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## **Theory and Practice of Participatory Approach in Schools: an Example of the Future Youth Schools – a Forums Project**

### **Abstract**

The active participation of youth has indeed become a key theme across a broad range of service delivery. All organisations concerned with children and young people now promote participation as a “central issue” (Wright, Haydon, Morgan, 2002). Across the EU there is a need to increase educational attainment and active civic participation by European youth. FYS-Forums is responding to this by creating a model for school – led global citizenship youth forums. But even the most carefully planned project can run into unexpected issues. In my contribution a critical review of FYS-FORUM project will be presented.

### **Introductory notes on FYS – FORUMS educational project**

This chapter has been inspired by an educational project: Future Youth School – Forums (FYS-FORUMS),<sup>1</sup> implemented in the years 2015–2018 by five partner organizations from Poland, Lithuania, Italy, Cyprus, and Great Britain<sup>2</sup> within the Erasmus+ programme. Apart from partners from the 5 countries above, the recipients, but also the co-organizers of FYS – FORUMS, were primary and junior high schools (both teachers and students). I was invited to the project as a social pedagogue who has experience with working with youth at risk and is familiar with the

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participatory approach. Within the idea of the project, of especial interest for me was that the main aims of actions were to anticipate pupils drop out and cut off the risk of starting the process of exclusion at its very early stage. The Forum, in my opinion, was a form of prevention tool for the education dropout risk.

The basic aim of the FYS-FORUMS Project was to create a model of schooling that promoted the idea of global citizenship with the use of a youth forum,<sup>3</sup> which was defined as the space within the school for students to express their opinions and present ideas that coincided with the democratic process of making a decision. This event by definition was supposed to be organized by students, including only topics recognised as important by young people. The elements that differentiated this forum from other similar ones organized in various parts of the world were real outcomes of the decisions taken during the forum, important for the school life and students and staff's activity on the local and global level. Based on the survey<sup>4</sup> and many discussions with the project partners, teachers and students, we came to the conclusion that the idea of the forum as a place to express opinions is not satisfying for all the above parties. It should be emphasised that the way we understand democracy and the process of arriving at decisions in accordance with its assumptions, in order to have a chance to have a real impact, it cannot finish at the stage of a discussion. Inseparable parts of this process are also decisions on the direction of the activity and the activity itself – without them (decisions

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<sup>3</sup> Youth forums have been established in over 30 schools that agreed to take part in the project. In the first year only 4 educational institutions from 4 countries (Great Britain, Cyprus, Lithuania, and Italy) were involved, in the following years more schools joined in (from the above countries and Poland). In the forum creation and work mainly young people were involved, with minimum encouragement and support from teachers in the first stage of the project. Originally it was assumed that the forum will be an institution working within the school that in the following years will be less and less dependent on teaching staff and become a space for students and shaped by them. During each Forum there were discussed topics important from the point of view of young people and suggested by them. The discussion formed the basis for directing further actions in correspondence with the subject of the discussion held during the event. Entrusting the forum to students was supposed to increase the feeling of agency, civic awareness, involvement in local, regional and global problems, and to develop democratic attitudes.

<sup>4</sup> Before any actions were directed and taken, research was carried out (focused interviews with students and teachers), the object of which was to examine the current situation and expectations of students and teachers in relation to their participation in school life. Of special interest were the relations between school-life of participants, assessment of educational programmes' usefulness in everyday life, teachers' opinions on the educational contents implemented by them, students' knowledge about global citizenship and their involvement in local and regional issues. Thus, the purpose of the subject of particular attention was to facilitate answering the question of how to introduce the model of education based on the rules of democratization and participation to school, where the primary objective is the development of involvement and civic attitudes among students.

connected with actions), the forum would only be “the art for art’s sake”, and the idea behind it would come to an end together with the project. Apart from chances for the forum’s surviving at school, assessed as small, what motivated us to create a forum as a students’ institution with the right to make decisions concerning school activity was related to the intention to equip students with decision-making skills, which could be achieved by authentic observation of their consequences in the life of the school.

## Justification for modifying the school space

The incentives to create the institution of the forum were: firstly, perception of the current educational system as inefficient in the scope of developing such skills as communication, organization, and entrepreneurship, which could be useful in future professional and private life. Currently, in the majority of European countries teaching programmes are based on the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, not the development of practical skills that can be applied in everyday life (for example UK National Curriculum, 2014). Based on literature review,<sup>5</sup> as well as observations and experiences of people involved in the project, it was confirmed that the current system of education is insufficient where it comes to the development of general/transversal competences,<sup>6</sup> while knowledge transferred during classes is perceived by students as of little use in both everyday<sup>7</sup> and professional life.<sup>8</sup> The purpose of the forums established within the project was to integrate the knowledge gained in the process of education with practical learning and its application as well as the development of the transversal competences mentioned earlier. Secondly, another incentive was recognising the issues

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<sup>5</sup> As part of the research preceding the project implementation, in 5 countries involved in FYS-FORUMS an analysis of official documents regulating the work of the educational sector was carried out.

<sup>6</sup> Competence (according to the European Qualifications Framework 2009) is defined as “proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. Competence is defined in terms of responsibility and autonomy” (Kolanowska, 2010: 321). Among various types of competences (such as for example languages, IT, specialization competences, etc.) we can find cross-sectional competences that are not related to any specific subject or field of studies (ibidem: 322) and which include among others: entrepreneurship, creativity, team work, communicativeness, etc.

<sup>7</sup> It is one of the outcomes of a research carried out before taking the action.

<sup>8</sup> For example in Great Britain, there is a strong demand from businesses to support young people in formal education – “learning by taking part in educational programmes and trainings, leading to the acquisition of a registered qualification, which is a set of learning/educational outcomes the achievement of which was formally confirmed by authorized institution and was registered in the Integrated Qualifications Register” (see: Think Global, 2013).

of democratization, participation and involvement of youth in local and global issues as important and essential for the development of conscious and active citizens. The project participants noticed in the existing teaching programmes the deficiency of subjects that would promote the idea of democracy and citizenship in an efficient way. As Jonathan Birdwell et al. (2014) note, contemporary youth get involved in civic matters to a limited extent, which can result directly from the approach of the school and teachers to subjects that teach youth citizenship and encourage them to take up social activity. For example, in Poland, as in many European countries, subjects such as Social Studies have a considerably lower status than such subjects as Maths or Physics.

At the beginning, each Forum was preceded by workshops for young people, to help them gain such competences as, for example: speaking in public; leadership skills development; providing students with some information enabling them to actively participate in the discussion; and teaching them effective and critical means of searching for credible sources of information in the future. What is more, young people learned how to prepare such an event on their own, to take total control over its organisation in the future.

Taking into consideration all the above elements of the FYS-FORUMS Project, we decided to support and develop students' civic attitudes based on such priorities as involvement, democratization, participation and empowerment by the creation of youth forums. These highlighted priorities corresponded to the strategy towards young people adopted in the EU as well as the educational practice, where one of the primary objectives is the minimization of the number of students who drop out of schools<sup>9</sup> for various reasons. What is more, the implementation of the FYS-FORUMS project is also the response to the need for young people in European countries to acquire social, civil, communication, or effective learning competences.

The establishing of the institution of youth forums was the objective in itself, but also the means to achieve desirable outcomes. Taking part in the forum also had an additional objective of "teaching" young people to

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<sup>9</sup> In Poland in didactic research calculation of the scale of the phenomenon of premature school dropout ESL (Early School Leaving) indicator is applied. J. Madalińska-Michalak writes that "This indicator does not have a fixed name in Poland. In the official translation of the EU documents initially it was called a dropout rate (Konkluzje Rady ds. Edukacji of 12th May, 2009 after: Madalińska-Michalak, 2014: 132). As the author further notes "the phenomenon of early school dropout refers to people who left school or equivalent form of education. These people often obtained only first level of secondary education (ISCED 2 – in Poland the completion of ISCED 2 means the junior high school level education) or lower. At the same time in the period when they could make up for the effects of such a decision and improve their chances for active, lifelong education i.e. at the age of 18–24, they do not participate in further education or professional training" (ibidem: 132).

participate in democracy, of shaping civic attitudes in them. In this case learning was combined with direct involvement, thus granting a satisfying and sufficient level of knowledge in this field achieved without any special effort.

## Participatory approach in theory

To present theoretical assumptions of participatory approaches certain selected concepts will be mentioned below (see for example: Anderson, 1998; Herr, 1999; O’Kane, 2008; Granosik et al., 2014; Gulczyńska, 2017). They were chosen due to the similarity of their approach to that of the current author as well as to the assumptions made at least in the initial phase of the project about the way of understanding participation at school. To complement the understanding of participatory approaches, the concepts of critical youth studies (see for example: Johnson, 2001; Schwartzman, 2001; Sibley, 1995) will be included. Making different ontological and epistemological assumptions rather than “traditional approaches” as to the way of understanding young age and young people, they explain the reasons why changing the way of treating youth and making their opinion important is necessary.

The basis for the participatory approach to working with children or youth is the approach that people legally categorised as minors are not passive participants of the process of socialisation but legitimate members of the society who, just like adults, create it and have the ability to transform it. Taking the above into consideration, their role in any aspect of life should not be limited but should be fully active (O’Kane, 2008). The application of this approach requires the consideration of many theoretical, methodological, and ethical issues. Youth, in the traditional approach, is defined in the context of biological age, which defines the level of an individual in the scope of psychological, social, or physical development. Based on age, various privileges and rights are conferred, such as the right to buy alcohol or cigarettes legally, the right to vote or work. On this basis it is also determined in what scope an individual has the possibility to get involved and make decisions on their own behalf. In this perspective youth is in the opposite situation to adulthood which, as Johnson (2001) and Schwartzman (2001) note, creates the situation in which young people enter into adulthood or come of age in isolation from the former stage of life – childhood – and in a way far away from it.

Participatory and critical approaches stand in opposition to the order in which age is seen as a sharp boundary that determines skills, abilities or rights of people, regarding this way of setting the boundary as unfair for

young people, as it suggests their development is incomplete and thus they are irrational as human beings. As a consequence of such age boundaries the practices aiming at protection, prevention and controlling of youth and their activity are legitimised and common (among others: Austin et al., 1998; Vadeboncoeur et al., 2005). As Johnson (2001) and Schwartzman (2001) note, such a way of describing and treating young people results in them taking up a lower and diminished position in the society in comparison to the high position of adults. What is more, the social order created by adults by means of a set of standards, rules and prohibitions limits the natural need of young people to act and actively participate, which later (in adult life) is perceived as valuable. Supporters of the critical rhetoric in the field of youth research object to such an order and regarding someone's abilities or limitations from the angle of biological age (Sibley, 1995). In exchange, they propose an approach removing the dichotomy between youth and adulthood; they also object to the privileged position of adults. The critically oriented researchers also propose the redefinition and transformation of the institutions (family, educational or legal), which in their current shape only stress the importance and role of adults. As David Cerecer Quijada et al. (2013) note, the role of the above institutions is the preparation of young people to adulthood, which, paradoxically, often entails protecting them from the reality of everyday life. Angela McRobbie (1994) and Nancy Lesko (2001) stress that excessive protection from the so-called "misguidance" becomes an excuse for adults to use various forms of supervision, control and correction of young people's behaviour. Critical research of youth stands in opposition to arbitrary division of young people into those who pose a threat and those who need to be protected from the threat. The first group, according to adults, needs discipline and punishment, the second group is regarded as potential victims and attributed good intentions in advance.

Changes in the approach to youth are, according to the representatives of critical trends, necessary and express concern for democratization and participation of young people in social life as legitimate active entities instead of objects of somebody's educational interventions. As D. Quijada et al. (2013) note, "youth and their activity should be treated seriously in accordance with the assumption that young people are citizens and not citizens in the making" (Quijada et al., 2013: 221). Due to the empowering approach towards youth, they start to develop in an unconstrained way, unleashing their natural need to act, not for specific benefits (for example a better grade at school), but because of the sense that this is what should be done. The conclusions from the research carried out by Daniels and Perry (2003) showed that for students in the process of education it is extremely important that their teachers support them and encourage them to express their opinions, to think critically and to be autonomous. The researchers

interested in the issues of youth education noted that in classes where teachers supported such practice, the students were better motivated, found learning more important and were significantly more involved in work at school (Daniels et al., 2001; Ryan, Stiller, 1991; Valeski, Stipek, 2001). The participation, as Waters-Adams (1994) observes, actively involves people in the process of understanding their way of acting. Thanks to the reflection over the current practice people are able to improve and reshape it. According to the above author, this plays a key role in the process of achieving mature thinking, the main pillars of which are democracy and cooperation (Waters-Adams, p. 197). What is more, the creation of participatory structures is an opportunity to listen to different voices and opinions on the vision of the future, politics etc. and provides information on the direction in which reality should be changed and shaped to become the participants' "own place", with people creating it actively involved in working and caring for it. The objective of participation is to counteract the routine form of lack of involvement, where some make the decision and the others wait for it to be made.

In Western societies, children's participation means their involvement in taking decisions affecting their social reality, while their point of view becomes visible and audible in various contexts. Anita Gulczyńska (2017) explains the term "participation", referring to the text where it is defined as "including children in decisions which affect their lives, the life of the community and wider society in which they live. It includes supporting children and young people in thinking about their business, in effective expression of their opinions and positive interaction with other people" (Save the Children, 2003; after: Gulczyńska 2017: 183). This researcher, citing Anita Franklin and Patricia Sloper (2005), distinguishes between individual and group participation. In the individual dimension it is carried out by children exercising "their rights to access services and opportunities offered by the society as well as taking part in the decisions that affect it" (Franklin and Sloper 2005: 183). The second (group) dimension focuses on "political and civic education, participation in decisions of group, local and social scope" (Franklin and Sloper 2005: 183). Both individual and group participatory models can be implemented in various contexts and social institutions, such as home, school, local community and even in a regional or global context. As the aforementioned researcher noted, in Poland particular emphasis is put on participation in educational types of institutions (Śliwerski, 2008; Andrzejewski, 2012; Jarosz, 2013; Śliwerski, 2013).

Researchers such as Diana McNeish et al. (2002) considered the reasons for taking into account and introducing participatory methods to various institutions in reference to their importance, roles, legislation, etc. Some arguments of the above authors are presented below:

- Acknowledging and respecting the rights of children as citizens and users of various services who participate in different institutions on the same conditions as others (for example adults);
- Carrying out legal duties resulting from the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989;
- Improvement and adaptation of social services addressed to children by systematically consulting on their needs with them. Only young people can help and identify the changing needs of their peers;
- Participation gives young people the possibility to have impact on and some choice of the provided services, which can be helpful for understanding their needs and for intentional decision-making;
- Participation improves the decision-making process; young people become more reflective but also more critical;
- Strengthening democratic processes. Democracy that includes representatives of new generation gains new opportunities;
- Young people become active members of the society, for example school, local or regional community;
- It strengthens child protection and prevents abuse towards them, which is possible for example when treating their words as we would treat the words of adults. The child stops being in a child-adult relationship in a less privileged position;
- Development of communication skills which can be useful in debates, negotiations, when setting priorities and making decisions. This proves beneficial in both everyday private and public life;
- It strengthens and increases self-esteem. Active participation provides the possibility to test one's own effectiveness and boost self-confidence.

On the other hand, Mariusz Granosik et al. (2014) emphasize that the use of the participatory approach as a method empowers the participants who in a classic order occupy an unprivileged position. In place of a traditional division based on “working for youth” approach, this publication proposes “working with youth”. Young people, as legitimate citizens, have the right to co-decide and take action in the public space. Its introduction into a school environment is, however, a long and difficult process as it changes the classical order and hierarchy, with students becoming partners with the right to decide about matters related to school. In the next subsection of this chapter some problems will be presented that impeded the practical use of participatory approach at school.



## **Participatory approaches in practice – on the example of FYS – FORUMS Project**

In FYS-FORUMS Project, the participation was understood as:

youth being actively involved in decision-making and taking action in issues relevant to them. Within formal education, this could be seen as encompassing a learner-centred and participatory approach within both the formal curriculum and non-formal or informal learning” (Bourn, 2016).

The introduction of this approach to formal education was supposed to include students in a democratic process of decision-making in relation to school activity on a local, regional, or even global level. During the project implementation it was possible to achieve many of the goals, for example students became involved in the preparation of the forum, they joined the discussion; during the first forum young people discussed about the refugee crisis in Europe (people forced to flee), and Italian students came up with an idea how they could take care of people forced to leave their country, helping them best they could. However, in this subsection I would like to focus on things that made it harder (or even impossible) to fully introduce participatory approaches within the schools taking part in the project. All the parties involved in the project implementation – partner teachers, and students – in a way contributed to the lack of spectacular success in changing the approach to working at school into a participatory one.

### ***Partners remind us again who these were***

The biggest problem for this group was connected with fictitious agreement on the way of introducing work based on the rules of democratization and participation at schools. Despite agreeing on the understanding of the notion of ‘participation’ (defined at the beginning of this subsection) various members of the team interpreted its meaning in a different way.

### ***Teachers***

This professional group, despite the initial enthusiasm towards the idea of working with youth based on the participatory approach, was, as it turned out, not ready to introduce certain changes. The teachers were unwilling to hand the forums completely over to students. At the initial stage

of work, they would choose the people “worthy”<sup>10</sup> of participating in it. As they explained to us later, they did it because they wanted to be sure that the event would be a success, so they had to choose people they were certain would fulfil the entrusted tasks.

Another obstacle was lack of readiness to widen the students’ scope of decisiveness. The teachers and management staff were informed about the possibilities of using the forum in their schools. Here are a few examples:

- Annual event promoting civic participation and involvement of youth within the institution with young people discussing social issues;
- The space for young people to make decisions, discuss and negotiate issues on a local and/or global level;
- Independent student community, with the right to participate in making decisions connected with the institution activity;
- Advisory body, the aim of which is to help management staff in making decisions;
- The space to exchange experience and create a cooperation network among young people from different institutions or even countries.

All schools chose to organize the forum as an annual event promoting participation and civic involvement of youth within the institution with young people discussing social issues, with some decision-making power in the scope of activity related to the subject of the discussion. It was the so-called “minimum plan”, but the staff concluded that it was the only variant they could envisage at that stage of working with young people.

The school curriculum and fear of failing to implement it was another important element standing in the way and obstructing the implementation of the participatory approach. By extending the decision-making powers of students at school it could lead to failure in its implementation.

It is hard to evaluate the attitude and lack of staff’s readiness to introduce the participatory approach at school as indisputably negative. Maybe, taking into consideration many determinants, such as for example the fact that the direction of changes was not suggested by young people but by some people from outside the school community, it was the only option possible. Moderation, in this context, may be considered an expression of care for the decision-making autonomy of the actual participants in this social space.

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<sup>10</sup> Sinclair (2004) noticed for example a phenomenon posing a threat to participation, namely the selection of students who in the opinion of teachers “are suitable to participate”. To take a closer look at this phenomenon, the researcher analyzed a dozen or so projects which assumedly worked with the use of the participatory approach which, however, does not mean that every young person has the same chances of being included. The ways of limiting the access are: selective information, individual invitations with teachers creating the general rule that “only the invited are welcome”, and in the countries with numerous minority members, limitation of communication including unequal access to information and resources.

However, the biggest obstacle which was noticed during the talks both by teachers and students,<sup>11</sup> was the change of role and, consequently, the change of relationship between students and teachers. The teachers could not come to terms with losing their privileged position. Their fears were connected with further work with young people who, as they said, “when they feel that they are given more freedom, will stop listening to us”.<sup>12</sup>

### **Students**

The above problem of “going beyond the role” referred also to students, who, first of all, had problems putting themselves in the role of a partner of a teacher, not a student, and then they could not imagine a teacher who was no longer a teacher, in the traditional meaning of the word, having no power over students that in this context manifested itself by assessing the students’ involvement in the forum implementation (how good was the student). The problem is related to the lack of mutual trust between students and teachers. This issue came up numerous times during the interviews with both groups. The teachers mentioned lack of trust towards students and tried to secure themselves from failure by choosing only some students, the “more trustworthy” ones, while students said they could feel their teachers’ distrust towards them and treating them as people who, if left on their own performing some task, would not manage. What is more, the students seemed apprehensive of changing the ‘old order’, which in its current shape was perceived as obvious – “this is what school is about”,<sup>13</sup> and rules at school. When referring to the responses of young people, it has to be pointed out that young people generally show a limited understanding of the need to participate in local/global actions. At the same time they express some interest and wish to take part in them, but in most cases this results from external motivation, which means that they recognize their value because they allow them to achieve some personal benefits, e.g. a good report at school. They described their involvement in developing skills in a similar way: in terms of improving their position in school and in general in their future life, and this was the only part connected in any way with work. An analysis of responses across all the groups revealed two categories of participants. These categories are based on the discourse employed by the participants

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<sup>11</sup> I refer to 2 rounds of focus interviews carried out with teachers and students from all the schools involved in the project. In total within 3 years of the Project duration 16 interviews were carried out (8 with teachers and 8 with students).

<sup>12</sup> Statement of one of the teachers.

<sup>13</sup> Statement of one of the teachers.

in their responses, their explication of their current understanding of the global citizenship issue, and their current level of engagement.

Some of the participants perceived this issue as influences that affected their personal life and they were interested in it – they were called “experience-oriented”. Other participants explained the importance of the issue referring to school lessons – I called them “learning-oriented”.

### ***“Experience-Oriented”***

“Experience-oriented” participants of focus groups are involved in a wide range of community activities. They are involved in volunteer work. Their responses reflect their personal (direct or indirect) experience in, for example, Civil Rights and racism. This was expressed in the following way:

Black people still get insulted today. I've discussed this with my best friend and parents and my best friend said how unfair it was back then, all those people who seemed to make racism an actual thing, they deserved to die a long time ago. I thought violence isn't always the answer. I thought at one point, maybe if you try to talk to somebody and say that racism isn't a good thing, then they could change their mind on how white people and black people see things.

I am not a Cypriot, so I would like to have the opportunity to present my country, our history to the rest of the school, and learn from others about their culture and other places in the world.

The “experience-oriented” group of participants has a much deeper and greater understanding of the need to be involved in such activities as volunteer work and various range of community work.

### ***“Learning-Oriented”***

This group of participants had some difficulties when trying to think about what global citizenship meant. At the same time, these participants, like all others, listed some issues of importance to them, such as climate change or human rights. However, as can be seen from the answers below, the global citizenship issue is important to them for other reasons than those mentioned by the “experience-oriented” group. Their comments in this particular context reflect their perspective on the significance of the curriculum and subjects where global citizenship is present and has to be passed. This group of participants agreed that they had discussed and learned about the suggested global issues during various lessons, and thought they were interesting to know about, however, they were not that different from other lessons and also they were quite difficult subjects. The discussion seemed to suggest that pupils were used to discussing global issues in their lessons and it was just a part of their normal learning.

Here are some comments:

Did you like learning about those issues? Do you think they're relevant?

3 – It was quite difficult.

1 – Well, it was like a normal lesson, just a different subject. Like always.

We have discussed climate change so many times that I don't want to learn any more about that issue.

## Concluding remarks

The inclusion of young people's voice and staying in touch with them during the decision-making process makes it necessary to consider several ethical issues that in a traditional school organization are not that noticeable. As Claire O'Kane and Nigel Thomas (1998) note, the majority of problems that need to be solved when working with young people are very similar to those encountered when working with adults. However, this does not mean that the two forms of cooperation do not differ from each other. The above authors encourage us to look for the little details and based on some reflection systematically improve the work effectiveness. Virginia Morrow (1999) emphasizes that the greatest ethical challenge for research or participatory practice is "levelling discrepancies in the scope of power and status between adults and children" (Morrow, 1999: 98). Thus, taking away the privileged position from adults and helping children and adults alike to come to terms with the new reality constructed according to totally different rules becomes extremely important. Erasing the traditional division of power is fundamental for the development of work based on the rules of participation, without it neither an adult nor a child would be able to become full participants of the project.

As Judith Ennew and Harriot Beazley (2006) note, another potential threat to working with young people on the basis of the participatory approach is tokenism, namely symbolical practice of minority inclusion, adopted by the representatives of dominant groups which, under the label of participation, aim at maintaining the old order. This kind of inclusion is limited to the scope of privileges granted to minorities by the privileged group and is also controlled by it. Kathryn Herr (1999) notes that the schools which undertake to apply the participatory approach and create the environment for the participants of this reality to be able to co-decide, in practice often bring about control of the discourse of changes under the cover of progressiveness. Thanks to this, the school maintains the old order and its *status quo*. When it happens, instead of helping in increasing activity, participation effectively limits it. Hampering the development in this context can be understood as intentional slowing down of bottom-up student

initiatives. Students would finally start demanding their rights and initiate actions aiming at it of their own accord. "Schools, according to Herr, create pseudo-participatory structures, the real goal of which is (...) to postpone the actual work on the reform of education" (Herr, 1999: 235). This threat gives rise to the need to consider ethical dilemmas connected with it: firstly, how to reduce inequality and over-activity of groups that form the majority. Secondly, in which fields and areas of life should young people have a real impact on the events, instead of the illusory sense of being in control. Apart from the discussion, young people should also have a chance to see the changes, the direction of which they discussed. The last ethical dilemma, mentioned by J. Ennew et al. (2006), is the issue of empowerment. In theory, each use of the participatory approach contains some empowering element, but the term can be understood in different ways. Therefore, it is worth asking at the beginning of work, what kind of empowerment do we expect? For example, do we want to change the current authority system? If a radical empowering solution is not our goal, do we only want to utilise it in some fields and if so, to what extent do we want to share the power (as practitioners). An important question is also what will the consequences of participatory approach implementation be, especially in case of its failure. In such a situation, it is worth considering from the start the method of restoring the balance lost as a result of the activities.

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