EDUCATION FOR PARTICIPATION
Subject didactics as an agent of politics?

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Abstract: The paper presents a critical review of key tenets of mainstream educational thinking on participation. Many approaches to education for participation tend to fall short of the state of the art of social science research on participation. Therefore, the paper calls for educational and subject didactic approaches to consider the diversity and irreconcilability of theories of participation and of models of citizenship. It aims to curb participatory enthusiasm by taking into account crucial empirical findings on the disappointing effects of increasing participation. Persistent and increasing economic and political inequality and tendencies of depoliticisation turn out to be among the main obstacles to delivering on the promise of equal opportunities for democratic participation. This brings the systemic tensions between democratic participation and capitalism to the fore. Against this sceptical assessment of participation theory and the reality of political participation, the challenges, possibilities and tasks of subject didactics in the social science domain are discussed. Above all, they face a fundamental decision: to subscribe to the idea of a functionalist education for participation as a kind of social engineering via schools, or to foster critical and political thinking about participation with the aim of changing prevailing power relations in favour of the less powerful and the powerless.

Keywords: participation, subject didactics, participatory education, inequality

EDUCAÇÃO PARA A PARTICIPAÇÃO: DIDÁTICAS ESPECÍFICAS COMO AGENTE POLÍTICO?

Resumo: O artigo apresenta uma revisão crítica de princípios fundamentais do pensamento educacional *mainstream* sobre participação. Muitas abordagens à educação para a participação tendem a ficar aquém do estado da arte da investigação em ciências sociais sobre participação. Portanto, o artigo apela a abordagens educativas e didáticas específicas para considerar a diversidade e irreconciliabilidade das teorias de participação e de modelos de cidadania. O artigo visa reduzir o entusiasmo participativo

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tomando em consideração resultados empíricos cruciais sobre os efeitos dececionantes do aumento da participação. A persistente e crescente desigualdade económica e política e as tendências de despolitização estão entre os principais obstáculos ao cumprimento da promessa de igualdade de oportunidades para a participação democrática. Isto traz à tona as tensões sistémicas entre participação democrática e capitalismo. Diante desta avaliação cética da teoria da participação e da realidade da participação política, discutem-se os desafios, possibilidades e tarefas das didáticas no domínio das ciências sociais. Acima de tudo, enfrentam uma decisão fundamental: subscrever a ideia de uma educação funcionalista para a participação como uma espécie de engenharia social através das escolas ou fomentar o pensamento crítico e político sobre a participação com o objectivo de alterar as relações de poder prevalecentes em favor dos menos poderosos e dos sem poder algum.

Palavras-chave: participação, didáticas específicas, educação para a participação, desigualdade

L'ÉDUCATION POUR LA PARTICIPATION: LA DIDACTIQUE DES DISCIPLINES COMME AGENT DE LA POLITIQUE

Résumé: Cet article présente un examen critique des principes clefs de la pensée dominante éducative sur la participation. Nombreuses sont les approches sur l'éducation à la participation qui ne parviennent pas à la hauteur de l'état de la recherche des sciences sociales sur la participation. De ce fait, ce document se sert des approches éducationnelles et des didactiques des disciplines pour rendre compte de la diversité et de l'irréconciliabilité des théories liées à la participation et des modèles de citoyenneté. Son but est de réduire l'enthousiasme participatif en prenant en compte les découvertes empiriques cruciales concernant les effets décevants d'une participation croissante. Les inégalités politiques et économiques persistantes et grandissantes, ainsi que les tendances à la dépolitisation semblent être parmi les principaux obstacles pour que les promesses de l'égalité des chances pour la participation démocratique ne se réalisent. Ceci attire l'attention sur les tensions systémiques entre la participation démocratique et le capitalisme. Par rapport à l'évaluation sceptique de la théorie participative et la réalité de la participation politique, les enjeux, possibilités et tâches des didactiques des disciplines dans le domaine des sciences sociales seront discutés. Une décision fondamentale les attend: faut-il souscrire à l'idée d'une éducation fonctionnaliste sur la participation comme une sorte de manipulation des structures sociales par l'école ou faut-il favoriser la réflexion critique et politique sur la participation en ayant pour objectif de changer les relations de pouvoir qui prévalent en faveur des moins puissants et des impuissants?

Mots-clés: participation, didactiques des disciplines, éducation à la participation, inégalité

Participatory programmes, policies and pedagogies have garnered considerable attention and are now met with broad acceptance. They have established themselves as the standard for political correctness. In generating resources and reputations, financing organisations and departments, creating new positions and income, they sustain a veritable participation industry. From subject

didactics[1] to curricula, in state schools and in the classroom, participation enjoys broad support and continues to generate a positive response.

Conversely, educational institutions face considerable political pressure to bring about the desired participation (section 1). Pedagogy and subject didactics are not unaffected by this. How do subject didactics position themselves with regard to education for participation, and what are their social scientific points of reference (section 2)? Which social scientific findings on participation are of particular relevance for subject didactics (section 3)? Which conclusions should be drawn from this for future work in subject didactics (section 4)?

1. Political pressure

Subject didactics have also been facing political pressure for years. They are expected to instigate and lead curricular and extracurricular activities in order to increase the civic and social participation of young people.

Since the 1990s, both the European Union and the Council of Europe have been pushing increased participation on the part of citizens; to this end, they have launched a number of programmes (cf. Keating, 2014). They work with key concepts such as «participation», «active citizenship», «good citizenship» and «active participant». At the national level, too, programmes aimed at fostering participation are flourishing.

As is generally known, elections are considered to be *the* legitimation process in democracies and the most important *conventional* form of political participation. For this reason, decreasing voter turnout is considered to be an indicator of a political system's decreasing acceptance, weakening its legitimation. This produces anxiety and a perceived need to take action. Such apprehensions increase along with financial and economic crises and their consequences for trust in the system and participation (Hoskins et al., 2012). Against this background, the state and policy-makers feel compelled to implement countermeasures: a task that is gladly entrusted to and willingly assumed by education policy (cf. Keating & Kerr, 2013).

The first problem area is therefore notoriously low voter turnout, above all among young adults, and in particular at European elections, despite the fact that, in many countries and for many years, age has normally been the best predictor of turnout (Norris, 2002). The failure of

[1] In Scandinavia and Continental Europe «subject didactics», «didactics of the school subject» – in German «Fachdidaktik», in French «la didactique des disciplines», in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish «fagdidaktik(k)» –, are understood as disciplines which do research «in everything related to the history, legitimization, content, teaching, and learning of the subjects of the curriculum» (Gundem, Karseth, & Sivesind, 2003: 527); cf. Schäfer (2010).

young people to vote has encouraged EU policy-makers to look for strategies and instruments that will improve participation among the youth (Keating, 2014).

The second problem area is the unsatisfactory or precarious social cohesion in individual countries and across Europe generally. «Citizenship is also understood as a factor of social cohesion» (Cecchini, 2003: 4). Therefore, members of society should increase their social participation activities and in so doing contribute to cohesion, consensus and harmony (Biesta, 2009; Zimenkova, 2013a). The relevant keywords are «engagement policy», «democracy learning» and «service learning» (Olk & Klein, 2009; Zimenkova, 2013b).

Owing to increasing migration flows, this problem area is attracting growing attention. Civic and citizen participation appears to be the ideal tool for integration (e.g., Meyer, 2001; Munro, 2008).

European and national participation policies address a third problem area: economic competitiveness and the promotion of growth. Relevant recommendations for the promotion of social cohesion, for example, from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) or the European Union, accompany the implementation of neo-liberal policies and in so doing expel issues of social inequality from the field of vision (e.g., Eizaguirre, Pradel, Terrones, Martinez-Celorrio, & Garcia, 2012). The EU Commission thus postulates a connection between «employability», «economic competitiveness», «active citizenship» and «social cohesion» (cf. Hoskins et al., 2012: 77). Adequate and up-to-date knowledge and skills are required for both, so that a person can participate in and contribute to economic and social life (Keating, 2014). From this point of view, even entrepreneurship education appears as an instrument for increased participation (Jung, 2011, critical e.g., Komulainen, Naskali, Korhonen, & Keskitalo-Foley, 2011).

Against this backdrop, then, what does an ideal citizen look like, according to participation policies (cf. case studies Mosher, 2015; Zhu, 2015)?

The comparative education researcher Avril Keating examined this question based on EU participation programmes:

> The (ideal) European citizen is the educated citizen, one that has been schooled and skilled for participation in post-modern and globalised societies. (…) The ideal citizen must also adhere to civic and democratic values, and be an active participant in all aspects of civic life and in creating a shared future not only for themselves, but also for Europe. (2014: 90)

Voter turnout, cohesion and economic growth are therefore proving to be the core objectives of current European participation policies. For the most part, this also applies to national policies, which generate a diverse array of programmes and activities. A broad range of actors participate in these – including subject didactics and schools.

How do subject didactics conceive of their relationship to political participation?

2. Subject didactics and participation

Before subject didactics can position themselves in regard to political participation, they must first define the term (cf. Roberts, 2004). Unsurprisingly, there are many, widely varying definitions of participation.

For example, German economics subject didactics applies a broad notion of participation (Jung, 2009). According to this definition, economic participation refers to participating or partaking in livelihood-securing economic activities or processes, such as consuming, working, saving and investing (Jung, 2009). In this sense, almost everyone participates almost always and almost everywhere. Similarly comprehensive concepts of participation are used in the context of engagement learning and service learning (cf. critical viewpoint Zimenkova, 2013b). Such all-inclusive categories serve as a projection surface and legitimation formula for many purposes.

By contrast, I am primarily using a strong concept of *political* participation here. According to this definition, participation is first of all about the sharing of power and about decisions regarding rules and resources. Direct participation demands the sharing of power between, on the one hand, citizens who do not hold office or administrative positions, and civil servants with decision-making authority and power on the other (Roberts, 2004).

Secondly, participation concerns issues that those involved consider to be important or substantial (Roberts, 2008a). In this sense, I understand social and economic participation also as strong concepts, given that here too the first and foremost concern is the sharing of power, opportunity and resources.

Learning something and education for something

In the following, I differentiate between participation as a subject or topic, that is «learning something», and participation education as «education to or for something». The first approach refers primarily to the acquisition of knowledge and skills, while education for participation, by contrast, refers above all to changing attitudes and changing how people act.

As an element of *subject* learning in schools, participation is frequently allocated to the social studies domain and its sub-domains of politics, society, economy, law and history. At the same time, participation can be an objective of school programmes. As *education for*, participation is part of a long tradition of other *educations for*, and its approach is similar to that of health education, environmental education, traffic education, career guidance, etc.

All approaches to *education for* have four general features in common (Simonneaux, Tutiaux-Guillon, & Legardez, 2012). First of all, they are thematic in substance and either interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary. They therefore transcend the horizontally arrayed discipli-

nary divisions of the school. Secondly, they are closely linked to social controversies and problems. They engage the actors directly for their cause because they consider themselves to be the answer to a societal demand that education be education *for* something. Thirdly, they are based on specific values and exclude other values. Their values have the task of justifying the respective rules and regulations which learners are supposed to follow in life. Fourthly, their explicit objective is generally to change attitudes and actions: «The objective is to understand in order to act and to act in order to change oneself, change society, and even to change the world» (Simonneaux et al., 2012: 18).

Conceptions that demand education be education *for* something have two significant consequences (Simonneaux et al., 2012; cf. Morén & Aldenmyr, 2015). On the one hand, they question the status and the legitimacy of customary scientific, academic, social and school knowledges. On the other hand, they pose a controversial question: How can notions of *education for* be combined with the prevailing culture of teaching and learning? Inevitably, *education for* is positioned both above and parallel to the structures and contents of the various subjects. Both challenges are usually dismissed by representatives of subject didactics, which in many countries, including Germany, maintain a largely discipline-oriented self-conception. They tend to adhere to conventional, academically oriented knowledge cultures and established mono-disciplinary structures of knowledge. They see the latter as the epitome of scientificity and hold them up as superordinate normative guidelines with which the school subjects simply have to comply (cf. as an example for Germany, Seeber, Retzmann, Remmele, & Jongebloed, 2012; regarding the debate in France, e.g., Chatel, 2010).

Under these conditions, at least three areas of tension are produced by the various forms of *education for* in general, as well as by its particular form of *education for participation.*

Tensions concerning «education for»

A first line of tension runs between the genuinely transdisciplinary character of each form of *education for* and the insistence that knowledge be structured along the lines of scientific disciplines or school subjects (cf. Simonneaux et al., 2012: 18). In economics didactics, this tension concerns primarily the mono-disciplinary concepts prevalent there. The majority of political didactics specialists in Europe consider citizenship education to be multidisciplinary in nature (e.g., Huddleston, 2005; Feyfant, 2010; Sander, 2010). This also applies to multidisciplinary-styled socio-economic education (Fischer & Zurstrassen, 2014). The tension between disciplinarity and *education for* is also evident in the didactic, curricular and content relation *between* citizenship or civic education and economic or socio-economic education (cf. Simonneaux, 2006).

A second line of tension confronts the goal of modern education, namely the production of an autonomous and identitarian subject, with that intensive intervention into autonomy which every

form of *education for* is supposed to bring about. This is because *education for* demands that the individual proactively changes him or herself, his or her actions and the world (Simonneaux et al., 2012). The individual is expected, for example, to feel *ecologically*, think *ecologically*, act *ecologically* and become politically active for ecology.

Demands of the type «You must change your life!» or «You must change society» (or at least your attitudes) are looming large in political didactics, or citizenship education, as well as in economic didactics (cf. Šimenc, 2009). This is just as evident for multicultural, human rights and sustainability education as it is for consumer, finance and entrepreneurship education.

A third area of tension arises from two alternative self-understandings of subject didactics. *Education for* can be conceived either as a critical approach or as a social-engineering project.

Conceptions of education that conceive of themselves explicitly as critical are primarily found in citizenship or political didactics and related discourses (e.g., Lösch & Thimmel, 2010; Johnson & Morris, 2010; Agnello & Lucey, 2008). In this area, however, it is also not uncommon to encounter approaches motivated by social-engineering, particularly in the context of *education for participation.*

Social-engineering serves more commonly as intention and legitimation in economic didactics, however. For example, the founding principle of *entrepreneurship education* supports both the policy of economic growth and the socio-political policy of risk individualisation; the main motive for finance education fits well into the policy of private capital-based pension schemes (cf. Arthur, 2012).

A number of questions related to subject didactics arise from these brief reflections on *education for*: Do subject didactics want to safeguard their *scientific* autonomy in the face of political expectations? Will subject didactics have the self-confidence to refuse the tasks politics would assign to education? How can subject didactics safeguard their autonomy? How tenaciously are subject didactics in the social science domain defending the autonomy of the *students*?

To my knowledge, these questions remain largely unanswered with regard to *education for participation.* Participatory education, therefore, is still an ambiguous and ambivalent political project. This applies to the conceptual and theoretical basis of education for participation, too.

Concept and theory of participation

Pedagogical and subject didactic approaches to citizenship education often fail to establish the social scientific foundation of participation (cf. also, e.g., Sack, 2013). Yet, participation, citizenship and democracy are persistently contentious concepts. They are the subject of a series of long-standing and ramified controversies (Roberts, 2004, 2008b; cf. Pateman, 1970; Kocka & Merkel, 2015).

Therefore, first of all, participation as a learning objective and *education for participation* encompass starkly different contents and intentions, depending on the theoretical framework.

This is because elitist, pluralistic, deliberative, agonistic, participative, activist and cosmopolitan models of democracy each have different definitions of problems, forms of participation and competencies (cf. e.g., Bellamy & Castiglione, 2013; Sack, 2013; Toots, 2013; Della Porta, 2013; Ruitenberg, 2009). The value base of participation varies considerably even from a formal perspective. Models of thick democracy, for example, assume that citizens share a set of common values embodied in implicit conceptions of the common good, while thin democracy assumes that citizens' values (also) starkly differ (Bellamy & Castiglione, 2013).

It depends, therefore, on the implications inherent in a given concept of participation. Each concept entails different political strategies and instrumentalisations, varying scopes of action, opportunities for impact and potential for change (cf. Salomon & Studt, 2014).

A second differentiation concerns the effective political direction of participation policies. Does a particular notion of participation entail «top-down» approaches to participation policy and education (Sack, 2013)? That is to say, are the state and its institutions demanding or expecting increased citizen participation?

Or does it, on the other hand, imply participatory activities «from below»? That is to say, are citizens demanding the right to participate in decision-making processes or even succeeding in winning them, as in the example of labour immigrants (Kemp, Raijman, Resnik, & Gesser, 2000)? «Processes of transition from below», for example, provide examples in which human rights organisations, labour unions and churches, among others, have contributed to the delegitimation of authoritarian regimes (Della Porta & Federico, 2013).

Or does a particular notion of participation even entail participation movements «from the outside» that are initiated and carried out by non-citizens, such as are becoming relevant in the current, multifarious context of migration (cf. Olson, 2013)? The flipside of this is the exclusion of the diverse, precarious residents who are common today in virtually every country (Gibney, 2011).

Thirdly, arguments for participation arise from very different political perspectives. From an analytical point of view, we can distinguish five main approaches to conceptualising political participation, which in practice can be combined: functionalist, neo-liberal, deliberative, anthropological and post-modern (Renn & Schweizer, 2012). Considering recent political theory, we should add agonistic participation as an alternative to currently prevailing deliberative approaches (Mouffe, 1999).

Fourthly, we come across different notions concerning the legitimate fields of participation. Does the demand for increased participation relate only to politics and society? Or does it also include the economy?

The expectations of increased participation also differ systematically. They can be analytically categorised into two types. The first expects participation to foster the smooth functioning of the established political and social institutions. This is a perspective based on general systemic functionalism (cf. Hedtke, 2013). This type of participation policy belongs in the category of «social engineering» (Sack, 2013: 32).

A second type is counting on participation – above all in the form of individual civic and social engagement – to compensate for the gaps created by the revocation of welfare state provisions (cf. Nóvoa, 2007; Kamat, 2004). What this comes down to is an instrumentalisation of the citizens with regard to certain public policies by additional forms of participation. It can be characterised as a neo-liberal communitarian perspective. This approach dominates relevant EU policy and fits well with the new demands being made of the employee entrepreneur, the entrepreneurial self and the life-long learner (Hager, 2009).

A third type of expectation relies on the assumption that the general public will be better able to represent their interests, or have them represented for them, by means of more or different kinds of participation. This is intended to favour above all those groups that have largely been silenced in the political process to date (cf. e.g., Klatt & Walter, 2014). This is an advocacy type of approach. It is closely related to the attitude of expectation that increased or differently modelled participation can contribute to a reduction in social, political and/or economic inequality. It can be characterised as a tendency towards an egalitarian position.

This outline shows that subject didactics need to clarify with which notions and positions they associate themselves and what they stand for. Are they positioning their concept of participation in the critical and emancipatory tradition? Do they stand for the right to *genuine* co-determination on the basis of the *genuine* sharing of decision-making powers? Direct participation is then about power-sharing between citizens who don't hold office or administrative positions, on the one hand, and civil servants who have decision-making authority and power on the other hand (Roberts, 2004).

Are subject didactics demanding genuine rights and practical participation for children and youth in the day-to-day life of the education system, or are they rather remaining remote from them and the practitioners, i.e. school management and teachers (Leinonen, Brotherus, & Venninen, 2014)?

Are they directing their understanding of participation towards the democratisation of the polity *and* the economy?

Will they go along with it when politics transforms the *right* to participation into a *duty* to participate in specific policies and expect, for example, that individual social engagement compensate for cutbacks in welfare state provisions (Newman & Tonkens, 2011)?

To what model of citizenship do subject didactics subscribe? Do they take into account the fact that differing normative concepts of the good citizen correspond to different theoretical con-

cepts in civic practice that in turn entail differences in participatory behaviour (Bolzendahl & Coffé, 2013)? Do they continue practicing the educational mainstream of «dispassionate analysis and rational deliberation», or are they courageously building a political classroom and «educating political adversaries» within liberal democracies (Andersson, 2016; Ruitenberg, 2009: 276; cf. Hess & McAvoy, 2014)?

In responding to these questions, subject didactics engaged in *education for participation* must take account of the state of the debate within the social sciences. I would now like to introduce briefly some findings from social science research that are, in my view, particularly relevant to education.

3. Social science analyses

Optimism about political and pedagogical participation is widespread. Much of the discourse about participation policy, including pertinent contributions to subject didactics, is based on the assumption that participation is good and more participation is better. Rarely does anyone dare to argue the case *against* more participation, or even for less of it.

How far-reaching are these assumptions and expectations? A glance at social-scientific research is, above all, sobering. Three relationships provide a telling example of this: the relationship between economic and political inequality, the relationship between financial capitalism and democracy and the relationship between political participation and exclusion.

3.1. Economic and political inequality

It is a truism of elections research that greater participation equals less social *bias* (Schäfer, 2010). Empirical research shows that inequality in political participation and efficacy more or less reflects the socio-economic inequality of the citizenry (Schäfer, 2010).

This applies first to *conventional* participation through representation on the basis of elections. In this sense, the lower class is, relatively speaking, worse off in all respects as compared to the middle or upper class (Lehmann, Regal, & Schlote, 2015). In their analysis of the broken promise of US American democracy, Schlozman, Verba and Brady (2013: 5) state that «those who are not affluent and well educated are less likely to take part politically and are even less likely to be represented by the activity of organized interests». The close connection between economic and political inequality is also evident in international comparisons (Weßels, 2015).

Social inequality has a negative effect on voter knowledge in the lower classes, thus preventing effective and interest-based voting (Weßels, 2015). Even if members of the lower class participate

to a far greater extent in elections and their share of the votes increases substantially, it does not necessarily improve the representation of their interests within the political system (for the USA, Flavin, 2012; Gilens, 2012). However, we must be careful not to make hasty generalisations, as political institutions and the culture of a country can have a modifying influence. The pre-dominant *bias* in post-communist European countries thus appears to consist of an over-representation of elderly people whose image of the state is informed by the experience of socialism (White & McAllister, 2007).

If teaching is now pushing learners towards forming politico-economic judgements that are strongly *oriented towards the common good*, this will reduce the representation of the interests of weaker citizens even more. If the disadvantaged learn to orient themselves towards the good of *all people*, this will prevent them from using participation for their *own* interests. This only reinforces their disadvantage.

Moreover, participation in conventional forms of participation such as elections is decreasing in many countries. In Europe, it is particularly the poorly educated and less affluent who are abstaining from participation (cf. on the following Schäfer, 2009). They do not expect politics to improve their socio-economic situation, nor do they any longer even hope for a compensatory social policy. They have no expectations at all of democracy (Blühdorn, 2013). Even for the «eroding middle class», democracy is losing «its appeal» (Blühdorn, 2013: 155).

Social inequality is on the rise almost everywhere, and almost everywhere, the respective form of capitalism is accepted as having no alternative. The states and their administrations appear to be completely overwhelmed by the apparent lack of alternatives: they are like prisoners in a system who have no choice but to serve the needs of the system.

This will have consequences for democracy. For under these conditions, two fundamental promises of democracy lose their credibility in dramatic fashion: the promise of equal opportunity of participation and the promise of a *collectively legitimised* configuration of the economy and of society (Schäfer, 2009). The first promise is crushed under conditions of real inequality. The second promise disintegrates under the real or supposed constraints of the system, resulting in a further increase in inequality.

In view of the disappointment arising from these failings of democracy, advocates of democratic participation hope to reduce the asymmetry by means of direct or unconventional forms of participation. The trend shows that the latter are indeed increasing in terms of frequency, degree of mobilisation and formal variety (e.g., Norris, 2002). They differ systematically both from electoral participation and from conventional civic activities. They are invested with political hope for a broader mobilisation of the citizenry. Social movements, as a form of direct participation, are even expected to contribute to (further) democratisation in transition countries (Della Porta & Federico, 2013).

Empirical evidence shows, however, that there is little new forms can do to counteract participatory inequality. On the one hand, forms of direct democracy such as plebiscites do a much poorer job of fostering the political inclusion of the lower classes than representative, that is to say indirect, forms of participation (Merkel, 2014a). On the other hand, it is above all those citizens who are already politically active in a conventional manner, who are well-educated and work in management or academic occupations, who use unconventional forms of participation as a supplemental way of garnering publicity for their causes (e.g., Nève & Olteanu, 2013; Norris, 2002).

In many countries, the participants in political demonstrations are highly educated members of the middle and upper social classes (Norris, 2002). However, protest activities are finding growing support and broader participation, in particular among people of middle age, which are increasingly «normalising» protest activities.

Increased participation beyond conventional representational forms thus primarily favours those who already have a disproportionate level of resources and influence. As a result, «social inequality is reinforced by a political dimension» (Pickel, 2012: 55; cf. Schäfer & Schoen, 2013).

This also applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to deliberative forms of participation. In pre-supposing a high level of *argumentative* competence, they intensify political disadvantages or exclusions caused by educational inequality (Toots, 2013). Inequality in education therefore creates inequality in democracy. While non-institutionalised forms of participation strongly foster education-based inequality, they clearly reduce inequality on the basis of gender and youth (Marien, Hooghe, & Quintelier, 2010). The diagnosis of an educational bias does not imply, however, the imputation of a lack of *decision-making* competence on the part of voters; their competence has proven to be entirely adequate, for example, in EU referenda (e.g., Hobolt, 2009).

If subject didactics wishes to do something about this inequality, it should focus on three challenges in particular. First of all, it should empower young people to rationally analyse their own economic, social and political situation and in so doing to work out *their own* collective and individual interests. Secondly, it should familiarise young people with procedures by means of which they can establish which parties actually best represent their interests with their policies. Thirdly, it should encourage young people to vote, if possible always, and, as far as possible, always with their own interests in mind. These three tasks of subject didactics are highly conventional. Yet here, too, a look at the empirical data is sobering. In international European comparison, it has been shown that schools and teaching only have a minor influence on attitudes towards Europe and on turnout for European elections (Keating, 2014). A more important role is played by individual experiences and preferences as well as the political attitudes of the learners and, in particular, of their parents (Keating, 2014).

Anyone who really wants young people to vote in elections and to engage more in politics should initiate professional political and media campaigns (Keating, 2014). These generally have

a powerfully energising effect and are more effective than education. They motivate people to go to the polls, bind attitudes and voting decisions more closely to one another and strengthen voters' appreciation of their own knowledge (Hobolt, 2009).

Indeed, increasing political participation is *above all* a task of politics and *less* a function of schools and teaching. So what is left for subject didactics to do? The task of subject didactics is to provide more and better education in the political, social and economic domain. It should concentrate on its main task: educating people about the conditions that cause inequality and exclusion and educating people about the actual options available to them for participation.

In doing so, particular attention should be paid, above all, to the relationship between capitalism and democracy and its consequences for participation.

3.2. Capitalism and democracy

I will begin with a remarkable observation from the general school systems of Germany, Austria and France: contemporary capitalism is not dealt with in the curricula (Bundesminister für Unterricht und Kunst, 2016; Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2013). Further curriculum analyses remain to be done, but the situation is presumably similar in other European countries. In those places where capitalism is not part of the curriculum, the learners are missing out on a central concept for the analysis of the economic *and* social system that defines the 21st century. At the same time, they fail to grasp how the economic system determines the limits of politics. Moreover, students are prevented from understanding the European Union's anti-democratic tendencies as an «instrumentation of the forces of democracy at various levels, draining them of their critical efficacy and transforming them into tools for justification» of the contemporary capitalism (Salais, 2015: 195). Keeping silence on capitalism in the classroom contributes to this justification strategy.

In the social sciences, by contrast, the analysis of capitalism and capitalisms has always been a core scientific task. Curricula that blank out capitalism thus fail to realise the principle of scientific orientation of all teaching and learning. The didactic principle of scientific orientation demands an examination of the relationship between capitalism and democracy.

This topic has been discussed, for example, by the social scientific historian Jürgen Kocka and the comparative political scientist Wolfgang Merkel (Kocka & Merkel, 2015; cf. also Merkel, 2014b). They consider the most important elements of capitalism to be the central function of markets for the purchase and sale of goods, including competition and pricing mechanisms, the ongoing increase in commodification, the decentralisation of economic decisions and the return-oriented investment and re-investment of capital and its effects of promoting and accelerating change and growth (Kocka & Merkel, 2015).

They diagnose a new phase of capitalism in which neo-liberal capitalism, having been successfully implemented, is superseded. The new capitalism is marked by intensified deregulation and privatisation, increased commodification, the partial dismantling of the welfare state, increasing globalisation, the expanding power of international finance capital and consequently growing socio-economic inequality (Kocka & Merkel, 2015).

According to Kocka and Merkel, the logics of capitalism and democracy are hardly compatible.

> Under capitalism, decisions and their implementation lead to a degree of economic and social inequality (of income, wealth, power and life chances) that is hardly acceptable in a democracy built on principles based on equal rights, opportunities and duties. Vice versa, full application of democratic decision-making – general and equal participation as well as majority decisions and minority protection – is unconceivable according to the rules of capitalism. Thus, capitalism is not democratic, democracy not capitalist. (2015: 313)

It follows that the «basic logics of capitalism and democracy are fundamentally different and lead to considerable tension between the two» (Merkel, 2014b: 113).

However, they do maintain that there are also affinities between capitalism and democracy. The affinities can be seen above all in the principles of competition and choice (Kocka & Merkel, 2015: 314). Nonetheless, the fact that the compatibility of capitalism with democracy has «decreased considerably» is essentially due to radical neo-liberalism and deregulated finance capitalism (Kocka & Merkel, 2015; Merkel, 2014b).

Such findings have a powerful effect on participation. This is because they establish the existence of structural, comprehensive limits on opportunities for participation which increasingly thwart *education for participation* (on the following Merkel, 2014b; Kocka & Merkel, 2015).

Economic and political decisions are being systematically denationalised, deterritorialised and expedited, and are increasingly in the hands of state executives and globally operating economic elites. It is claimed that this is to the detriment of the parliaments, for it curtails representative participation and restricts the constitutionally guaranteed democratic legitimation of decisions. At the same time, socio-economic inequality is growing.

Socio-economic inequality violates the principle of political equality. It disadvantages the lower classes, making political participation more asymmetrical, which further disadvantages them. The result is socio-economic and political «lower class exclusion» with less participation and poor(er) representation (Kocka & Merkel, 2015: 318, 324).

It is also maintained that the significance and influence of collective actors such as unions have long been decreasing. This further weakens the representation of the interests of the lower social classes and strengthens the trend towards exclusion.

This kind of exclusion becomes more marked as it becomes increasingly difficult to enforce state redistribution policies from the top down against the interests of globally mobile capital

(Kocka & Merkel, 2015). The losers in globalisation and financialisation therefore move further and further away from the system of political representation.

As we know, there are many different historical and contemporary types of capitalism and democracy, obviously also in Europe (cf., e.g., Hall & Soskice, 2001; Bochsler & Kriesi, 2013). Some of these combinations of capitalism and democracy are more compatible than others (cf. Kocka & Merkel, 2015). Completely real political alternatives, some of which have already been realised, do exist.

However, because the current form of capitalism is not on the agenda, the tension between capitalism and democracy and participation cannot be addressed. It would appear that the curricula in many countries are restricted mainly to their own national institutional systems and that they present the type of democracy that has become established in that country and in their national version of capitalism. As a rule, it would seem, they refer to the latter as market economy. In this way, learners develop the impression that there are no political alternatives. For the loser groups mentioned above, «no alternatives» reads like «hopelessness» for their own future. Generally speaking, the lack of a political alternative has a crippling effect on participation and the willingness to participate. In contrast, clearly contrasting positions do a better job of motivating citizens to participate in political processes (Hobolt, 2009: 158).

What is the relationship between exclusion and the depoliticisation that results from an apparent lack of alternatives?

3.3. Political participation and exclusion

Nobody who speaks about participation should be silent on exclusion. Political participation and social exclusion are closely interwoven. Social exclusion is a relational, dynamic and multidimensional notion which has to be defined more precisely in terms of education, ethnicity and gender, social capital and urban space, culture and recognition, and income and wealth (cf. Byrne, 2005, 2008). Moreover, exclusion is a contested notion. It has been criticised as a strategic political discourse that aims to conceal persistent poverty and inequality, individualising its causes and shifting the responsibility to the excluded who failed to behave as an entrepreneurial self (Byrne, 2005; Peters, 2001; Mitchell, 2006). Therefore, education for participation begins with a critical examination of the topic of exclusion (cf. Kronauer, 2015). It must make the phenomenon of socio-economic marginalisation a topic for discussion and ask questions about the *systematic* causes and dynamics of exclusion and non-participation. We shall take the concept of post-democracy as an example for our discussion.

According to the strong concept of post-democracy or «simulative democracy», there is no longer any hope for a renaissance of social democracy and its culture of participation. It therefore

contradicts the «more optimistic» positions of scholars like Jürgen Kocka, Wolfgang Merkel and Colin Crouch, on the one hand. On the other hand, this concept views the phenomenon – which the aforementioned scholars lament as a crisis symptom of conventional participation – as an achievement that is *also* emancipatory and democratising. The citizens wish to free themselves from the old, hierarchical and inflexible form of participation and use forms of participation that allow for more self-determination (cf. Blühdorn, 2009, 2013).

This apparently results in the depoliticisation of citizens and the depoliticisation of issues and governance. In view of the hyper-complexity of politics and personal life today, depoliticisation serves as a conscious strategy to reduce complexity; this also applies to public administration and to politics (Blühdorn, 2009).

Furthermore, the predominant politics is a politics of objectivisation. It is oriented normatively towards the type of objectivity that is claimed by science, law or system imperatives. This amounts to a «logic of depoliticisation» (Blühdorn, 2009, 2013).

In addition, more democracy means more self-responsibility for the citizens, something they do not necessarily want. They are already overwhelmed by increasing complexity and turbulence, by normative and material insecurity and by the considerable demands on the management of their everyday lives (Blühdorn, 2013).

In addition, even as regards their identity formation and self-realisation, citizens largely allow themselves to be led by the imperative of system conformity (Blühdorn, 2013). System conformity internalised to this extent drains all substance from the notion of participation as a means of changing conditions from the bottom up.

We have already noted that *social* inequality leads to inequality in *political* participation. The two inequalities strengthen each other reciprocally (for the USA, Bartels, 2009). But inequality in participation also results from participation *itself* (on the following, Blühdorn, 2013). This is proven by the example of *network governance*.

Network governance describes a decentralised, cooperative, consensus-oriented and mainly informal policy. Government and administrations decide who may and who may not participate, generally favouring the groups of modernisation and globalisation winners. Therefore, participation becomes an instrument used against the marginalised and the excluded.

To summarise the findings, it can be said that, overall, participation has changed fundamentally in post-democracy.

4. Subject didactics: critical inquiry or aligned activation?

These social scientific findings have serious consequences for participation education programmes and practices. First of all, in line with the criterion of effectiveness, it would appear to make more sense to engage in participation *policy* rather than participation *education*, given that school *education for* participation seems to have by comparison a rather limited effect on the social reality of participation. Secondly, protagonists of school *education for* participation must fear that the conventional objects, options, motivations and goals of this approach are *fully* disappearing. Thirdly, they have to expect that participation *from above* will be directed *against* the marginalised and consequently *against* participation *from below*. These findings cast doubt on the main legitimation of education for participation, which is to promote the participation of the marginalised. If *education for* participation is further called for and practised without attention to these problems, as has been the case to date, it will come under strong suspicion of being ideology, in the sense of simulating something for which there is less and less correspondence in socio-political reality.

Nonetheless, the conceptual subject didactic and practical teaching work on the *topic* of participation remains important, for it enables, communicates and strengthens the perception, analysis, reflection and interpretation of social reality. The most important thing is therefore: doing critical social science in the classroom and creating communities of inquiry (Splitter, 2011)!

Today, the main cause of inequality, marginalisation and exclusion is attributable to the globalised and financialised capitalist economic system and its effects. This is why subject didactics and teaching work has to focus on this. In fact, however, we usually encounter an eloquent silence on this point because questioning or criticising the system is usually avoided in curricula, school and teaching.

Against this backdrop, subject didactics that have chosen *education for* participation as their programme have two tasks of enlightenment to work on at the same time: they must engage in their own social-scientific self-enlightenment and they must guide and accompany the social-scientific enlightenment of the learners.

If scholars of subject didactics in the domain of social sciences wish to do more, they should engage in promoting political participation in schools *as organisations* and in enabling and strengthening participation here and now. That would then be about *politics* in schools and *more power* for the learners. Unambiguous evidence is not available and we can, therefore, only hope that genuine school political participation on the part of the learners will encourage their political competence and activities (Reichert, 2014; Solhaug, 2008; but sceptical, e.g., Dieltiens, 2000).

However, the trend in education appears to be going in the opposite direction in many countries. For example, education policies, ministries and trade associations, and even teachers

themselves are increasingly pushing *political* topics to the margins. Particularly affected are those educational programmes that have a proportionally high number of educationally *disadvantaged* people who also belong to groups that are excluded from political participation.

Very often, education policy and education practice dispense with critical social-scientific inquiry and self-reflection, instead sending the learners into an endless loop of career guidance. In this way, the losers in globalisation and economisation gathered there are systematically barred from acquiring any knowledge about the *causes* of their situation and about alternative *political* solutions. And as if that were not enough, they are told that they are first and foremost personally and individually responsible for their own *collective* fate.

It doesn't stop there. In many countries they are then also bombarded with programmes imported from US American education policy and promoted by the OECD and the EU Commission, such as *entrepreneurship education* (cf. European Commission, 2014; critical, e.g., for Finland, Komulainen et al., 2011). These programmes do not merely jettison the democratic, collective promise of equality and participation in favour of striving for employability and market success (cf. for Sweden, Beramendi & Anderson, 2008). They then place in its stead the promise – which can only be honoured for the *individual* – that occupational success will come about just as soon as they start managing their lives like an entrepreneur manages his company. In view of the current research in the social sciences regarding the degree and the causes of inequality, this is a deplorable level of cynicism.

What is thus called for is humility when it comes to participation education, as well as a focus on social-scientific, theoretically and empirically informed education *about* participation and inequality. Subject didactics should concentrate on its core competence and first work on two questions as they relate to their specific domains: «What is the case?» and «What is behind it?» (cf. Luhmann, 1993). Then, the further question can be asked: «What can be done?».

With the conception, guidance and evaluation of social-scientific enlightenment in the classroom, subject didactics has more than enough work to keep itself busy for many years to come. It can, therefore, confidently leave *mobilisation* for participation to politics. Participation is a genuinely political task and politics has more resources to deal with it than pedagogy does. One way or the other, the responsibility for participation lies with politics.

Acknowledgements: *I am very grateful to the journal editors and anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback.*

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