



ReThink Urban Spaces

Young People as City Builders. Youth Participation in German Municipalities

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YOUTH PARTICIPATION

STATE-LED PARTICIPATION

YOUTH-INITIATIVES

YOUTH-ADVOCATE-LED PARTICIPATION

CULTURE OF PARTICIPATION

ADOLESCENTS

URBAN PLANNING

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

GERMANY

Abstract

In 2009 the German Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development launched a research program called “Adolescents in Urban Neighborhoods” to foster youth participation in urban development and planning in Germany. Over all, 55 pilot projects were funded and implemented across Germany to explore methods, instruments and strategies to involve youth in urban planning and decision-making processes between 2009 and 2013. To broaden up the understanding of what youth participation can be, chances and challenges of state-led participation and two further forms to engage with participation are discussed and further defined in the paper: the integration of youth-led projects in planning processes and youth-advocate-led participation.

1. Introduction

In recent years a rising awareness is noticeable, which acknowledges young people as stakeholders to be involved in public participation in general and in urban planning processes in specific, especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods (cf. Jupp 2007: 331). In line with Harts proclaimed ladder of participation of children, adolescents are progressively seen as potential ‘experts in their own lives’. In addition they are also recognized as ‘producers of cities’ (cf. Frank 2006: 351-353; Kudva, Driskell 2009: 368; Lekies et al. 2009: 346). Frank (2006: 352) identifies two movements that fostered an increased significance of youth participation: the children’s rights movement and the growing commitment towards sustainable development.

At the same time, young people still face “age-related discrimination and disrespect in their local communities” (Hart 2009: 665), which is noticed to be a common experience “which spanned the socio-economic and cultural axes of gender, class, race and ethnicity” (Hart 2009: 655). Nairn et al. (2006) argue that two types of young people – achievers and troublemakers – are often targeted by participation. Whereas the ‘ordinary young people’ are frequently excluded, described by Nairn as “the excluded middle”.

This indicates that youth participation remains a challenge for urban planners (Hörschelmann, van Blerk 2012: 256). Especially they fail to include the youth into formal planning processes (Percy-Smith 2010: 107). Overall, there are a number of reasons, why youth participation in urban planning still “remains uncommon and unsupported in comparison to adult participation” (Frank 2006: 353). Structural barriers for lacking youth participation embrace e.g. the dominant presence of adult-oriented institutions and economic interests in discussion processes and the resulting lack of knowledge of needs and interests of adolescents. Furthermore, societal views hinder youth participation: Often young people’s involvement is predicted to be unproductive since adolescents are e.g. seen as not yet capable of a valuable contribution to urban planning processes (cf. Frank 2006: 353).

Today western cities and neighborhoods face a number of challenges framing urban planning and development, such as the ongoing demographic change towards an older and more diverse population as well as increased cultural pluralism and social fragmentation, change of the economic base with deindustrialization, the development of a knowledge-based society, climate change and adaption – to name the most cited ones in planning theory, policy and practice (cf. Barton et al. 2010; BMVBS 2012; Streich 2014). Today's youth will not only face the named challenges but also inherit the impacts of policies, strategies and implementations adults decide upon today (cf. Lennard, Lennard 2000 and Chawla 2002a cited by Frank 2006: 352).

Besides this argument for fostering youth participation in urban planning processes, planning practitioners, politicians and researchers name a range of contexts of justification for the involvement of young people, amongst others civil law, democratic and political theory, educational, ethical and moral theory and service orientation (cf. Betz et al. 2010: 3). While many argumentations equal the reasons for participation in general, there are some potential benefits especially stressing the need for enhanced youth participation, e.g.:

- Participatory processes foster social and democratic learning.
- Intergenerational exchange through participatory processes can improve the communication and understanding between younger and elder people in society.
- Being involved in planning and decision-making gives youth an opportunity to bring forward own ideas and present themselves as equal discussants. This helps decrease negative prejudices adolescents frequently face in society.
- By actively involving different groups environments shall be created which suite the needs of all groups of a society. Especially seeing the decreasing percentage in an ageing society, also involving young people and their interests becomes more important.
- Participatory processes foster integration in a neighborhood and identification with a quarter by being involved in shaping the environment, being taken serious in the process and appreciated. (cf. Million, Heinrich 2014: 337; Frank 2006: 352; Hart 2009: 654)

Following these arguments a culture of youth participation in communities is to be established. In the past, participation in planning was initiated by city departments offering particular opportunities to get involved in a manner predefined by the hosting and moderating institution. While this still has its importance and can be a suitable model for certain planning processes, there is also critique from academics, practitioners and those who have been part in prevailing models towards such state-led participation (cf. Jupp 2007: 31). It is argued “for the need to rethink children's participation as a more diverse set of social processes rooted in everyday environments” (Percy-Smith 2010: 107).

To broaden up the understanding of what youth participation can be, we want to discuss in this article chances and challenges between state-led participation and two further forms to engage with participation: the integration of youth-led projects in planning processes and youth-advocate-led youth involvement.

Youth-led projects can basically be every form of activities and commitment of young people, which somehow develops a meaning or relevance for the urban environment and its citizens. Youth-advocates are stakeholders, who foster youth participation either independently or on behalf of a commissioning state-agency. Participation in this case would resemble more a top-down process but since youth-advocates normally have a lot of practice in working with young people and might already have established contacts to the young people in the neighborhood of interest they tend to have a better access to the target group. Often youth-advocates are non-profit organisations. While the definitions given here are very broad and general, we want to specify these by discussing different scales, tasks, formal and non-formal planning processes.

The reflections presented are based on the research project entitled “Youth Participation in the Practical Test”. It embraced an evaluation of 55 state-funded pilot projects of youth participation implemented in Germany since 2009. The implemented pilot projects offer a unique research opportunity as today's research on youth participation and adolescents' role in urban development is mainly limited to single case studies or assessments of few practice examples only. Broader studies facilitating a comprehensive view on the state of youth participation in planning practice are very rare (Frank 2006: 353f.; Kudva, Driskell 2009: 368; Lekies et al. 2009: 347). An overview of empirical studies and their findings on youth participation in the US, Italy and UK is given by Frank (2006) – however none of the cases was initiated by the youth. Therefore the question still holds: How can youth participation in local government planning processes and youth-led projects find their way into everyday planning and design practice?

¹ The research was commissioned by the German Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development in 2012 to 2013. The research project team was formed by the Chair of Urban Design and Urban Development at Berlin Institute of Technology (TU Berlin) and the planning firm STADTIDEE, Dortmund.

² Heinrich, Million: Young People as City Builders

2. The German Federal Research Program “Adolescents in Urban Neighborhoods”

In 2009 the German Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs launched the federal research and funding program “Adolescents in Urban Neighborhoods”. The program’s stated goal was to give adolescents “a greater say in urban development” (BBSR 2013a). The program “Adolescents in Urban Neighborhoods” should provide an explorative setting for exploring adolescents’ needs within urban neighborhoods as well as for testing methods, instruments and strategies to involve youth in urban planning and decision-making processes by funding real-life youth participation projects. Besides fostering state-led approaches it was also looking for approaches that offer opportunities for youth-led activities in which young people can be ‘producers of their city’ in the sense of building and designing their own spaces and sites. In the long run the pilot projects were intended to support the creation of a sustainable culture of youth participation in German communities (cf. BBSR 2013a; Uttke et al. 2013: 12f.).

The program embraced three different thematic calls for projects to which city government bodies as well as non-profit initiatives and youth-led initiatives could apply for. Each call was accompanied by a research team on behalf of the BBSR, which organised the call for projects, monitored the projects and wrote a scientific report on insights gained. A selection process by the accompanying research team and the BBSR insured a variety of themes, methods and tools in youth participation projects located in diverse and prototypical spatial settings in cities and towns across Germany as well as the participation of youth representing different ethnicities and economic levels. Each call had a time frame of about one and a half to two years in which the participation process needed to be realised. The researchers used a process-oriented case study approach. They did on-site visits talking to the participants as well as other stakeholder in the projects. Knowledge gained was published directed to planning practice and local governments in Germany. Furthermore, important outcomes and conclusions were incorporated on the next call for projects. All youth projects are described online in detail (town/city size, neighborhood setting, cooperating partners, target group, context and aims of the project, implementation and outcomes, problems and highlights, contact information) and are therefore not content of this paper but very worthwhile reading, as they also contain reflections on challenges within the projects.

2.1 The First Set of Pilot Projects: Innovative Youth Participation (2009-2010)

The call for the first set of pilot projects was very open and exploratory. Entitled “Adolescents in Urban Neighborhoods – Innovative Youth Participation” applications were welcomed that presented at the first sight innovative and uncommon concepts for involving adolescents in the development of their cities and neighborhoods. Projects were to include methods and instruments, which support young people in voicing their needs and set impulses for an improved youth participation (cf. BMVBS 2009: 1).

Out of 222 project applications 31 projects were selected and financed. In very few pilot projects young people were asked to be part in state-led formal planning processes (e.g. land use planning, developing guidelines for a child- and youth-oriented cities). The far larger number of projects were participatory planning and design projects targeting the re-design and re-use of public spaces, empty lots or vacant buildings. In public spaces for example street art interventions were realised and youth festivals organised or an empty store was re-designed as youth meeting place. Methods were used according to the planning theme, but also new media such as films and song composition were used. All projects were led by adult academics or youth-advocates and took place largely outside standard local government planning processes. The broad range of projects indicates that this first set of pilot projects served the research program as an open laboratory for youth participation (cf. Uttke et al. 2013: 55; BBSR 2013b; BBSR 2013c).

² The brochures for planning practitioners and local governments can be downloaded here: http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/FP/ExWoSt/Forschungsfelder/2009/JugendlicheImStadtquartier/Jugendbeteiligung/01_Start.html?nn=430172¬First=true&docId=426902

³ More information: http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/EN/RP/ExWoSt/FieldsOfResearch/TeenagersUrbanQuarter/YouthParticipation/03_Results.html?nn=386162. For profiles of all pilot projects see (only in German): http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/FP/ExWoSt/Forschungsfelder/2009/JugendlicheImStadtquartier/Jugendbeteiligung/01_Start.html;jsessionid=C8F9CEB7A74A193F9042F1389494619D.live2052?nn=430172¬First=true&docId=426878. gung/01_Start.html;jsessionid=C8F9CEB7A74A193F9042F1389494619D.live2052?nn=430172¬First=true&docId=426878.

⁴ Heinrich, Million: Young People as City Builders

2.2 The Second Set of Pilot Projects: Youth Funds (2010-2011)

The second set of pilot projects addressed municipalities, which were eager to establish youth funds to publicly finance micro-projects and to thereby foster youth-led projects. The overarching theme was sport and other physical activity-oriented uses of urban space (BMVBS 2010: 1-3) as starting point for involving young people in urban development. Within this second set of pilot projects eight municipalities out of 133 applications were chosen. Budget per city were about 25,000 Euros, of which 20,000 were to finance youth-led micro-projects each with a budget of about 500 to 2,000 Euros. Cities, usually the youth or planning department or a non-profit organisation commissioned by the municipality were organising a local call for projects and supported the micro-projects in the implementation process. In total approximately 90 micro-projects were financed (cf. BBSR 2013d; BBSR 2013e).

Spatial focuses were open spaces for independent use, which stresses that this second project call reflected findings of the already cited research findings from the different accompanying research projects. Young people search for spaces for physical activities that are not supervised by adults or programmed by any institutional setting with opening hours, entrance fees or memberships. So micro-projects were carried out in parks, streets, and plazas, but also school grounds and outdoors areas at youth centres, which explicitly did not impose many constraints where used. Popular spaces were in the middle of neighborhoods, where youth could be seen by others versus places in the suburbs or outside of the city. Usually mobile and temporary fixtures (e.g. mobile ramps, obstacles, goals, and even transportable stages) were designed and built by the young people, accompanied by small interventions in existing sports grounds and schoolyards (e.g. basketball nets, additional seating, shelters, stages).

2.3 The Third Set of Pilot Projects: Youth-revived Spaces (2011-2012)

The pilot projects of the first and second call showed a high interest of young people to especially re-use neglected or abandoned spaces and buildings. Many cities and towns in Germany have a large number of brownfields formerly used as industrial sites or barracks. Furthermore, many main streets depict empty storefronts. So the third set of pilot projects was entitled "Youth-revived Spaces" (own translation; Ger. "Jugend belebt Stadt"). The call for projects searched for initiatives and approaches, which aimed at an innovative re-use of vacant buildings and sites by young people. This should enable young people to directly translate their ideas into spaces that meet their needs. Projects were to focus on inner city areas (cf. BBSR 2013f; BMVBS 2011: 1).

This third set of pilot projects offered funding for two types of projects: Applicants could present projects in which youth would re-use a vacant property (which should be already named in the application). Or projects could develop a testing method to identify the suitability of vacant buildings and plots for usage by young people and develop concepts for reactivation (cf. BBSR 2013f; BMVBS 2011: 2f.).

Out of the 218 applications for pilot projects, 12 youth-built and 8 vacancy-check projects were funded and implemented between 2011 and 2013. In order to carry out the youth-built projects the young people formed a registered non-profit society, or the city took over the role of the builder. Overcoming a number of obstacles youth-built projects re-shaped buildings with budgets of up to 125,000 Euros, in two cases the youth groups became owner of the building. In addition, some cities were successful to use other funds to carry out further renovations in the buildings. Uses implemented were youth centres, open meeting points and cafés, studios for non-commercial activities in fields such as photography, graphic design or silk screen printing and much more (cf. BBSR 2015a; BBSR 2015b).

Between 2009 and 2013 a total of 55 pilot projects were funded in timely overlapping calls. The high numbers of proposals in all three calls indicate that the interest in youth participation is much higher and the search for alternative resp. better ways for participation in German cities and towns is on going. Many (not all) pilot projects meet the critics of academic research (cf. Percy-Smith 2010; Frank 2009; Jupp 2007), as they re-define youth participation by linking it more to everyday life of young people, by experimenting with methods and – that is by far the biggest contribution of the pilot projects – by promoting more youth-led activities. Although all accompanying research teams maintained a close relationship to the pilot project stakeholders via site-visits and interviews, no empirical study was done, on the young people, which actually took part in the projects.

⁴ More information: http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/EN/RP/ExWoSt/FieldsOfResearch/TeenagersUrbanQuarter/YouthFunds/02_Concept.html?nn=386162. For profiles of all pilot projects see (only in German): http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/FP/ExWoSt/Forschungsfelder/2009/JugendlichemStadtquartier/Jugendfonds/01_start.html?nn=430172¬First=true&docId=520018.

⁵ More information (only in German): http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/FP/ExWoSt/Forschungsfelder/2009/JugendlichemStadtquartier/Jugend_lelebt_Leerstand/01_start.html?nn=430172. For profiles of all pilot projects see (only in German): http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/FP/ExWoSt/Forschungsfelder/2009/JugendlichemStadtquartier/Jugend_lelebt_Leerstand/01_start.html?nn=430172¬First=true&docId=426790.

⁶ Heinrich, Million: Young People as City Builders

2.4 Research Design

The findings presented in this article analyse planning levels, core issues and themes, in which young people participated to discuss state-led, youth-advocate-led and youth-led participation in planning. Conclusions will be drawn across the 55 pilot projects rather than presenting cases in detail. The conclusions are based on the information obtained in

- scientific reports on the accompanying research on all three sets of pilot projects,
- a broad assessment of all 55 pilot projects, mainly based on a document analysis of all internal reports as well as websites and further published material on the projects,
- in-depth case studies on 14 pilot projects through stakeholder workshops or interviews, and
- the conduction of three conferences on projects and processes of youth participation.

All 55 projects were analysed based on documents and reports. The analysis resulted in a profile of every pilot project. Based on the profiles, 14 pilot projects were chosen for in-depth case studies. Selection criteria were: fruitfulness and complexity of projects (e.g. in view of applied methods), their outcomes and transferability, projects of different planning levels (city and region, neighborhood, public space, buildings), projects of each set of projects, accessibility of local stakeholders as contact persons for interviews or workshops.

Figure 1: Impression from a stakeholder workshop in Erfurt



Five of the 14 in-depth case studies were based on site visits, including a workshop with representatives of important groups of stakeholders (e.g. young participants, involved non-profit organisations, involved municipality officials from the department for urban planning or youth) was conducted (see Fig. 1). Nine in-depth case studies were based on one to two interviews each with a key actor of the respective project. In addition, today's status of the project was explored.

Further components of the study were three conferences, which were held in cities across Germany: Hanover (11-06-2012; attendance: 140), Nuremberg (17-10-2012; attendance: 60) and Erfurt (15-11-2012; attendance: 80). The conferences targeted especially practitioners in planning and youth work and were aimed to obtain information on the pilot projects, to foster reflective dialogue between stakeholders, to facilitate a transfer of knowledge between pilot projects and other municipalities, and to discuss preliminary results of our research.

Findings of the research project were in detail presented in an unpublished scientific report (Uttke et al. 2013), which was the base for a guiding brochure on youth participation directed to German planning practitioners and city administration and politicians (Niemann et al. 2013).



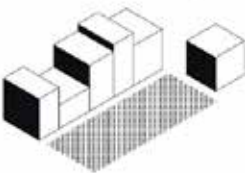
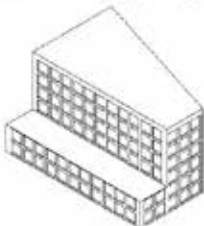
⁶ For the documentations of the conferences see: http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/FP/ExWoSt/Forschungsfelder/2009/JugendlichemStadtquartier/Veranstaltungen_2012/Hannover_2012_06.html?nn=430172 (conference in Hanover); http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/FP/ExWoSt/Forschungsfelder/2009/JugendlichemStadtquartier/Veranstaltungen_2012/Nuernberg_2012_10.html?nn=430172 (conference in Nuremberg); http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/FP/ExWoSt/Forschungsfelder/2009/JugendlichemStadtquartier/2012_JugendStadtErfurt_info.html?nn=430172 (conference in Erfurt).

⁷ Heinrich, Million: Young People as City Builders

3 Participation of Young People in Scales and Agendas of Urban Planning

Young people do not call their own activities urban planning, urban design or urban development. Nevertheless, they are interested in city issues; they can be enthusiastic about being active in urban development processes and act as city builders. In principle, young people in the pilot projects were involved in different scales, tasks of formal and non-formal planning processes: from the regional and city planning scale to the level of neighborhood planning and public space design, to the scale of a single building or site. An overview of planning levels, tasks, agendas and specific topics of youth participation in the pilot projects is shown in Figure 2. Although planning levels are clearly indicated in the figure, there are crossovers in the planning levels. There are no clear-cuts in responsibilities, instruments and themes of each layer. This can be seen also in the pilot projects as some projects can be considered as crossover and can be cited in more than one planning level.

Figure 2: Exemplary tasks, superordinate themes and concrete topics of the 55 pilot projects of youth participation on different scales

Scale	Tasks & instruments	Superordinate themes & questions	Concrete topics
City & region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land use plans City visions Guidelines Integrated development plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility • Climate adaption • Demographic change • City marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public transportation • Cycle path networks • Greenways • Cross-generational communication
Neighbourhood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated action plans Master plans Urban renewal Subconcepts addressing specific topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leisure • Education • Land-use conflicts • Conversion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sport facilities • Playgrounds & recreation areas • Schoolyards • Local networks
Public space design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Binding land use plan Feasibility studies Re-development plans Urban design plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas for sporting activities & recreation • Qualification of public space • Events • Temporary uses & installations in public space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary constructions • Trend sports • Art, culture and music • Meeting points
Site & building design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project planning Modernisation Building alterations Utilisation concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vacancy • Refurbishment • Monumental protection • Re-use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-employed construction work • New media • Transformation of youth facilities • Non-commercial art projects

⁸ Heinrich, Million: Young People as City Builders

3.1 City and Regional Level⁷

Tasks of planning administration at the level of city and regional planning, in which the participation of young people is asked for, are formal and informal plans like land use plans, master plans and city district development plans. Usually they deal with the long-term development of the whole region, city or city district. In addition, the development of general city visions and guidelines for urban development provide opportunities for youth participation.

The range of topics on this scale of mostly state-led planning activities is very broad, ranging from strategic issues such as the environmental and climate adaption, city marketing or demographic change to space-related issues such as housing and open space development and urban design. Our study confirmed that mobility and traffic are topics of high interest to young people, as they depend a lot on public transportation, cycling and other modes of transportation besides using the car. Therefore, they are very much willing to be part in the conceptualisation of public transport networks or cycling routes throughout the city and region. Only two of the 55 pilot projects operated city-wide. In Duisburg youngsters were part in the planning process that would lead to a new land use plan under the project title “Youth Check – Impulses for Duisburg2027”. In the project in Cologne quality criteria for a child- and youth-friendly urban design were developed in the same-named project. Some other projects were conducted at the interface between city and neighborhood planning. These included the pilot project “Circle Line 100/200” (Hanover), “Donnerschwee Shapes up for Leisure” (Oldenburg), “Youth Builds the Future” (Dessau) and “Young Shelf Hugger” (Berlin).

In the city-wide pilot project conducted in Cologne, the goal was to foster and anchor the involvement of children and young people in urban planning through the development of quality criteria for a child- and youth-friendly urban planning. In different phases 80 children and young people and 50 representatives of 14 city departments of the city were developing a proposal. This participation process was clearly state-led and young people were in the role of participants. The topic and methods of the process were predefined by the involved state-agencies. The abstractness of the topic was dealt with by letting children and youth discuss not the city as a whole, but their neighborhoods and home districts. The short-term visibility of results was ensured by the implementation of two playgrounds/meeting points for children and adolescents. In order to ensure the implementation of the criteria, the city council must adopt them. However, this is still to be done. Currently the application of quality criteria in Cologne is still heavily dependent on individuals. This reflects a difficulty not only for young people to deal with “child- and youth-friendly urban planning” – also for city planners and city administration it can be an elusive and abstract topic. Here best practice examples and positive experiences become even more important.

The example of Duisburg shows how difficult it can be to create a state-led youth participation process working towards a legally binding plan such as a land use plan. Although many young people were reached through schools, only a small number could be activated to be part of the process. The city administrator interviewed assumes various reasons, while pointing out also, that one is, that the participation process did not take into account enough the different neighborhood settings (e.g. affluent vs. disadvantaged neighborhoods). This confirms Jupp (2007) and Percy-Smith (2010) who argue that a clear reference must be given in the participation process to the everyday environments of children and young people. Furthermore, it was said, that state-led participation on city-wide agendas needs time to develop and “grow”, more than the pilot project-call offered. It would be better to let youth participation grow from individual projects starting slowly and anchoring it, as also other interviewees confirmed. Especially at city level personal contacts and established ways of communication between decision-makers and young people can be rare, as the project stakeholders point out. For this purpose, it is important to find a “common language” or use a “translator”. Here it is useful to integrate the expertise of youth departments and youth workers.

Looking at the question, why only a few youth participation projects in this level of planning were realised, diverse reasons could be identified in our study. For one thing, municipalities in Germany know hardly any best practice examples, in which youth participation in city and regional planning issues was successfully implemented, and which could give orientation for follower-projects. This means that city administrations and city planning offices enter new ground and challenges are hard to predict. The analysis of the pilot projects and the discussions at our three conferences revealed further perceived difficulties associated with involvement of adolescents in city and regional planning processes (cf. Uttke et al. 2013: 34f.), for example:

- high degree of abstraction and generalisation of planning issues,
- long planning horizons of sometimes more than a decade,
- huge discrepancy between planning and implementation, and
- lack of personal contact between decision-makers and adolescents.

⁸ This paragraph is based on Uttke et al. (2013: 32-37).

⁹ Heinrich, Million: Young People as City Builders

On the one side, these are likely reasons, why youth-initiated participation is not happening at this level of planning. It stresses on the other side the importance of state-led participation. Without it, little to no involvement of young people would be given in city and regional planning agendas. An important success factor is, as the pilot projects show, to bridge abstractness and long planning horizons by the short-term implementation of concrete projects so as to make results visible. The experiences made in the pilot projects stresses that such a course of action resembles more the modes of practice of young people and can thus help to keep the target group interested.

In addition, the analysis shows in state-led participation processes normally the state-agency sets the agenda, chooses the topic for participation and defines the procedure and approach to participation. This can be an obstacle: The choice of topic can disregard what young people are interested in at the moment. Activation can be complicated due to a lack of approachableness of young people by state-agencies. The pilot projects tried to cope with this by approaching young people in school. However, this tended to address rather the "usual suspects" than for example truants. Furthermore, the gap between young people's lifeworld and the routine business of state-agencies can hinder participation processes. In the pilot projects e.g. holidays and the FIFA World Cup were not taken into consideration for the scheduling which reduced the number of participants noticeably.

3.2 Neighborhood

Planning on the level of neighborhoods or city quarters in Germany includes integrated action plans, frameworks and master plans as well as urban regeneration and urban redevelopment projects. Here the participation of young people is especially valuable, because they can be part of the development of their everyday life settings.

The bottom-up initiatives of the pilot projects addressed concerns identified and pushed by young people, such as lack of unsupervised spaces to be (re-)used and designed by adolescents, creation of spaces for recreation and facilities for sports (especially for trend sports), insufficient public transportation and conflicts with other groups of society e.g. due to noise. A special focus were conversion processes and the temporary use of brownfields and vacant plots as potential spaces for youth projects. Examples of model projects on neighborhood level were e.g. "Progress bar" (Erfurt), "The long way home" (Herford), "Youth in the Sculptor Quarter" (Leipzig), "Donnerschwee Shapes up for Leisure" (Oldenburg), "Urban Oasis – Using Leftover Areas and Staging Public Spaces" (Rosenheim), "Back to the City – Youth Conquers the City Centre" (Spangenberg) and "Place for Youth in Würselen" (Würselen).

Most pilot projects addressing the neighborhood level were led by youth-advocates while only a few were led by state-agencies or youth initiatives. A reason for the small number of state-led projects might be that youth participation is a task, which is still not part of the standard repertoire of planning authorities in Germany. Non-profit organisations and others who applied for funding as youth-advocates again operated mostly in their genuine field of activity and interest. Hence, some of them as well as some of the youth initiatives that led projects stated that their activities in a certain field had been going on already before and the call for projects allowed them to apply for the needed funding.

Since most projects were not state-led, the projects were often not directly linked to on-going formal and informal planning processes in the respective city but were rather detached (often temporary) projects or events. The study shows that the link (and thus often also the potential impact) of youth participation to planning processes anchored in the planning department is weaker in projects, which are not state-led. However, in several pilot projects the successful youth-advocate-led and youth-led projects were throughout the process recognised by state-agencies and could thereby develop an influence on planning departments and their planning processes. Our study shows that projects, which are not state-led, can be an important starting point for further youth participation in formal planning processes or produce results to be incorporated in formal plans. For example young people in Erfurt re-used a building, which was designated to be demolished. In consequence of the successful re-use and maintenance of this building by young people the master plan was indeed changed and the building remained preserved. In other cities (e.g. Dessau and Leipzig) planning authorities stated in the course of the projects that they want to utilise the positive experience from pilot projects and strengthen the role of adolescents in further planning processes. Albeit a long-term influence of projects on the establishing of a youth participation culture remains to be researched.

Even before pilot projects were put into place, bottom-up initiatives led by young people (mostly high-school graduates and university students) already existed in a number of neighborhoods. Examples are Nachbarschaftsgarten e. V. in Leipzig who took the lead in the project "Youth in the Sculptor Squarter" and Plattform e. V. in Erfurt who led the project "Loading Bar". Such initiatives bring good ideas and concepts, (human) resources and local networks into youth participation projects. They use approaches, methods and means of communication established among adolescents and thus they can easily reach other young people, participants are highly motivated and willing to become involved in neighborhood planning. These are valuable premises for participation, which are not necessarily given in neighborhood projects by planning authorities.

The pilot projects show that youth initiatives can make a valuable contribution to neighborhood development, to on-going planning processes and that they can inspire and qualify state-led youth participation. Consequently, one important task within youth participation in urban planning processes should be the identification and support of existing bottom-up initiatives. In Erfurt, for example, the head of the city department of urban development confirmed that the pilot project was the starting point for an on-going fruitful communication between the municipality and the local initiative Plattform e. V. Today they collaborate a lot and the planning administration acts as a facilitator for permits and financing issues. The analysis of city- and region-wide projects stressed the problem of abstractness and long planning horizons. The pilot projects show that one way to bridge this can be to link small-scale projects and initiatives on the neighborhood level with superordinate planning levels and processes. Our analysis confirms that young people have a good knowledge of the urban quarter they live in. Therefore, projects on this level have a high potential to reach a level of understanding of different administrative and planning levels and formal planning processes within the city. So there is a big advantage to actively connect and to create hybrids between bottom-up initiatives and official planning processes in participation, as also Jupp (2007) points out in her research. Youth-advocates can support this.



Figure 3: Impression from a repurposing-event of the pilot project “Urban Oasis – Using Leftover Areas and Staging Public Spaces”

Photograph: Anna Juliane Heinrich (Uttke et al. 2013: 112)

A positive example for such a hybrid is the project “Urban Oasis – Using Leftover Areas and Staging Public Spaces” in Rosenheim. With the temporary re-use of open space (see Fig. 3) young people are pointing out sites for further development in the city centre and inner city residential areas. Because of the convincing results, the city planning department now actively suggests certain sites throughout the city for “Urban Oasis”-events. To point out this hybrid approach—the link between local initiatives and official initiatives—it is important to connect the different local projects with each other and furthermore to make them explicitly visible in the official process. In Rosenheim this is done by a simple corporate design.

Challenging for fostering bottom-up initiatives can be the fact, that these initiatives do not necessarily want to be part of official participation processes and do not always have an interest in cooperating with the city to a point, were it is even rejected deliberately. This was initially the case in Erfurt. City stakeholders have to state clear their interest in cooperation with local initiatives, as well as considering their needs. Confidences as well as commitments need to be built up between both partners. The lead for projects must clearly remain with the young people.

⁹ See <http://www.stadtoasen-rosenheim.de>

¹² Heinrich, Million: Young People as City Builders

These findings from the pilot projects operating on a neighborhood level are fruitful for sharpening the definition of youth-advocate-led participation: An advantage in comparison to state-led participation is closeness to adolescents and their interests, needs, forms of communication, modes of practice and their culture. The pilot projects clearly show that addressing and activating young people was easier for youth-advocates due to their experience and already existing contacts. While youth departments could often rely on youth workers especially planning departments tended to have difficulties reaching young people in the first place. Also in the design of participatory processes and the choosing of methods youth-advocate-led projects proved to be very sensible for their target group. In contrast to that state-led participation sometimes appears to be rather a blueprint of adult participation. At the same time youth-advocates are normally familiar with official procedures and requirements such as permissions that might be necessary during a project. This is an advantage compared to youth initiatives because for them such procedures can be major obstacles.

Since they are not led by state-agency youth-advocate-led projects tend to have a weaker connection to official planning processes. Likewise, they have a high potential for bridging the gap between abstract, long-term planning and the life of adolescents. Connecting youth-advocate-led participation with state-agencies seems desirable especially considering the aim to establish a participatory culture within a municipality. While youth-advocate-led participation could remain limited to single projects, a sustainable culture of participation can only be established together with state-agencies. In this respect an obvious advantage of state-led projects is the direct connection with departments of the municipality and the close link to politics on the city level. This can facilitate the consideration and implementation of ideas, aims, projects etc. generated from participatory processes.

3.3 Public Space Design

The public space includes public green, streets and plazas. Planning procedures and instruments that provide young people opportunities for participation at this level are, for example, urban design and urban re-development plans, feasibility studies and master plans. Participatory planning and design of public spaces include events and temporary interventions in order to foster appropriation of space and to deal with conflicting uses and users in the public realm. Examples of pilot projects on this level are “South West Laboratory – Flying Building” (Bergheim), “Youth Builds the Future” (Dessau), “Urban Oasis – Using Leftover Areas and Staging Public Spaces” (Rosenheim), and “Place for Youth in Würselen” (Würselen). All projects of the second set of pilot projects “Youth Funds” had a clear focus on young people and their micro-projects using the public space temporarily and permanently for sports and recreational activities in the cities and towns Berlin-Mitte, Dillingen, Erlensee, Hanover, Kaiserslautern, Nuremberg, Ostfildern and Schleswig.

The pilot projects of the second set—the youth funds—had to be led by a state-agency. While the pilot projects were funded and supervised by the German Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs and the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development it is remarkable that only two of the eight project were led by the respective planning authority. The other six projects were initiated and led by the youth or family department. The responsibility of the leading state-agency was to publish a call for micro-projects and to administer funds. Young people could apply for funding and subsequently were responsible for the planning, conduction and accounting of their micro-project. During this process mentors of the respective state-agency supported them. Consequently, the youth funds established a hybrid, which draws on components of state-led and youth-led projects. Besides the youth funds, the other pilot projects on the scale of public space were mostly led by youth-advocates.

The projects showed, that the public space is an important level of action for young people—and therefore also for participatory planning approaches—because here young people find spaces free of supervision by institutions such as schools. Adolescents hang out in these spaces, meet and greet here, and use it as a stage for their own activities. The pilot projects for example dealt with street art and urban gardening, appropriation and temporary uses, meeting places, shelters and street furniture, performances and events, installations and the (re-)design of public spaces.

These activities certainly bring widely known conflicts and complaints from other user groups and residents (e.g. noise, litter, behavior). Youth projects tend to challenge residents by their unusual ideas for changes in public space and aesthetic impressions, which differ from those of adults. Such conflicts were named in the reports of the youth projects in growing and shrinking cities, touristic or historic city-centers in Germany. In an interview with representatives of a youth project in Chemnitz, the problem was described as follows: “Cities like Chemnitz—especially downtown—are completely weaned from urbanity and every asset related to a youthful lifestyle. In downtown and inner city residential areas, the residents have enjoyed almost a suburban peace and then when loud young people come who claim their presence as young people, then that is a point of conflict. Unlike other cities (...) you have no acceptance of vitality”. An important conclusion drawn from the pilot projects was that complaints must be taken seriously, including dealing with negative statements in press (local newspapers etc.). Negative press before or at the beginning of a project was common.

¹⁰ This paragraph is based on Uttke et al. (2013: 32-37).

¹³ Heinrich, Million: Young People as City Builders

Furthermore, the described conflicts can also be the start for a participatory project. The project “South West Laboratory – Flying Building” (Bergheim) responded specifically to complaints from the public, who criticized the weekly crowding of young people at a roundabout and the related noise and alcohol consumption. The project was initiated and led by the non-profit organisation Woanders e. V. who was asked by street workers whether they see an opportunity to deal with the conflict. As youth-advocate Woanders e. V. handed in an application for a pilot project and already in this application suggested a nearby park as new location for the weekly crowding. The park was being redesigned at the time and Woanders e. V. could introduce the idea of a meeting point in the planning process.

A mobile structure was designed by the architecture firm “Lobomob” to serve as meeting point in the park. Young people use the “flying building” until today. Residents’ complaints have stopped. However, it should be critically noted that here the young people were “moved” out of public space, which cannot be an overall solution. For municipal practice participatory planning in public space needs a high level of sensitivity to the question of the “where”. In the discussion at our regional conference in Nuremberg it has been advised to initiate and moderate a dialogue between the various user groups in public space. This includes showing young people what they can do in the public space and what is forbidden (by law).

Overall participants of the regional conferences in Hanover and Nuremberg agreed on the observation that the social acceptance of young people is decreasing in public space. For planning administrations this means to foster inclusive approaches in the development of public space. One approach to promote the acceptance of young people is—as was the discussion at the regional conference in Nuremberg—to let young people take charge and to give them the opportunity to demonstrate their positive impact as users, designers and promoter of public space. Young people should be motivated to build up communication and to seek contact with their “neighbors” themselves. This indicated towards the need of more youth-led projects.

This strategy is supported by the experience of pilot projects: The interviews and workshops done in our study confirm that positive experiences through the youth projects have fostered a changing positive public awareness of young people in general—as confirmed by actors in the projects in Erfurt, Hanover, Miesbach, Ottobrunn and Rosenheim. This shows that city administrations need to foster youth participatory planning and youth-led projects—even if concerns are there. Active presswork can further contribute to a positive perception of young people in public.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that youth projects in public space offer good opportunities to connect abstract planning processes with “hands-on” projects. Examples are the micro-projects of local youth funds. The youth is in these cases responsible for the planning of a project, for which they receive support and mentorship. They can also take part in the building process and be user of the newly (re-)designed urban spaces. Youth projects like “Bunker Super Suite” (Hamburg) and “Urban Oasis – Using Leftover Areas and Staging Public Spaces” (Rosenheim) are conceptualised as temporary participatory actions. Important here is to create a balance between an event and an urban planning process with an implemented result for use. Events can be central elements to activate and motivate young people and to raise public awareness for youth projects. Nevertheless, it cannot be the sole aim of youth participation in planning and design of cities and spaces.

Some lessons can be drawn from the pilot projects conducted in and around public spaces to refine the definitions of the different forms of participation: The establishing of youth funds formed a hybrid of state- and youth-led participation. This allowed making use of some of the inherent advantages of the different forms of participation. Projects were anchored in the city administration and accordingly permission for projects were rather easily granted. Furthermore, the cities addressed the conflicts named above and e.g. supported a positive image of the micro-projects with intensive press relations and engaged in the moderation of the question of locating projects. At the same time, adolescents acted very independently and were in charge of their micro-projects. They chose the themes of their projects and thus activities were promoted, which would probably not have been suggested by a state-agency such as the latest trend sports. While this was highly motivating for the youth, city administrations were confronted with new legal technicalities such as slack lining and required measures of tree protection.

Beyond these successes it must be remarked that activating young people to get involved with the youth fund was a major obstacle. Many funds received only few applications for micro-projects. Whether this was for example due to the chosen form of communication or whether the format of a youth fund was generally not well received could not be clarified during the research.

3.4 Site and Building Design

The fourth scale to be discussed is the scale of concrete sites and building designs. On this small-scale pilot projects on empty plots or in vacant buildings allowed young people to appropriate, use and create their own spaces, either temporarily or permanently. With this approach, projects responded to the needs of self-defined and self-designed spaces aside from youth centres. Many cities lack spaces dedicated and managed by young people. Generally, tasks and instruments of planning administration on this scale are for example legally binding land-use plans and revitalisation plans. However, these plans and processes were in no case the starting point of a pilot project. The pilot projects rather triggered a discussion; one project resulted in altering a master plan.

¹⁴ Heinrich, Million: Young People as City Builders

As for the pilot projects the third set “Youth-revived Spaces” focused on re-using vacant plots and buildings. In addition a number of projects of the first phase dealt with this scale of design: “Mellow Park Campus” (Berlin), “Open Pavilion 2009” (Bielefeld), “Eichbaum Countdown” (Mülheim an der Ruhr), “Play and Leisure Ottobrunner East” (Ottobrunn), “PlaNet Youth – Magic Moments for Aichwald” (Aichwald), “South West Laboratory – Flying Building” (Bergheim) and “Youth in the Sculptor Quarter” (Leipzig). This underlines the importance of this planning scale in youth-friendly city development. Half of the “Youth-revived Spaces” projects were led by youth initiatives and half of them was either state- or youth-advocate-led.

The central obstacle to youth projects on this scale was access to land and buildings. The Erfurt project “Progress Bar” was originally intended to include the whole neighborhood block and to do “shop hopping” re-using different vacant shops temporarily. The plan failed because only one retail space owner would accept the young adults as renters. Other landlords were asking (unreasonably) high rents. Also in the towns of Bad Kreuznach, Chemnitz and Stadthagen despite high vacancy rates in retail spaces, young people faced same experiences of either non-acceptance or high rent expectation of landlords.

In Bad Kreuznach, the support of the German Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs called the local mayor’s and city council’s attention to the pilot project, who made the youth project possible in the end. In the project “Young Shelf Hugger” (Berlin) it was a success factor that the negotiations with potential landlords were conducted by the non-profit organisation that led the project.

For planning administrations this means that youth-led projects need assistance in finding suitable properties and dealing with owners. Not only did landlords doubt the capability of young people to take care of a rented space, also the aesthetics of youth projects conflicted with adult’s perceptions and expectations towards e.g. picturesque historic cityscapes.

While many of the pilot projects were conducted in shrinking cities, which have a high vacancy rate, growing cities, touristic or historic city centres in Germany stressed the overall lack of space for such youth projects. In addition, municipalities should consider whether city-owned buildings and site could be used.

Especially projects of the third set of pilot projects prove the high level of professionalism with which youth-led projects self-organise and coordinate their projects. In the youth-led projects “Haindl Cellar” (Miesbach), the youth centre Stadthagen (“A youth club for Stadthagen”) and the re-used building in Erfurt (“PhaseTwo”) the young people took over whole buildings and turned them in centres of youthful activities. The ability to act as independent stakeholders can be encouraged and organised by planning administrations and other project promoters. In Aachen, Miesbach and Stadthagen numerous local craftsmen guided the young people in self-employed work. In these and other projects, the qualifications and the gradual introduction to self-employment is described as a key success factor. In this case the role of administration should be to establish structures to enable this work and for example to establish contacts.

Our study shows that the re-design of concrete sites and objects highly motivates youth to take ownership. The projects in Bergheim, Berlin (“Young Shelf Hugger”), Bielefeld and the discussion at the regional conference in Hanover confirm that the design process, their own work, the joint building activities and the possibility of continued use fosters a strong identification of young people with the project. Issues like vandalism are very rare. In Bergheim the young people organise repairs completely independently. Furthermore, youth initiatives had far less problems with activation: The youth-led pilot projects successfully tested and used different ways of communication, such as Twitter, MySpace, Facebook, Email and SMS. Through these canals they easily reached and motivated their peers to participate in projects.

A special potential of such youth projects is that they can serve as starting points for further youth-led activities and commitment. The project conducted in Erfurt within the first set of pilot projects was a place for activities and events organised by and for young people for four years. From this project arose the initiative for an application within the third set of pilot projects. The re-used four-story building is still being used by young people e.g. as office for the non-profit organisation Plattform e. V., as a café, and studio for divers artistic activities.

The projects on the scale of concrete sites and building designs are especially informative to substantiate the characterisation of youth participation led by youth initiatives: The proportion of youth-led pilot projects was the highest in within the third set of pilot projects, which addressed the micro-scale. This fact and the workshops conducted within the research project confirm that the micro-scale is the most appealing for youth initiatives. The more “hands-on” activities and short- and medium-term implementations are included in a project and the more independent young people could perform, the more they took over responsibility and took the lead for realising their own ideas. For youth involvement in planning processes of higher degrees of abstraction, other formats of participation seem necessary. In the context of the pilot projects no youth-led projects were conducted linked to long-term planning processes. Youth-led projects on the micro-scale can rather be a starting point for further commitment in planning processes in a municipality.

¹¹ This paragraph is based on Uttke et al. (2013: 32-37).

¹⁶ Heinrich, Million: Young People as City Builders

4. Conclusion

The research program “Adolescents in Urban Neighborhoods” with its 55 pilot projects serves as a rich source to discuss the state of the art in youth participation in urban development and planning in Germany. In the projects young people performed in a range of different roles. While they can be participants of top-down participation, they can also be bottom-up city builders starting and leading participatory projects themselves.

In this article we discussed different forms of youth participation concentrating on state-led, youth-advocate-led and youth-led participation in different planning levels. The analysis and discussion of the 55 pilot projects conducted in Germany helped to characterise these forms of participation, their strengths and weaknesses as well as the question how they can complement each other.

Building up upon Jupp (2007), we characterise state-led participation as the involvement of citizens in formal and informal planning processes whereby the process is led by a state-agency. “Leading” the participation process in this understanding embraces that the state-agency e.g. initiates, structures, moderates and organises the participatory process. Participation in this case is a clear top-down process, whose advantages are in the direct connection to administration and politics. This helps to acquire necessary permits and to clarify realistic implementation possibilities from the beginning. State-agencies can promote effectively the capacities and potential contribution of young people on a larger scale e.g. by addressing the inhabitants of a city district or whole city by press work on a smaller scale e.g. by addressing landlords and supporting young people to find buildings and plots for their activities. Participation can be embedded—time wise and result wise—in on-going planning processes. Furthermore, top-down youth participation can address more abstract themes and tasks in city and regional planning which have a longer time horizon (which young people do not exactly address themselves in youth-led projects) – this is at the same time still a challenge for planners due to lack of experiences working with youth and communicating with them on eye-level, as distribution of power is often not clearly stated. Here projects studied often failed in reaching young people and activating them for an involvement and more good practice is clearly needed.

Characterising advantages and obstacles of state-led youth participation a number of features can be named for the other two participatory modes. Youth-advocate-led participation is also rather top-down. Since youth-advocates have a lot of practice in working with young people they tend to have a better understanding of and access to the target group. They can be bridging the gap between state-agencies and young people and can serve as moderator between them. While youth-led participation imposes certain requirements on young people, youth-advocates can support young people and empower them to get involved in urban planning processes. It also includes participation beyond the “usual suspects”.

Youth-led participation can be characterized as any form of activities and commitment of young people, which somehow develops a meaning or relevance for the urban environment and its citizens. Here the micro-scale (single sites, buildings, plazas etc.) is the most appealing for youth initiatives, which favour rather “hands-on” activities and short- and medium-term implementations. In such they install successful peer-to-peer communication and activation strategies. Our research shows, that youth-led projects on the micro-scale can be a starting point for further commitment in planning processes in a municipality. Nevertheless, often youth-led projects remain completely detached from urban planning processes and need—in order to be successful—an active support by state-agencies (e.g. in the field of permits).

Overall, we can conclude that this three forms providing different settings for youth participation in urban development and planning. In reality, however, this is not a strict three-category scheme but rather different spheres, which overlap, diffuse and blend into each other. The research results indicate further need for best practice experience and research in order to validate and support future youth participation, amongst others:

- youth participation at the city-wide and regional level,
- regular and influential involvement of young people in current discussion, developments and decision-making processes in urban planning,
- the role and cooperation of planning authorities and other departments of the city administration in youth participation processes, and
- the provision or creation of spaces for adolescents in historic or touristic city centres and growing cities, which have little available space such as vacant buildings and plots.

¹⁷ Heinrich, Million: Young People as City Builders

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