fact the intention was to create a horizontal situation of collective participation.*"

These problems are reflected in the low membership rates. Membership in peace organisations ranges between 0.3% in Germany and 2.8% in Austria. Human rights and humanitarian aid organisations attract between 1% (Slovakia) and 6% (Austria) of the respondents. Similarly, environmental organisations as well as animal rights/animal protection groups fare between 1% (Slovakia) and 7% (Austria) (see figure 4).

Figure 4: **Membership in "new" political organisations**



Source: euyoupart 2004.

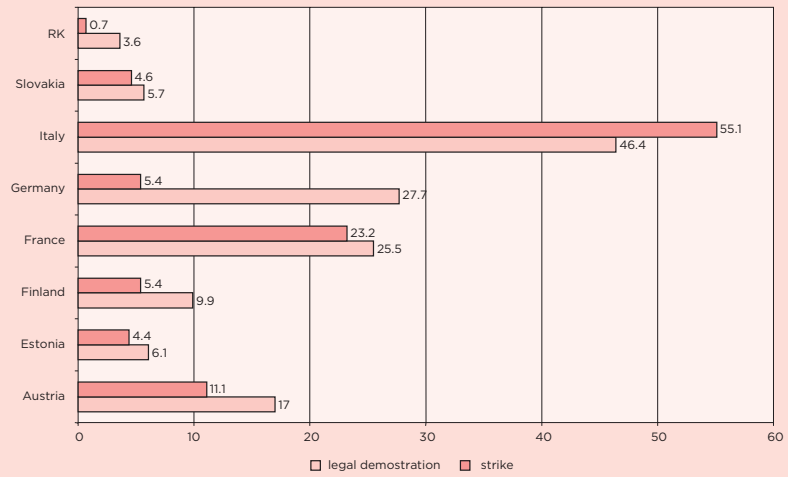
Interestingly, the rates for participation in the organisation's activity and volunteering are not always lower than membership rates. This depends on the country and type of organisation. In Austria, for example, these rates are always lower than the membership rate. By contrast, young people in Finland, Germany, Italy and Slovakia tend to be active rather than just members, especially in peace, human rights and environmental organisations. This finding suggests different organisational structures, with some opening possibilities for getting active spontaneously rather than using members' contributions to have professionals act.

Political communication, action and protest

From the young people's reservations towards traditional forms of participation it is not surprising that spontaneous, single acts of political expression and communication partly achieve higher rates among the young people than continuous involvement in political organisations and social movements. In Austria, Finland, Germany and Italy, for example, around 10% of the respondents have already contacted a politician. In all countries apart from Estonia and the UK, 5 and more percent have already collected signatures or donated money. Young Austrians (11%), Estonians (17%), Finns (16%) and Germans (11%) have contributed to a political internet discussion and around 11% of the respondents in Austria, Finland, France, Germany and Italy have written a letter or an email with a political content.

Participation in legal demonstrations has a very large range across the countries varying between 4% and 46%, as does participation in strikes (1% to 55%). These differences seem to be linked to national political cultures. Italy is the outstanding example for political protest with 46 and 55% of the young respondents taking part in demonstrations and strikes. French young people are also relatively likely to take part in demonstrations and strikes (26% and 23% respectively), while their German peers join in demonstrations (28%) but not strikes (5%). The lowest participation rates are found in Estonia and Slovakia as well as in the UK (see figure 5).

Figure 5: **Legal protest**



Source: euyoupart 2004.

Illegal and violent forms of participation such as writing graffiti on walls, participation in a political event where property is damaged, violent confrontation with the police or with political opponents, occupation of buildings and blocking streets or railways are very rare, indeed. None of these activities reaches more than 5%. The only exception is Italy, where rates are around 5%.

Spontaneous acts of political protest are more in line with young people's principles and their 'yes-but' attitude. They express the young people's political and moral feelings and their sincerity. They do not require any commitment to other persons or to an organisation, while still offering some group experience with like-minded people. They permit engagement for a universal value without selling 'whole ideological packages' (IARD, 2004): "*I mean, it's not a problem for me to go to a march, whereas, say, joining a party can be more complex*."

However, even demonstrations contain the danger that principles are violated. A good cause can be abused by false motivations. To some extent the young people express fears which echo the adults' reservations against demonstrations and, in particular, young people's participation in them (cf. Theiss-Morse/Hibbing, 2005). They question the sincerity of young people's engagement by suspecting that many "*go to the demonstration because they want to miss school and have a good time instead*". However, the most frequent concern regards the organisation of demonstrations by extreme groups and their attempt to abuse the event for their own propaganda thereby betraying the original ideal or political aim behind the demonstration.

The use of violence is generally seen as unacceptable for the young people, since it is incompatible with their principle of tolerance. However, as Ann Muxel and Cecile Riou observed for France, the approach differs between the higher qualified young people and those with a low level of education. For the disempowered latter group demonstrations may be legitimised as the only way of talking to decision-makers. Students, on the other hand, place more value on dialogue which hints at their potentially easier access to and communication with political authorities (Muxel/Riou, 2004).

There is unanimity among the young people about the ineffectiveness of demonstrations, but also of petitions and referenda. While for some this is a reason not to participate, it does not deter others, since it is more a matter of self-expression, self-determination and loyalty to one's moral convictions: "*It is not a demonstration that will stop the war; it was to show that we didn't agree*".

Political consumerism

According to Giddens (1994) life politics concerns the defence of life styles. Life politics can be individualistic in its aim, claiming respect from the others for one's ideals and attempting to assert oneself against normative conceptions of the environment. Life politics can also relate to more universal values and issues such as environmental protection or social equality which are expressed in everyday practice: "*What is personal is political …*". In a "yes-but" world, a world without ultimate truths, where ideologies and mass mobilisation are suspect and conventional forms of participation ineffective, the desire to "save the

world" boils down to personal activities aimed at living up to one's own private ideals. At most, attempts are made to influence the immediate social environment.

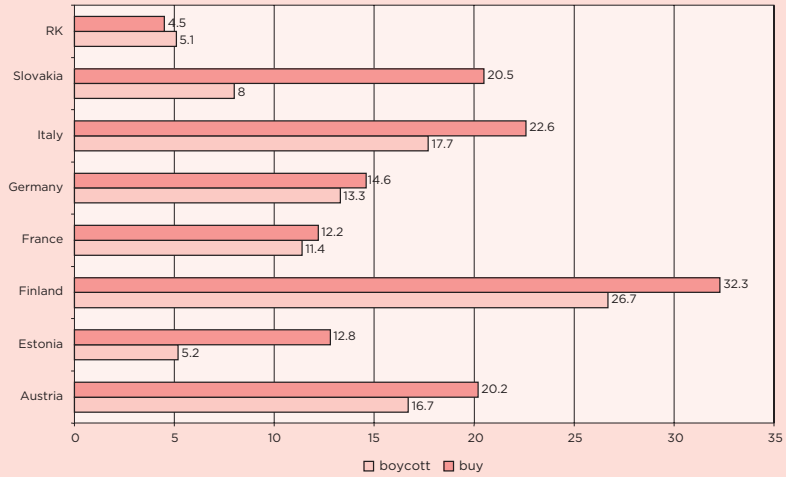
Today many political protesters do not show their disapproval by participating in demonstrations and many a protest is not even aimed at political authorities within the national context but at business corporations or foreign or international political institutions. This protest often takes the form of consumer boycott campaigns, as for example, the boycotts of Shell and Nike products or the boycott of French products by Americans after the French government had opposed the UN Security Council resolution in favour of military force in the Iraq conflict. In boycotts and buycotts citizens use their purchasing power in order to influence institutional or market practices that are considered unfair. Along with other forms of political participation boycotts have increasingly been used as a political tool and examples of the past such as Nestlé show that they can be successful (Stolle/Hooghe/Micheletti, 2005).

While it seems fruitful to shift attention to forms of participation which do not conform to the traditional picture of representative democracy within the limits of a nation-state, there are methodological problems attached to the problem of measurement, in particular the question of how to distinguish between regular boycotters who act for political or ethical reasons and those who do not. A qualitative study of consumers of organically grown food shows that motives and the concepts of politics involved can vary greatly. The motives of these boycotters and bycotters range from egocentrism, exocentrism, reflexive intervention and ambivalence, while the span of attitudes to the political sphere includes indifference, opportunism, fundamentalism and reform orientation (Lorenz, 2006). Thus, the relationship between issues of life style and the issue of the power of international business corporations remains diffuse as does the relationship between social critique and consumption critique (Lamla, 2006).

Despite these difficulties participation in boycotts and buycotts has been added to the list of forms of participation routinely used in survey research (e.g. World Value Survey and European Social Survey) where they serve as a gauge for political consumerism. Within the scope of the EUYOUPART survey it was not possible to go into so much depth concerning the behaviour, motivation and frequency as Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti (2005) suggest, but the wording of the two questions attempted to capture the political content: "During the last 12 months, how often have you boycotted/bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons?"

The data reveal that in most countries, political consumerism is more widespread than demonstrations and strikes. The highest rates for boycotts and buycotts are in Finland with 27% and 32% respectively, followed by Italy (18% and 23%), Austria (17% and 20%), Germany (13% and 15%) and France (11% and 12%). In Estonia and Slovakia the proportion of young people who boycott products is below 10%, while the proportion of those who consciously buy certain products is higher (13% in Estonia and 21% in Slovakia). Young people in the UK are least attracted by these activities (see figure 6).

Figure 6: **political consumerism**



Source: euyoupart 2004.

In the qualitative interviews of EUYOUPART buycotts are mentioned by those who are at least politically interested and have a strong social and political conscience: "*I think as an individual I cannot change the world, but for myself. The simplest example is aluminium. For the household I never buy aluminium foil … or aluminium cans. I certainly do not buy them. Even if it does not affect anything, I have a clear conscience*."

Conclusion

Most quantitative studies in participation research focus on the impact of age, education, gender, generation, social capital, and values. These factors have all been shown to influence participation, and by pointing to the deficits some (groups of) individuals may have the results are highly policy relevant since they open up possibilities to mitigate these deficits: political knowledge can be increased by improved citizenship education, social capital can be strengthened by supporting youth organisations and youth programmes, political skills can be fostered through more local youth participation projects. While the merit of these efforts shall not be denied here, the mere fact that empirical analyses show only moderate relationships (e.g. Dalton, 2004) suggests that political disaffection and lack of participation have a deeper reason. This hypothesis is strengthened by the qualitative findings presented above. Whatever "deficits" young people may have, their perspectives on the political system and the possibilities of participation reflect the power structure both, between the economy and the nation-state, and between the political system and the citizens.

Whether the young people's expectations towards the democratic system come close to an empirical or a normative understanding of democracy, they are frustrated in both cases. A considerable proportion of the young people, especially the lower educated, would actually like to see the political elite taking responsibility for the people's welfare so that the citizens are

safeguarded from the risks and uncertainties of late modern living conditions with their material and socio-psychological insecurities. However, this desire cannot be fulfilled by welfare states that are caught between the demands of the internationalised economy and their own fiscal crisis. They are unable to develop and realise social and political visions and to articulate and integrate social and political cleavages. Thus, deeply rooted lines of conflict remain excluded from the public debate (Böhnisch, 2006) while the ongoing bickering around political trifles which is so prominent in the media does not answer to the needs of the citizens. The perceived gap between citizens and politicians and the inefficiency of political processes leads to political disaffection which has its obvious effects on participation.

Those young people with a strong ethical consciousness or political identity espouse more elements of a normative understanding of democracy with participation as a means of controlling and reducing power relationships and as a vehicle for citizens' self-determination and self-realisation. Their expectations of co-determination are frustrated primarily because of the lack of efficacy of their own activities and efforts, while their hope for a socio-political will to form society according to ethical and social criteria is dashed in the face of a depoliticised public and management politics: "*I find it outrageous when adults say young people are apathetic. The point is, I am not apathetic. Because if the election campaign is only about faces and everybody accepts the framework and nobody dares [to initiate changes, RS] then I am not fed up with politics but fed up with what is happening*." (8)

REFERENCES

Almond, G. A.; Verba, S. (1963) The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations. Princeton

Barber, B. (1984) Strong Democracy. Participatory Politics for a New Age. Berkely

Böhnisch, L. (2006) Politische Soziologie. Eine problemorientierte Einführung. Opladen

Brünzel, S. (2000) Reclaim the Streets. Karneval und Konfrontation. In: derive – Zeitschrift für Stadtforschung. 2: 41-46

Dalton, R. (2004) Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices. The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies. Oxford

Evers, Adalbert; Nowotny, Helga (1987) Über den Umgang mit Unsicherheit : die Entdeckung der Gestaltbarkeit von Gesellschaft. Frankfurt am Main

Felgitsch, S. (2006) Die Rekonstruktion des Politischen In: Flatz, Chr.; Felgitsch, S. (eds.) Dimensionen einer neuen Kultur des Politischen. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag. Pp 10-40

Habermas, J. (1973) Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus. Frankfurt a.M.

Hackett, S. C. (1997) Young People and Political Participation. In: Roche, J.; Tucker, St. (eds.) Youth in Society: Contemporary Theory, Policy and Practice. London, pp 73-95

Hoecker, B. (ed.) (2006) Politische Partizipation zwischen Konvention und Protest. Opladen

Hooghe, M. (2003) Youth Organisations within Political Parties. Political Recruitment and the Transformation of Party Systems. Paper given at the research seminar "What about Youth Political Participation?" organised by the Council of Europe and the European Commission, November 2003, Strasbourg

Howe, P. (2006) Political Knowledge and Electoral Participation in the Netherlands: Comparisons with the Canadian Case. In: International Political Science Review 2006; 27; pp 137-166

IARD (2004) Political participation of young people in Europe (EUYOUPART): working paper on qualitative research findings in Italy. Milan

Inglehart, R. (1977) The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics, Princeton

Inglehart, R. (1997) Modernisation and Postmodernisation. Cultural, Economic and Political Change in 43 Societies. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

(8)
Quoted in Spannring/Wallace/Datler, 2004

Klingemann, H.-D.; Fuchs, D. (eds.) (1995) Citizens and the State. (Beliefs in Government, vol. 1). Oxford: Oxford University Press

Lamla, J. Politisierter Konsum – konsumierte Politik. Kritikmuster und Engagementformen im kulturellen Kapitalismus. In: Lamla, J.; Neckel, S. (eds.) Politisierter Konsum – konsumierte Politik. Wiesbaden pp 9 - 37

Lorenz, St. (2006) Biolebensmittel und die "Politik mit dem Einkaufswagen". In: Lamla, J.; Neckel, S. (eds.) Politisierter Konsum – konsumierte Politik. Wiesbaden pp 91-112

Magnette, P. (2003) European Governance and Civic Participation: beyond Elitist Citizenship? In: Political Studies, vol. 51, issue 1, pp 144-162

Montero, J. R.; Gunther, R.; Torcal, M. (1997) Democracy in Spain: Legitimacy, Discontent, and Disaffection. In: Studies in Comparative International Development, Vol. 32, no 3,124-160

Muxel, A.; Riou, C. (2004) Political participation of young people in Europe (EUYOUPART): working paper on qualitative research findings in France. Paris

Norris, P. (1999) (ed.) Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Paakkunainen, K. (2004) Political participation of young people in Europe (EUYOUPART): working paper on qualitative research findings in Finland. Helsinki

Pharr, S.; Putnam, R. (2000) (eds.) Disaffected Democracies. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Putnam, R. D. (2000) Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York

Riepl, B.; Wintersberger, H. (1999) Political participation of youth below voting age. Examples of European practices. Vienna: European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research

Roker, D.; Player, K.; Coleman, J. (1999) Challenging the Image: Young People as Volunteers and Campaingers. Leicester

Schultze, R. (1998) Partizipation. In: Nohlen, D. (ed.) Politische Begriffe (lexicon der Politik Bd. 7), München: Verlag C.H. Beck, pp 470-472.

Sloam, J. (2004) Political participation of young people in Europe (EUYOUPART): working paper on qualitative research findings in the United Kingdom. Birmingham

Spannring, R.; Wallace, C.; Datler, G. (2004) "If you have a Grandpa, send him to Europe." Attitudes of young Austrians towards EU elections. In: Sociológia. Slovak Sociological Review. Vol. 36, No. 3, pp 253-273

Stolle, D.; Hooghe, M. (2005) "Inaccurate, Exceptional, One-Sided or Irrelevant? The Debate About the Alleged Decline of Social Capital and Civic Engagement in Western Societies". In: British Journal of Political Science 35(1): 149-67

Stolle, D.; Hooghe, M.; Micheletti, M. (2005) Politics in the Supermarket: Political Consumerism as a Form of Political Participation. In: International Political Science Review, vol. 26, no. 3, pp 245-269

Theiss-Morse, E.; Hibbing, J. R. (2005) Citizenship and Civic Engagement. In: Annual Review of Political Science, 8:227-49

Verba, S.; Nie, N. (1972) Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality, New York

Verba, S.; Nie, N.; Kim, J.-O. (1978) Participation and political equality. A seven-nation comparison. Cambridge.

Waechter, F.; Riegel, L. (2004) Political participation of young people in Europe (EUYOUPART): working paper on qualitative research findings in Germany. Munich

Wiesendahl, E. (2006) Partizipation in Parteien: Ein Auslaufmodell? In Hoecker, B. (ed.) Politische Partizipation zwischen Konvention und Protest. Opladen. pp74-99

Wilkinson, H. (1996) But Will They Vote? The Political Attitudes of Young People. In: Children and Society. Vol. 10 (3), pp 242-244