Denmark: Ways of promoting youth participation.
Education to participation and youth municipaties.

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Abstract
This paper focuses on how Denmark promotes youth participation.
To begin with a quick glimpse is given into recent Danish research in the field of youth participation. This shows that the Danish society faces quite a challenge concerning youth participation. Young people of today tend to be less active in nearly all areas of public decision-making, and this of course affects the representative democracy as well as a whole range of other public institutions.
In 1997 the Danish Government passed the first official coherent youth policy. The objectives are outlined.
Thirdly two examples of 'good practises' are presented. The headline "Education to participation" covers a brief presentation of how Denmark's educational system plays a very important role in teaching children and young people to become active citizens with democratic values and a sense of common responsibility by building up the habit of participation in schools. The second example of a good practise is a direct outcome of the new national youth policy. In this nationwide project 17 Danish municipalities have been appointed "Youth Municipalities" for a 3-year period. Each youth municipality launch one or more projects that aim at increasing the local level of youth participation. The projects were terminated at the end of last year, and a complete evaluation is on its way. A brief account of the project is given and the paper also sums up which lessons are to be learned from the experiences of this project. A complete evaluation of the project is still on its way, but The Danish youth council has looked into the project already, and the results of this research are outlined.

Denmark and the decreasing number of young people
Statistic shows that the number of young people in the Danish population has decreased greatly during the last decades. This means, that in 1987 the number of young people between the ages of 15-24 peaked at 800.000. In 2004 this number will decrease by 25% to 600.000. This number will be the lowest since 1920 (Bay, 1996). This development should be seen as a result of the overall development in the population. The duration of life for elderly people has increased since the end of World War II, and in the same period the birth rate has decreased. As a result the percentage of young people in the population is dropping.
As a result Denmark faces a provision problem. The working part of the population is decreasing, while number of elderly people is increasing. Of course the decreasing number of young people also effects a number of institutions and businesses life off young people.

Democracy and the downward tendency of participation
The Danish democracy is a representative democracy. Participation in both national and local elections is a central issue, because participation in elections both concerns participation in itself and also legitimisation of important political decisions. Compared to most other countries Denmark has traditionally seen a heavy election turnout. In 1968 the poll was 89,3%, while in the seventies it

was 87,7%. During the eighties the poll dropped to 86%, and this tendency continued through the nineties where the poll was 84,4%. When focusing on young peoples participation in national and local elections this tendency becomes even more striking (Andersen, 2000). This is illustrated in table A below[ii].

Table A: Poll in the Local election 1997 and the national election 1998.

	Local election 1997			National election 1998		
Year of birth	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
1975-80	0,70	0,71	0,67	0,87	0,92	0,83
1960-74	0,85	0,85	0,85	0,95	0,95	0,96
1945-59	0,92	0,92	0,92	0,94	0,95	0,94
1930-44	0,93	0,93	0,94	0,97	0,96	0,98
Before 1930	0,94	0,98	0,91	0,97	0,97	0,97
Average	0,87	0,88	0,86	0,94	0,95	0,93

From: Andersen, Johannes: "Unges valgdeltagelse" ("Young Peoples Participation in Elections") In *Når unge udfordrer demokratiet – dokumentation og debat. (When the Young Challenges the Democary – Documentation and Debate)*. Centre for Youth Research, 2000.

As the table shows young people are less likely to vote than older citizens. When trying to explain this tendency, one might point to historical and social circumstances. Older generations have established parliamentary conventions and traditions long time ago. People born before 1945 formed their identity in a historic period marked by events, which reminded them that democracy was something, which had to be fought for. Therefore voting, as well as other forms of democratic participation, became an important way of demonstrating support of the national democracy. The generation born between 1945 and 1960 developed a different attitude towards the parliamentary conventions. The wars in Europe were soon history and democracy no longer seemed at risk. People born after 1975 seem to carry on this trend. The direct political participation is not considered as important as earlier one might say that it is more or less taken for granted.
According to resent Danish research, a thesis that seems to hold well is that today's young people consider democracy to be a basic framework of society. This means that democracy within the young generations is seen as something, which is simply there, a reality independent of the individual. As the next table shows young people also tend to feel differently towards a number of central democratic norms. The higher the number, the more important the norm is rated.

Table B: Attitudes towards democracy and participation. (1998).

	Vote at public elections	Act accordingly to the law	Be open towards the attitude of others	Feel responsible to solve common problems	Keep updated on society issues	Be active in the public debate
Average	0,93	0,92	0,85	0,85	0,83	0,53
Birth year:						
1975-80	0,86	0,88	0,84	0,78	0,76	0,49
1960-74	0,92	0,89	0,86	0,84	0,81	0,48
1945-59	0,95	0,93	0,87	0,87	0,86	0,55
1930-44	0,94	0,93	0,84	0,87	0,86	0,55
Before 1930	0,98	0,98	0,84	0,87	0,87	0,57

From: Andersen, Johannes: "Unges valgdeltagelse" ("Young Peoples Participation in Elections") In *Når unge udfordrer demokratiet – dokumentation og debat. (When the Young Challenges the Democary – Documentation and Debate)*. Centre for Youth Research, 2000.

As one can see, the number drops quite dramatically when the youngest generation rates the importance of voting at public elections. The feeling of responsibility to solve common, societal problems is also of less importance to the young. This points to another relevant factor concerning young people's participation. This being that generally young people of today are likely to be preoccupied with projects and beliefs concerning themselves as individuals. Concerns of societal issues and the common good become secondary.

Sociological research into the field of young people shows that it is not adequate to see this only as a question of participation or non-participation. Young people participate less because different kinds of political participations do not seem important, relevant or reasonable. However, this does not indicate that young people are less active or that they are less visionary concerning what they want or how the ideal society should look like. But these issues are looked upon from the individual's point of view. As an example of one of the consequences of this, one might point to the democratic convention of deciding issues on the basis of majority votes. Today, there is a tendency that young people do not consider majority votes to be a reasonable democratic form of decision-making. More likely, majority votes are seen as interfering with the individual's freedom. Therefore it is not given that young people feel obligated to execute a decision carried by a majority vote (Simonsen, 2000).

Research also shows that young people see democracy and democratic actions as closely connected to personal responsibility. Democracy has become a personal issue. An inner process, you could say. There are no given rules and you have to decide what you want. Everyone have to decide for him or herself what is right.

When working with youth participation you can either mourn this, or you can work with it.

The Danish Youth Policy
In 1997 the Danish Government presented its first proposal for a national youth policy[iii], which includes all young people from 15-25.
The Government decided that Denmark should have a coherent youth policy, placed with the ministry of education. Until this point, the Danish youth policy has been divided between different departments such as those of education, social affairs, labour etc.
The strategy of the Danish Government youth policy is about thinking across different political sectors in order to create a coherent policy and the best results.

The aim of the Danish youth policy has right from the beginning been to reflect the demands and wishes of young people. This means that all political issues that effect young people's lives are agenda setting of Danish youth policy.
Youth policy is only meaningful if it involves young people and gives them responsibility.
As a consequence the proposal for a youth policy was formulated largely on the basis of contributions from young people themselves. One of the methods used by the Government is to set up youth conferences and hearings, where different youth organizations are invited.

The overall objective of the Danish youth policy is as follows:

"All young people shall be able to enjoy an eventful youth, qualifying them for an independent and diversified life as active contributors to the development of the society"

This makes up the framework for another 10 objectives:

1. **Influence and responsibility**
"The youth policy shall form an improved basis for young people's active participation in the development of democracy and their direct influence on and responsibility for matters affecting themselves."

2. **Education for all young people**
"All young people shall have formal and real possibilities of completing a youth education. The target is that by year 2000, 90-95% of a youth generation should complete a youth education."

3. **Full employment for young people**
"The target is full employment for young people by year 2000 (a youth unemployment rate of max. 5%)."

4. **International qualifications**
"All young people shall be adequately qualified to meet the requirements and utilize the possibilities of the international community."

5. Access to information technology for the young
"Young people shall have the possibility to acquire basic qualifications
in information and communication technologies, to enable them to seek new
knowledge independently by means of IT."

6. Improved guidance and counselling
"All young people shall have access to comprehensive, coherent and
straightforward guidance and counselling."

7. Establish a base in life
"All young people, including those with special difficulties, shall have
real possibilities of establishing a base in their lives."

8. Well-functioning housing areas
"One of the aims of the youth policy is for the young people to live in
well-functioning housing areas, with all-round possibilities of
development and experience."

9. Cultural variety
"The youth policy shall contribute to giving the young people a basic
knowledge of their own cultural background, thereby promoting mutual
understanding between different ethnic groups".

10. Knowledge about young people
"Updating and development of the youth policy shall be a dynamic process
so that it relates to the challenges and possibilities that the young
people are facing. The youth policy shall therefore ensure that new
knowledge about the living conditions and viewpoints of the young people
is gathered on a continuous basis."

The youth policy has during the last three years resulted in a number of initiatives. One of these is
the appointment of 17 so called 'Youth Municipalities'. This project will be accounted for later.

Education to participation

In Denmark young people get to vote at the age of 18, but the education for democratic citizenship
and participation begins long before this. It is widely known and accepted that the educational
system plays a very important role in relation to the democracy.
Continuous debate and development of the concept of democracy is a pivotal point in privation of
the democracy. It is in the course of the everyday life that democracy must unfold and be efficient.
Therefore, by actively including democracy and participation in the educational system it is
acknowledged that it takes more than constitutional rights to make sure that this happens.

This means that the educational system with all its many and various kinds of institutions actively participates in making sure that young people growing up develops an awareness of how the democracy works. Another very important objective is that children and young people learn to feel responsible towards participating in democratic activities.

It is declared in the first object clause of the primary and lower secondary education, "The Folkeskole"[iv], the educational activities must contribute to educate children and young people to be democratic citizens. In 1970 it was made a statutory right for pupils to participate in matters concerning the school, and at the same time it was allowed for pupil representatives to participate in school management's meetings. In 1986 student councils was made mandatory, and in 1990 when school boards[v] were introduced, students immediately obtained the right to representation. Seven years later, in 1997, they also obtained right to vote.

Democracy in the Danish educational system can be divided into three different aspects:

1. Teachings of democracy.
In both primary and lower secondary school there is a number of subjects, which contains descriptions of how the democracy functions and of the rights and obligations of the citizens as part of the curriculum and educational materials.

3. Democracy in the classroom.
From an international point of view 'The Folkeskole' holds a very high percentage of the children in every class put together across differences in social and ethnic backgrounds. Equality and broadness are perceptible characteristics of the Danish 'Folkeskole'. The legislation defines that teachers and students in each class are to cooperate about on which objectives are to be achieved. They are also to discuss working methods and selection of educational materials. Right from the beginning the students are co-responsible for their education.

3. Influence on the everyday life at the educational institutions – the representative democracy.
Concerned with pupil and student influence Denmark is a pioneer case. Both when it comes to the everyday life at the educational institutions and overriding considerations in education policy.

The three aspects must be viewed in coherence. If teachings in democracy are to be meaningful, students must experience influence and responsibility in relation to their own education. Both when it comes to everyday life in class, the institution and the educational system as a whole.

Student councils

The usage of student councils in schools is mandatory in Danish schools. All schools that teach from fifth grade and up must have a student council formed by the students. The basis of the council is the students, which means that it is the students themselves that decide how to put together the council. They also make their own agenda. There are no specific issues, which a student council has to deal with, but studies have shown that the areas of interest are those close to the young peoples everyday life.
Most schools have elections at the beginning of each school year.

Experience has shown that it sometimes is quite difficult to make student councils work as intended and thereby give the student a feeling of participation in decision-making and also there's a tendency that a large number of students do not take interest in the council participation. Studies have shown that there is a way of dealing with the problem of lack of participation in student councils. It has proved efficient to have the council meetings on a regular basis. Also a number of schools have had luck with splitting the school council into two, one for the youngest students and one for the older ones. This gives everyone a clearer sense of responsibility and being heard. Another way of supporting the interest and participation in student council is to have a contact teacher. The contact teacher sits in on the student council meetings and provides an opportunity for the student to ask questions and the contact teacher to throw light on issues that are opaque to them. But for this arrangement to work the contact teacher must be neutral and objective and only act when called upon. Lastly, it has proven successful to set up courses for the members of the student councils where they are taught not only about student councils but also conference leadership, negotiating skills and how to give a speech.

Youth Municipalities

In 1997, as a part of the Danish Governments youth policy, 17 municipalities have been appointed "Youth municipalities". The Danish Government invited all Danish municipalities to participate in this pilot project, which runs over a period of 3 years, finishing at the end of year 2000.
The aim of the project is, that the selected municipalities test and develop new ways to implement the Government's 10 objectives of the youth policy. A municipal framework was chosen to make sure that a close contact with the everyday life of young people was established. Prior to the project several youth groups were asked about their views, and their responses made it clear that for the young a good youth policy is concerned with concrete and familiar matters closely connected to everyday life.
52 out of total number of 275 municipalities responded to the Government's invitation. Of the 52 applicants 17 were chosen. They were given extra financial resources for developing new methods of youth participation.

The criteria for the selection of the youth municipalities the Danish Government particularly focused on the following aspects:

- The young people would be actively involved in planning, realization and evaluation of the activities and initiatives.
- Specific efforts would be made to involve all young people, including those who do not normally get involved in decision-making.
- The municipalities would launch initiatives that would offer realistic prospect of achieving, a number of the 10 objectives of the official youth policy, within the test period.

The 17 local projects are all very different from each other, and they reflect a broad range of municipal activities on behalf of the youth groups as well as wide differences in the ways they were carried out.

The activities of the 17 youth municipalities are e.g.[vi]:

- Setting up youth councils[vii]
- Youth conferences
- Setting up cooperation with a twin city.
- Forming a youth panel, which cooperates with a local newspaper.
- Setting up a youth centre run by the young themselves. Setting up a youth secretariat, where the young deal with social, cultural and political issues.
- Organizing shared accommodation for disadvantaged young people.
- Initiating direct youth radiobroadcasts
- Running a project for young people with eating disorders.
- Developing an IT and cinema training programme for local youth groups.
- Employing a democracy consultant to the local youth council
- Publishing of a youth magazine aimed at local youngsters and politicians
- Setting up an IT training programme for low performers
- Appointing an ombudsman for children and young people
- Creating a monthly local TV programme, captioned "Voice of the Youth"
- Setting up young to young counselling
- Appointing a team of reporters to pick up the wishes of the local young people
- Supporting disadvantaged youth groups

Table 3 below[viii] shows which of the objectives the projects have chosen for the projects.

Table 3: Objectives of the activities launched by the youth municipalities:

Objective	Number of municipalities
Influence and responsibility	17
Access to IT for the young	15
Guidance and counselling for the young	14
Establish a base in life	10
Knowledge about young people	10
Cultural variety	9
Education for all young people	8
Well-functioning housing areas	5
Full employment for young people	4

As the figure shows all municipalities have chosen the first objective "Influence and responsibility" as an aim for their project. Second and third most popular objectives are 'Access to information technology for the young' and 'Improved guidance and counselling'.

The figure also points to the fact that the youth municipalities as a whole cover all of the areas of national youth policy. This means that the experiences from this project give a solid foundation for revision and renewal of youth political efforts. They can also prove useful for policy makers and organisations working to improve youth policy and the basis for youth participation outside of Denmark.

What is to be learned from the project of youth municipalities?

The project of youth municipalities has resulted in a number of lessons that can be of use for others working within the field of youth participation. First and foremost the project has shown that it is a good and very useful experience to turn a (national) youth policy into concrete locale actions.

What is to be learned about young people's participation from the youth municipalities?
Young people are just as unlike as the rest of the population, and the study made by The Danish Youth council shows that young people have very different motives for participation. However, it is possible to say something about what generally motivates the young. The project has shown that young people make demands in order to become and stay involved. These demands are:

- Personal challenge and satisfaction
- Possibility for a dialogue concerning their visions and wishes
- Transparent, realistic and reliable guidelines in relation to economy, time and politics
- Acceptance of new working-, meeting and organization forms
- To be part of the entire process
- To have direct influence on both form and content
- To be able to turn ideas into reality within a short period of time

Accordingly, the most efficient method in relation to promoting youth participation is to make sure that the content of the projects initiated is flexible and dynamic, hardly any young people are keen on participating in projects that can not be changed to accommodate their interests. In order for young people to get involved influence on content, working methods and principals of democracy is therefore a necessity. (Bach 2000a, 2000b).

Organisation – lessons to be learned[ix]
Research made by the Danish Youth Council into the organisation of the different activities launched by the 17 municipalities has pointed to the fact they can be divided into two groups, because they take different organizational starting points. One type of activities is based on project organization, and another on working/operating organization. None of the municipalities involved in the project use solely one of the methods (Bach, 2000a, 2000b). Still, useful lessons can be learned when looking at project-based organization and operation-based organization as extremities on a scale on which each of the projects can be placed.

The activities based on project organization are characterized by:
- A specific, new activity
- Project groups and ad hoc committees
- Establishing and developing resources and activities
- New and unknown paths
- Time limitations
- Project leader and project hired staff

And the activities based on operation organization are characterized by:
- Maintenance and cementing
- Administrative organization
- Controlling of predetermined resources and activities
- Familiar paths
- Continuous actions
- Administrative staffing

The lessons to be learned from these two counterparts can be summed up in the following general aspects:

First of all activities based on project organization depend on interest. If nobody fells like getting involved, the project dies before it is born. It may seem as a somewhat obvious thing to be drawing attention to, but never the less, there were projects in the youth municipalities that were never carried out despite political will and financial resources.
The activities based on project organizing appeals to launch new activities. Also it appeals directly to young people involving themselves, as they are keen on engaging themselves in single events or isolated issues. Therefore the project organization creates immediate results and dynamics. A weakness in this type of organising is that for young people to engage in this process they need to have courage and faith in the project leaders. And some of these projects are also weakly founded politically, administratively and financially due to the fact that they are not part of a whole. These types of projects are unstable by nature; they have limited financial resources and are therefore easily shut down. It has also turned out that sometimes young people has difficulties handling and accepting the necessity of a working process beginning with formulating the aim of the project, and ending with an evaluation. Lastly, the project-based way of organizing has also showed that it is of great importance that the access to resources and information is direct and easily achieved for the young (Bach, 2000a, 2000b).

The activities based on operation organisation have a somewhat more narrow appeal to the young, so more effort has to be done recruiting and maintaining the interest of the young. The strength in the operation-based organization is without question the political and administrative obligation to a continuously revision of the youth political activities. In addition, the young have a secure place on the municipal budget. Therefore the operation-based organization provides a more solid base, and is also a guarantee that the project can continue after the finish of the youth municipality project. Problems in relation to this kind of organization are foremost and typically, that adult control and bureaucracy characterize the projects, and this seems to keep a great number of young people from getting involved. Also the operation-based youth activities have a tendency to be forgotten and invisible, because it is only given attention when it is formally revised.

You may say that each type of organization generates a different kind of community, one based on activity and another based on politics.

The activity-based community focuses on starting and completing concrete activities *with* and *by* young people. The community based on politics focuses political influence concerning matters of importance *for* the young. This means that they each attract and exclude different kinds of young people. Therefore a very important lesson to be learnt from this is that the way of organizing the projects to a certain degree determines the kind of young people that gets involved. It is very difficult if not impossible to create a project that attracts ALL young people. By using both methods of organisation you make room for various kinds of young people: those who are attracted to the idea of a singular project and those who want to work with politics. In any case it is important to be aware that different kinds of young people are attracted to different kinds of youth participation and then deal with this issue in the process of designing youth participation projects. And one may also want to discuss the viability of an objective that aims at ALL young people. It might be a better idea to aim more specifically and then work out a project design with this in mind.

Conclusion

All together the youth municipality projects have shown that young people do in fact wish to participate in local decision making, when and if it concerns issues that relate to their specific life situation. These local projects have also informed us that young people wish to participate in local decision making if they can take part in setting the agenda and deciding the working methods. Also the project has shown the importance of paying attention to the design of a youth participation project, not only the content of a project but also the way it is organized plays an important role in relation to which young people that chooses to get involved.

Lastly, it is noticeable that most of the projects in the Danish youth municipalities have a broader time perspective than the three years, which is the official time frame. At the termination of the project at the turn of the year 2000 quite a few of the 17 municipalities have initiated a process of revising or formulating youth political action programmes. A number of the municipalities have also taken this as an opportunity to formulate a coherent youth policy.

Notes

[i] Centre for Youth Research (CeFU) is a National centre for research on young people. It was established in the beginning of 2000, and is situated at Roskilde University Centre. The centre is concerned with research into all areas that concerns young people. Centre for Youth Research's website can be found at www.cefu.dk.

[ii] All figures and tables in this paper are originally in Danish. Author's translation.

[iii] Further information on the National Danish Youth Policy can be found on www.uvm.dk.

[iv] The Danish Folkeskole is a comprehensive school covering both primary and lower secondary education, i.e. the first (grade 1 to 6) and second (grade 7-9/10) stage basic education. In other

words it caters for the 7. 16/17 year-old. It comprises the Folkeskole, private elementary schools and continuation school.

[v] The school board lay down principals for the organizing of the teaching. They determine the number of periods in each grade, optional subjects, special education and the disposition of the pupils in different classes. The also organize the cooperation between home and school, and its their job to divide the teachings among the teachers. They must also approve of the school budget and decide if adults are allowed to attend classes. They work out suggestions for curriculum, and recommend development projects to the local authorities. They also make statements on teachers and other staff to be hired.

[vi] A complete listing of the different activities and in which municipality the activities take place can be found on www.uvm.dk. The division of the total amount of 45 million DKK for the project is also to be found here.

[vii] The term 'youth council' covers many different kinds of actions. It includes formally elected youth councils as well as different groups of young people gathering at one or more occasions. The same applies for the terms 'youth secretariat' and 'youth centre'. The activities covered by the terms are defined in the local context and are therefore not to be understood unambiguously.

[viii] The table is from a non-published article by Thomas Bach from the Danish Youth Council. Authors translation.

[ix] All information about results and outcomes of the youth municipality-project, I have from articles written by Thomas Bach from the Danish Youth Council. Unfortunately, none of them are translated into English why as references are of little or no use in relation to the non-Danish readers of this paper. Of course neither Thomas Bach nor the Danish Youth Council are to blame for any inexactitudes due to the translation process. For further information on the youth municipality project or on the Danish Youth Council, please go to www.duf.dk

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