

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM RESITA

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Abstract: *In the context in which a series of imperatives of public politics at a national level are not in agreement with the wishes, aspirations and feelings of common people, community development is identified more with interventions axed on the cultivation of a local democracy with a high degree of participation and public politics initiated by citizens. Community development is correlated with an associative activity at a local level that has as finality an upwards approach of the elaboration of public politics. Actions of community development refer to a more complex process with a higher degree of awareness and analysis. From the stages of this process we can not miss a process of identification of youngs' needs and aspirations, reason for which in this paper we will present an analysis of the needs of young people from Resita that aim their civic knowledge, abilities and attitudes in connection to a civic participation. This analysis may represent a starting point for the development of an efficient strategy of development of politics for young people.*

Keywords: *community development, democracy, public politics, lobby, advocacy,*

1. Community development – principle of modern and postmodern education

Community development is a complex concept, which supposes change at the community level for the society. The analysis of terms – change and utility – represented an interest, a theme and a debate even since the 19th century. Thus in 1896, the American pedagogue John Dewey opened an experimental school called “the Laboratory school”. The purpose of this school was to cultivate social awareness and a democratic vision. The pupils of this school were engaged in educational activities in order to develop their intellectual and to cultivate social relations based on cooperation. The schooling act supposed learning through collaboration, inter-disciplinary, civic learning etc.

J. Dewey believes that the reason for graduating school is not exclusively preparing for a career, but the closeness to an ideal of democracy. In his belief, a school centred on pupils doesn't have a well contoured social direction and this is why we tend to see the child more “competitive” than “intrinsic”. This comparison supposes acquisitions fixed by an adult. These acquisitions have the purpose of “knowledge purifying in a mental and moral cavity that is waiting to be filled up”. But life means development, a concept that is superior to acquisition. Development implies “an intrinsic plenitude and absolute claims”, actions through which we live “for real and in a positive manner” (Dewey, 1916, p.51). The corresponding solution supposes a connection between society and educational change.

In the pedagogue's belief, it is essential for schooling to be correlated to society. The pupils are the ones that will plan and realize a social change. Schools that ignore this aspect will produce egocentric individuals, incapables of development. J. Dewey thus proposes the idea of school and of simplified community. This idea supposes a number of people united by the fact that they work according to common rules, in a common spirit and with common goals. In reality, this embryonic society supposes pupils that are guided in a democratic and cooperative

manner and which are involved in “active occupations”. This demarche is based on two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that life, in general and those occupations that serve social need, in particular, represent the key elements of education: “Active occupations refer to manual skills and technical efficiency so that, an immediate satisfaction is found in work” (idem, pag. 197). The second hypothesis is that work leads to development, only if it is guided. This is why schools fulfil a guidance role, but also one for the understanding of pupils.

The ideal of education is supreme. This ideal can be reached when schools functions to change society: “The are some who declare that schools must, pure and simple, reflect social changes which have already happened... others insist that schools must take part actively in the directing of social changes ...” (Dewey, 1938, pag. 69). The purpose of education is determined by the type of society, society is the one that influences education.

Elements of J. Dewey’s conception are also used by his collaborator W. H. Kilpatrick, known in the education domain through the development of the “project method”, a method applied with success in USA primary schools. The project method puts an accent on extra-curricular activities for the development of a community by involving pupils in the process of proposal of public politics and in the influencing of authorities through specific activities of lobby and advocacy. The idea predominant social, are also identified in the conceptions of postmodernist pedagogues:

- The community concept is central to P. Freire’s conception (1970). In the pedagogy for the oppressed, the pedagogue proposes a stage of critical transformation, during which people change their statute through a social action. Education supposes a dialogue between pupils and adults, regarding the problems of the community, of the world, by using an inter-disciplinary approach.

- H. Giroux considers culture an artefact, and the school an instrument for its transmission. The pedagogue argues the lack of “moral leadership models necessary for the advancing of interests of a democratic society”. This demarche doesn’t ensure progress, because excellency implies “new forms of practice and civic participation”, and not a quartering in a dominant tradition. The role of schooling is to capacitate people to be “active and critical citizens, capable of fighting for the reconstruction of a public democratic life” (Giroux, 1988, p.245, 296).

- According to Michael Apple’s opinion, education indoctrinates pupils by intentionally placing each of them on a pre-established social role and by excluding from education nowadays problems of the society: relations between races, violence, economic and politic control. Schools accentuate the dynamics of power, representing an instrument of pupils’ oppression (Apple, 2004, p. 2).

Any development supposes the option for certain values and assumptions that legitimate its process and finality. One of these values is humanism, because development is made for people with their participation. The development of a community starts from the people’s needs and aspirations that compose it. Another supposition of community development is participation, development being a process that implies participation in a great measure of the community and hardening the community by developing cooperation abilities and the collective action of its members. Thus, a basic definition presents community development as: “an active participation, if it is possible, in the community’s initiative, but, if this initiative doesn’t appear spontaneously, challenge and stimulation techniques can be used to obtain an active and enthusiastic reaction.”(Smith, 1996, 2006)

Community development is correlated with an associative activity at a local level that has as finality an upwards approach of the elaboration of public politics. An important concept is the one regarding capacity building: special, economic, cultural, technical or ecologic competencies. The developing of capacity is strongly connected to the demarche of elaboration or influencing of public politics at the young people’s level. Actions of community development imply a more complex process with a higher degree of awareness and analysis. From the stages of this process

the identification process of the young people's needs and aspirations can't be missed, together with the evaluation and hierarchy of alternative actions, the active search for resources and a process of systematic planning.

2. The civic participation of young people from Resita

The analysis of young people's needs at a local level might represent a starting point in the development of an efficient development strategy of politics for the young. For this reason, in May-June 2013 I have applied a questionnaire which was filled in by 710 young people with ages between 18 and 15, from which 242 males and 466 females.

The analysis of young people's needs from Resita aimed at:

- civic knowledge (about democracy the democratic system and public politics);
- cognitive civic abilities regarding a civic participation of young people in the domain of public politics;
- civic behaviours: forms of civic participation;
- attitudes towards the involvement in political action expresses through the importance of a participation to political action (local and general elections, to follow political problems in newspapers, to help people from their community in difficulty),
- political civic abilities: the perception of a personal political efficiency of young people, the degree of familiarity with the problems of the community;
- a present and future political presence of young people.

For the first question "During your education, how did you learn about democracy, citizenship, public politics and other notions of the same type " 39,3% of the young people questioned recognize the role of school in offering information regarding civic knowledge. Also, the mass media means (radio, TV) represent for 38,6% of the young people interviewed modalities of gaining civic knowledge. Non-formal educational activities have a minor role in their civic education: a small percentage of young people declared that they found out information about democracy from activities realized by public institutions or from activities outside schools.

1	From school	39,3%
2	From activities outside schools	11,2%
3	From activities realized by public institutions	8,9%
4	From radio, TV	38,6%
5	Family	2,0%

The second item had the role of questioning the efficiency of a transposal of civic knowledge into practice:

- 38,3 % of the young people interviewed consider that the civic information gained from the activities specified have "somehow" helped them in the interpretation of political events.
- 29,6 % of them consider that the civic information acquired from the activities specified helped "much" in the cooperation with other people in order to solve a problem.
- 38,9 % of the young people questioned sustain they have the capacity to critically approach social events.

	Not at all	A little	Somehow	Much	A lot
The interpretation of political events on the	15,5%	26,8%	28,3%	15,5%	3,9%

basis of real information					
Cooperation with other people in order to solve a problem	5,6%	13,8%	34,9%	29,6%	16,1%
Understanding the fact that an individual implication is important for social change	5,1%	14,4%	30,7%	29,6%	20,3%
A critical approach of social events	11,3%	23,4%	38,9%	20,0%	6,5%
Taking decisions independently	7,1%	18,6%	29,1%	31,1%	14,1%

Item 3 – “When we say about a person that is hold civic virtues we refer to...” – has the role to evaluate the correctitude of civic knowledge. 65,63% of the young people questioned answered correctly to this item – this person “is interested in the goals and the interests of the community”.

The perception of young people on what civic participation represents to them is analysed in item 4 – “Which of the following statement refer to the young civic participation”. 34,37% of the young people interviewed consider that a civic participation supposes “the contracting of representatives in order to improve politics and programs for the young”; 56,90% of them the variant “participation to the training program for the young”; for 19,71% of the young interviewed “the offering of funds to a young organization” refers to a form of civic participation; the other variants were also chosen “the offering of assistance for young with a risk factor” - 18,02%, “belonging to a political party” - 7,32%. In fact all these aspects refer to the young people civic participation.

Items 5 and 6 “How many of you did you take part in the following activities during the last year” and “How probable is the realization of the following activities” have the role of evaluating the young people’s actions and to offer us an image of their future desires and actions.

	Weekly	At least once a month	2-3 times a year	Never
You voluntarily helped a neighbor	14,08 %	32,40 %	41,12 %	12,39 %
Offer voluntary services	6,76 %	12,40 %	26,76 %	53,80 %
Participated in the taking of important decisions at your school	5,91 %	18,02 %	32,68 %	43,38 %
You joined a local protest or signed a petition	4,50 %	11,55%	27,04 %	56,90 %
Contacted a local representative for an important community problem	4,50 %	8,16 %	22,53 %	64,78 %
Objected in an open manner against an injustice	13,80 %	17,46 %	23,39 %	36,06 %
Implicated in mass media discussions regarding community problems	4,50 %	9,30 %	24,51 %	61,70 %

The results obtained reveal a scarce participation of young people in civic activities at the level of local communities. At the level of this age segment and of this community, community development resumes to concepts without applicability and a practical efficiency.

Regarding future civic actions of the young people interviewed, the results are more gratifying. More than half of the sample questioned declared the wish to participate in community development.

Table 4 – How probable is the realization of the following activities

	Certainly yes	Probably yes	I am not sure	Probably not	Certainly not
Have you joined a local protest or signed a petition	7,04 %	21,97 %	27,32 %	24,22 %	19,44 %
Have you contacted a local representative for an important community problem	10,42 %	30,70 %	23,66 %	22,25 %	12,68 %
Have you objected openly against an injustice	10,14 %	8,17 %	21,13 %	29,58 %	30,99 %
Have you got involved in mass media discuss regarding community problems	12,11 %	23,94 %	30,70 %	19,72 %	13,52 %
Have you registered to a political party	41,13 %	21,97 %	21,13 %	8,45 %	7,32 %
Have you started an NGO	7,60 %	14,93 %	29,30 %	27,89 %	20,28 %
Have you run for a public function	5,63 %	16,39 %	18,87 %	32,66 %	35,49 %
Have you notified or written to a newspaper about corruption	12,11 %	24,79 %	25,63 %	19,72 %	17,75 %

For the item 7 “*State three problems with which the town Resita is confronted with*” - 69,4 % of the young people questioned denounced the lack of working places, 18,1 % of the young questioned denounced a poor infrastructure, 12,2% of the young questioned denounce the lack of places and means to spend their free time, , 20,6 % of the young people questioned denounce problems of education (drugs and alcohol), 47,5 % of the young questioned denounce other problems: safety, social differences, the lack of cultural programs, the existence of dilapidated buildings, indifference towards the young, the lack of young at a local level, the lack of community programs, the lack of homes for newly married persons. If we make a comparison with the problems underlined by these studies and reported at a national level, we may confirm the correctness of the problems identified.

When questioned about the institution that offers credibility in solving these problems, the young people from the town Resita offer a degree of trust close to three institutions: Town Hall, Local Council and County Council. The prefect’s institution obtains a degree of trust close to the one offered to specified institutions.

Table 5 – How much do you trust the following institutions in solving these problems

	A lot	Much	Some what	A little	Not at all
Town Hall	22	51	128	97	56
Local Council	13	42	117	110	72
County Council	15	41	126	104	68
Prefecture	15	43	105	108	83
Political parties	10	18	72	97	155

The last question “*How interested are you in local community problems*” – has the role to underline the interest of the majority in a civic participation: 14,41% are very interested, 43,22 % are interested, 38,42 % are some what interested and 3,67% are not interested.

3. Conclusions

In the context in which a series of imperatives of public politics at a national level are not in agreement with the desires, the aspirations, the feelings of common people, a community development identifies more with interventions focused on the cultivating of a local democracy with a high degree of participation and public politics initiated by its citizens. The empowering of young people to participate in a community development and in the initiation of public politics represents a challenge and a necessity.

Community development encourages decisions and participation at a local level, but on the other side it may be looked at as an implementation of national politics at the level of the community and of the local authorities. This process supposes the development of the young people's principles in the following way:

- Humanism, the fact that a development is made by the participation of humans;
- The durability of process, because the young people's motivation is intrinsic;
- The responsibility of development actions, a concordance with the basic values and with the traditions of that society.

Public politics are, first of all, a means of hardening the sense of the community. By participating in the process of identification of community problems and the elaboration of public politics as an answer to these problems, young people interact more frequently with neighbors, with colleagues and with other people exchanging a series of opinions. Thus a series of initiatives of public politics may appear, but the effect is the most important one and the durable fact is the revival of the community sense. The practice of civic competencies in order to obtain transformations in the social and politic environment influence in a strongly positive manner the development of the young people civic profile and produces a durable motivation of civic participation. Through the young people's participation in the process of trigger and elaboration of public politics the feeling of personal political efficiency is increased and capacities of civic participation are formed. The phenomenon of empowerment appears in young people and the creation of connections between their needs and the elaboration process of public politics. In other words, through the implication of the young in activities of intimation of community problems and of influencing the public politics we assist at a qualitative transformation of a democratic society: a passing is created from an electoral democracy to a participative one.

The young are a real force of the society, if they are empowered and have action instruments. For this reason we consider it to be necessary to implement programs of community education with the help of public institutions; the development of programs by local educational institutions of extra-curricular activities on the theme of active citizenship. It is important that these programs accentuate the acquiring of knowledge, the development of abilities and the exercise of civic behaviours, the promotion and practice of all forms of civic participation: volunteer, the appurtenance to a political party, the participation in social programs, the offering of assistance for young with a risk factor, discussions with mass media, with the representative of the local community etc. The results of the programs are visible:

The young are familiarized with forms of participation to a civic life, other activities than the electoral ones, practicable in a daily manner.

Programs of community education influence in a positive manner the young trust in the capacity of finding a solution to the problems of the community, the trust in the capacity of finding a representative of authorities responsible and the trust in the capacity to influence by his forces the decisions of public authorities. It also influences in a positive manner the young's capacity to be leaders, a civic participative ability especially important for a good functioning of a democracy. Moreover, the repeated contact with the members of the community and with representatives of authorities and a mainly positive attitude lead to an increase of trust in the people of this community. The positive effect registered on the civic profit of pupils shows us

important clues and essential recommendations regarding the projecting of a strategy of development of local politics.

The interactive-participative, non-formal demarches in community education programs develop in superior manner knowledge, attitudes, abilities and civic behaviours; these have positive effects on the development of a civic profile of young people and produce a durable motivation of civic participation.

A development strategy for local politics for the young people is based on an objective analysis of their needs and may have as result young people that are more prepared for participation to a public or political life of this country, with chances of personal, social and professional success.

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