

Youth services, youth policy and political participation – customer as an active citizen?

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1. Introduction

The aim of this presentation is to analyse the different kind of participation and power relations in the context of youth work, youth services, youth policy and political participation. The analysis is based on the experiences of youth project *Successful lessons* in Finland (Tarvainen ect. 2007; Kuure ect. 2008).

The project *Successful lessons* (“Onnistuvat opit”) was an embedding project commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and financed by the European Social Fund that was realised by Social Development Co Ltd, the National Centre for Professional Development in Education and the National Workshop Association in Finland. The term of the project was from 15 August 2005 to 31 January 2008.

The aim of the project was to disseminate activities in accordance with the model ‘learn a lesson’, which was developed earlier. The model is a simplified description of the process through which measures to prevent social exclusion of young persons leaving basic education and entering post-basic education are proposed to be developed in municipalities and through which they could be embedded in the permanent structures.¹ The project gathered together multisectoral cooperation networks and initiated on the basis of them local activities in the municipalities of the area and supported local actors in establishing the activities. The project *Successful lessons* helped the municipal authorities to build up operational models based on cooperation of the different administrative sectors so as to be able to target services to those young persons entering post-basic education who are in need of support.

The target group was 15-17 years of age young people in transition from compulsory school to secondary education (vocational school and high school). The project focus was young people who are in need of support but the development of youth service system concerns all young people.

Our question is, how do the political and implementation process face young people and what kind of role they have in the different spheres of the process? We divide the process into three spheres: politics, youth policy and youth services.

¹ The results and outcomes of social projects are always some kind of better practices or social innovations in youth work or in social services. The problem is how to mainstream or disseminate the innovations to the social environment of the project or how to move and embed the innovations to the permanent structure of main organisation and everyday work.

2. Different spheres, agendas and roles of participation

The discussion in political sphere could be characterised as open discussion and debate, in where the solutions are not clear. The outcomes of the discussion are some kind of political decisions, which in national level in many case means new law and legislation. After the new law have been made by parliament, the implementation process starts in administration in order to achieve goals set in political discussion. The service system that faces the citizen takes place in local level and in communities.

However, the discussion in different spheres like politics, policy, implementation and service system does not continue linear way without breaks and discontinuities. Vice versa. In the context of European Union is used to say that the political guidelines are made in European level, the legislation is made in national level and the job is done in local level. The breaks and discontinuities are to be seen in agendas, roles and rhetoric.

First. The agendas in different spheres differ.

In the political sphere of society the agendas are broad and nowadays most of them are global. The biggest demonstrations during last years in which young people have participated are environmental questions or other questions in global level – and those themes are not special just for young people. Environmental and global political debate is for every age group. As a matter of fact, out of the discussions in the political sphere there is hard to identify or make distinctions of groups by using age as a variable.

In the sphere of implementation the political debate transforms into policies like youth policy and the agenda changes. In national and European Union level the focus is in youth policy the living conditions and participation of young people.

In the sphere of youth service system in local level the focus is in the services offered to young people. In our case in Finland the youth service system means comprehensive system that produces services like school, work, leisure time activities, social care etc. to young people.

Second. The role of young participant differs in different spheres.

In the political sphere of society young people act as active participants. They open new kind of political discussions, themes and forms of political participation and they make the agenda of their own. The word for an actor is *active citizen*.

In the implementation sphere of society young people act as part of governance of society. In this point of view the youth policy in national level and European Union level is implementation of the decisions made in political sphere. The discussion in implementation process is closer and the agenda made by authorities. The young people are *heard* in the process – to use the expression well known in rhetoric of governing citizens and managing organisations. In the political discussion people are not *heard* or *consulted* but they are powerful actors of the discussion and construction of new agenda. The word for an actor in the context of governance is *stakeholder*.

In the local level where the job will be done and process faces the facts of everyday life, in other words, the service system of society faces citizens. In the local level citizens including young people act like customers in social service system. The sphere is not called sphere of markets but sphere of quasi-markets (Kähkönen 2007). The difference between markets and quasi-markets is in the relations between customer and provider. In the normal markets relationship there are two kinds of actors, customers and providers. In the quasi-markets of social services there are three kinds of actors: 1) public purchaser of services, 2) public or private provider of the services, 3) citizen, who uses the social service.

In the sphere of quasi-markets people do not vote or they are not heard or consulted as stakeholders or actors but treated as customers. The agenda of the services and all the contracts are done by purchasers and providers. The customer is outside the process and he/she can't act like in normal markets, that is to say, vote by his/her feet, walk away and take another service. Customer does not have direct power relations to the service providers. The power relation is between purchaser and provider. The word for an actor is *customer*.

Third. Rhetoric in different spheres

New public management –type of governing society is mixed with private –type of management and public –type of bureaucracy, in other word managerialism . The production of services is based on practices and theories borrowed from private enterprises and management. The rhetoric that is used in EU-policy documents, policy programmes of government of Finland (prime minister Vanhanen II cabinet) and in local service systems is same managerial rhetoric. The rhetorical gap is mostly to be seen between young people political interest (focus on global, environmental questions) and governmental youth policy (focus on living conditions and participation). The political sphere lives its' own life and social service system its' own life maybe having some fragmental appointments every now and then. In that kind of situation it is very easy to understand that political system in Finland does not fit or correspond with young people interests.

III The multiplicity of service system and diversity-management

The services of welfare state are organised in local level and local communities. Young person with questions of his/her everyday life faces very complicated system of services. There are lot of services available but not easy to find when you are in trouble or need of special kind of service. (See figures 1 and 2)

The providers of the service are different by their background like local government, NGO, private enterprise, church and even state. The public bureaucracy is divided into policy sectors like social, culture, education, leisure time etc. There are two mains questions to be solved: 1) how to manage service system based on customers point of view (customer based management); 2) how to organise services logistics.

The main strategy in some cities in Finland is so called purchaser – provider model, e.g. in Tampere, Oulu, Jyväskylä, Hämeenlinna. The strategy includes three operational moves: first it opens up quasi-markets in service production; second it develops diversity management practices based on multi-professional and cross-sectoral networking (on multi-professional networks, see Määttä 2007); third it tries to modify custom-based services that are developed very successful e.g. in the services of banks, air-traffic and tourism. There are lot of services that customer can do it yourself –method.

IV Conclusions

The opening of quasi-market and construction of purchaser – provider model in organising service production and delivering, changes the rhetoric used in the sphere of public life. Active citizens turn into customers of services. The power relations in local government and local democracy turn into relations between purchaser – provider – customer, in where the contracts are done between purchaser and service provider.

The change in rhetoric is new and ongoing process. New type of managerial and market rhetoric is in its orthodoxy as impossible to understand as EU-slang. For example the case of young peoples participation and membership: according to new rhetoric we are talking about services produced by some providers. In order to survive in the markets of service production the provider must design the service as a product. In this kind of language the participation is a product, produced by some provider of the service.

However, the roles of active citizen, stakeholder and customer are entangled together in modern type of new public management. The overall critic on new public administration or quasi-market of public service production is not enough but needs more differentiated and detailed analysis.

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