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Children's participation
and civic involvement development

Partycypacja dzieci
a rozwój zaangażowania obywatelskiego

STRESZCZENIE: W prezentowanym opracowaniu podjęte zostały niektóre wątki dyskursu o partycypacji społecznej młodych ludzi w kontekście jej realizowania w społecznościach lokalnych, z intencją ukazania zakresu i możliwości partycypacji lokalnej młodych ludzi oraz próbą wyjaśnienia na czym polega jej niewłaściwa interpretacja i realizacja. Celem rozważań jest też pokazanie znaczenia lokalnej partycypacji młodych ludzi dla rozwoju obywatelskich społeczności lokalnych i zaangażowania obywatelskiego na poziomie lokalnym i państwowym. Artykuł jest oczywiście jedynie zarysem rozległego współczesnego dyskursu nad partycypacją dzieci i jej implementacją w życie społeczne.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Partycypacja dzieci, partycypacja lokalna, obywatelstwo, społeczeństwo obywatelskie, demokracja.

ABSTRACT: The paper presents some issues of the discourse on social participation of children and young people in the context of its implementation in local communities. Its intention is to show the range and possibilities of local participation of young people and an attempt to explain what is wrong with its misinterpretation and implementation. The Author also aims to indicate the meaning of young people's local participation for the development of civil communities and civic involvement at the local and national level. The paper is only a foretaste of the wide contemporary discourse on children's participation and it implementation in social life.

KEYWORDS: Children's participation, local participation, citizenship, civic society, democracy.

> *Participation… It is the means by which a democracy is built
> and it is the standard against which democracies should be measured.
> Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship.*
> Roger Hart

Introduction

Participation has become a term that is eagerly and widely used by various government entities, local governments and NGOs to legitimize their activities and programs as consistent with the idea of democracy and the corresponding standards of a civil society. A rich trend of discourse and action in this area since the 1990s has been the participation of children (Jans 2004). In today's world, as it was noticed by Beck (1997), children are not only increasingly encouraged to "be the authors of their own lives ", but they are also more and more often being encouraged to speak and act in their own matters and in matters of the environments in which they live. Young people, previously unnoticed on the social scene, are now seen as advocates of their interests (Cockburn 2013; Lansdowne 2010), as social actors and social activists, as well as reviewers of decisions that affect them, and as researchers of their own reality (Wyness 2012; Toots, Worley and Skosireva 2014; Dahl 2014). The change in social status of children from passive "objects" of care and efforts, and the decisions of adults on entities of action and creation of social reality causes them to be increasingly involved in social decisions, even political, and also in other social activities (Lansdowne 2010). A radical change of relations between adults and children is happening right before our eyes; the attitude "for children" is giving way to the attitude "with children ". There seems to be a category appearing of the interdependence of adults and children, a partnership between them and cooperation in social activities (Cockburn 1998). It is this philosophy of social relations that is called children's participation.

The term "children's participation" is used by a variety of ideological and structural entities which include children in their programs of actions or in the area of created policies. Mostly, the use of this term accentuates consultation of certain decisions with children, the participation of children in deciding in the context of certain formal structures, such as the existence of a students' council at school or youth council in the community, as well as taking into account the "voice" of adolescents in certain spheres of action and solutions

that affect them – mostly leisure, entertainment or designing space for them (e.g. playgrounds). However, such understanding is too narrow a look at the social participation of children. It is not merely about mainstreaming their voice in the process of deciding and managing reality, as it is often understood (Hart 2009).

Participation of children – the development of the idea

The idea of social participation of children was and still is a challenge to the traditional model of relationships between children and adults, which immediately assumes superiority, authority and power of adults, and the subordination of children. In exchange, a model is promoted where adults and children co-decide and cooperate in various areas of life and at different levels of society (Coleman 2010). The clash of both visions and overcoming the current culturally rooted standard of relations between adults and children required political and legal support. This was provided by the Convention on children's rights in 1989. In it, social participation of children and adolescents found its formal consolidation in the form of certain provisions. Article 12 of the Convention, is seen in this regard as essential, as it expresses the right of children to express their own views freely in matters affecting them and taking these views seriously according to the child's ability. Many authors see this provision as defining the status of the child and children in terms of an autonomous and self-defining social entity (e.g. Wyness 2012; Parkes 2013, p. 7 and subsequent). Subsequent articles 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17, expand on the idea of social participation of children in: the right to free expression, the right to information, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to freedom of association and the right to privacy and access to media information (Wyness 2012, p. 233). In addition to those provisions for participatory rights, article 3 is also important (talking about the so-called best interests of the child). Together they give a formal basis for understanding and implementing the concept of children's participation (Jaros, Michalak, p. 622). Through these articles, the Convention has formally established the duty of people, institutions and societies in perceiving the child as a person who has his own opinion, own views and is able to express them, as well as – this is particularly important – the duty to take these opinions into account in decision-making processes on matters that concern them. As pointed out by many authors, the Convention thus highlights the right of children to self-determination (Wyness 2012, p. 234) and simultaneously determines their status as full-fledged citizens and children's social participation has been made

one of the basic dimensions of their functioning but also the conditions of their development.

Although the Convention established the standard for the development of children's social participation in the legal and moral sense, then it did not specify in more detail the contents, scope and areas of that participation. Consequently, the implementation of these rights in practice has encountered many obstacles and adopted undesirable forms. Already in the 1990s Roger Hart (1997), in analyzing the state of reality of children's participation, noticed many irregularities and emphasized that it will be a long time before actual changes take place in individual countries in the approach to children's participation in civic life and before it begins to be fully implemented.

Due to the many misunderstandings as to the meaning of social participation of children and young people and concerns that were borne by methods of their implementation in social life, it was begun to develop further documents explaining the real broad meaning of this idea and indicating the appropriate forms and means of its dissemination. The main ones include: *The revised European charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life* of 2003, Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of member states of the Council of Europe (2006) 14 *on citizenship and participation of young people in local and regional life,* Recommendation of the Council of Europe (1864) of 2009 *to promote the participation of children in decisions affecting them,* Recommendation Rec (2012)2 of the Committee of Ministers of member states of the Council of Europe *on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18* of 2012, and *General Comment No. 12 of the Children's Rights Committee: The right of the child to be heard* of 2009, and the recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (1551) of 2002 *Building the society of the twenty-first century with and for children* and the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe No. R (97)3 *on youth participation and the future of civil society.* In these documents, the sense of children's participation is explained by the common definition indicating that it is about the "right, means, space and opportunities and, where needed, support to freely express one's views, be heard and participate in decisions on matters that concern them, and treating their opinions seriously according to their age and maturity" (definition e.g. in Recommendation (2012)2. They indicate that the social participation of children is understood in the individual (each child) and collective perspective (group of children). It is also stressed that participation means the opportunity to participate in decisions and influencing decisions, and the ability to engage young people in activities for the common good. Therefore,

the right to participate in this sense means for children the possibility of its implementation in certain areas and places, as well as the possibility to use specific means of its implementation. In addition, a child's right to participate also means the possibility to obtain support from adults in the realization of this right. In exploring the sense of participation rights, one should note that it is about the possibility of social participation and not its imposition or coercion. John Holt (1974) drew attention to this already in the 1970s, when he emphasized that the rights, privileges, duties and responsibilities of citizens should be available to young people at any age, if only they want to take advantage of them.

A particularly important document for the universal understanding of children's social participation is that issued by the UN Committee of Children's Rights of 2009, General Comment No.12 entitled *The right of the child to be heard /CRC/C/GC/12*. It clarifies that States should, on the one hand, encourage children to formulate and express their views, and on the other hand provide them with actual conditions and opportunities to do so. It also stresses that opinions and outlooks expressed by the children can significantly enrich the perspective and experience of adults, and should be taken into account when making decisions, when building solutions of policies, and in the preparation of laws and methods of action, as well as the evaluation of actions (p. 12 of General Comment No. 12). All these processes are set out in Commentary as social participation of children. At the same time the document stresses that the quality of many practices are disturbing, which are used "in the name of" children's participation, and which in fact do not have much in common with it. It pointed out that participation cannot be achieved through ad hoc manifestations or individual acts and actions, that is a process of development of deep and intensive exchange of opinions and cooperation between adults and children in all contexts of life relevant for children (p. 13 of General Comment No. 12). It emphasized that the right to express opinions concerns children in both the individual and collective sense, and this means that it is also the right of groups of children, such as school classes, groups of children in the neighbourhood or children collectively in the local community, and finally, the population of children in society. Children should be treated by the state as a social group whose views should be heard. Therefore, efforts should be made to determine the views of children contributing collectively, to consult decisions with groups of children and to respect and take them into account in decision-making processes and in developing and implementing programmes (p.10 of General Comment No. 12). The Committee of Children's Rights also pointed out that in the adopted findings, which relate

to children as a defined group, their best interests must be the primary criterion. In other words, when it comes to the interests of a greater number of children, then the managing institutions, authorities, local government or state authorities should create the opportunity to listen to children and take their opinion with due attention and include them in decision-making or even legislation processes. It was emphasized that, in conjunction with article 13 of the Convention, the participatory rights mean that adults should refrain from intervening in the expression of opinions by young people or from restricting their access to information. States should indeed strive to create an environment of respect for the views expressed by children as a social group. It was also noted that against the background of art. 17, a prerequisite for exercising the right to express opinions is children's access to information on all matters that concern them, while this information should have the right form suited to the developmental possibilities of children (p. 83 of General Comment No. 12).

Apart from the provisions of official documents, the actual sense of social participation emerges clearly from theoretical discourse. Already in 1992, Roger Hart stressed that the real participation of children is based on several fundamental conditions: awareness and understanding of the project's intention by children, the voluntary nature of their participation and their initiative for its creation, understanding the principles of their participation in expressing opinions and making decisions, the importance of participation and actual power of influence (not decorative), the actual representation of peers through structures, a large degree of freedom as to the form and specific aspects of speech. In explaining the meaning of children's social participation, the author emphasizes that its essence goes beyond the often accented common dimensions of the children's participation in decisions made by adults and consultation with children (Hart 2009), as it is about all situations when children cooperate with other children and (or) adults to make certain decisions, or plan certain common activities, ranging from building a common space to play and ending with a jointly developed solutions of the state's policies, e.g. in the sphere of education. What's more, according to Hart, full realization of children's participation and their involvement in the development of civil society cannot stop at the existence of some formal participatory forms with a social mandate, like children's forums, local councils, consultations or school boards, but requires deep transformation of formal structure of the state and local structures towards equal permanent participation of children in them.

Local participation of children and young people

In the context of the aim of conducted analyses here, i.e. the justification of the local participation of children in the context of the rights they are entitled, and showing the importance of the local participation of children for the development of civil societies, special attention should be paid to the phrase that appears in the primary participatory article of the Convention – art. 12, which reads: "in all matters concerning the child ". In its interpretation, the Committee of Children's Rights suggests the need to adopt a very broad understanding, that is, to recognize that listening to the voice of children must take place not only in the immediate context of their functioning in families or schools, but also in the social processes taking place in their local communities and societies (p. 27 of General Comment No. 12). The Committee stressed that many opportunities for children's participation arise specifically at the level of local and national communities, that these are the closest areas of life to children and adolescents, right after family and school, in which their participation can be implemented and in which it could be promoted. However, the Committee noted that such structures and participatory agendas, like children's parliaments, municipal or local youth councils or spontaneously organized consultations with young people, which are to enable them to influence decisions, should not be the only forms of implementing social participation but only one of the many solutions, because in themselves they allow the participation of only a small number of children. Therefore, other solutions must also be enabled, such as fixed hours of consultations for children with politicians, parliamentarians or officials, or to provide children with means of expressing views and needs chosen by them (newspapers, TV, radio, etc.). In addition, it is noted that in the context of local participation, children should also be encouraged to created their own organizations led by them or undertake their own initiatives of expressing opinions and exerting influence in local or national conditions. Such forms provide a huge space for meaningful participation and representation of views in many areas of life and many places where children are present (schools, playgrounds, health care facilities, public transport, cultural facilities, libraries, etc.). It also provides the opportunity to influence the measures and practices applied in these places. The Committee believes that such various forms of social participation should be made possible for children at the district, regional or national level (p. 127––131 of General Comment No. 12).

Likewise, in the aforementioned European recommendations of 2006 and 2012, which take up the issue of participation of young people, there are indications to strengthen local participation of children and young people, and clarify the nature of local participation, speaking about supporting the involvement of young people in the local community, about investing in organizations led by young people and the establishment of consultative agencies of children and young people at the local, regional and national level (cf. Parkes 2013, p. 186). These recommendations postulate also the exchange of good practices for the participation of young people at the regional and national level.

Understanding the space and means for achieving local participation of young people is formulated clearly by the *Revised European charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life* of 2003. It emphasizes that the involvement of young people in local and regional life must be part of the general policy of citizens' participation in public life. With this objective in mind, this involvement should be popularized and made possible to young people through: training in participation, regular and relevant information, providing means of communication, supporting projects and social activities of young people and their willingness to work for others. Attention is also paid to supporting the participation of young people in associations, especially those started and run by them. Each of these courses of actions popularizing local participation of young people is explained further in the document[1]; due to the space limitations of this study, I will refer only to some.

A special dimension of the local participation of young people is their work for the common good, that is involvement in volunteer actions and activities related with helping others, or in the defence of common goals

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[1] For example, in the area of training young people for participation, the role of civic education programmes and education within youth groups or peer education is indicated. The issue of informing young people about opportunities and matters which concern them is seen as crucial. To participate in local matters, projects and activities, young people simply have to know about them. This means that local authorities should encourage and help improve information centers for young people by using structures such as libraries, schools, youth services, local (municipal) websites, and possibly support young people in creating and operating them. Another direction of promoting local participation of young people is facilitating participation through communication and information technology. It emphasizes the need to promote interactivity of young people by using new technologies in information and communication. Likewise, it points to the role of young people's participation in the media and helps them to express themselves in this way and to participate in creating media information. What's more, it postulates that young people have the opportunity to create their own media (radio, press, Internet TV, etc.).

for young people. Popularizing this activity by the local authorities means promoting all initiatives of young people on voluntary activities, establishing organizations focused on such activities, or creating centres of such actions and informing about them. Taking into account the fact that young people have many ideas that are valuable for the local community, in promoting their social participation they should be supported in transforming them into projects and local actions, including with the help of experienced activists and technical, material and financial support. Such activities of young people develop their sense of responsibility and independence and create competences and attitudes of social activists. Likewise, a very valuable dimension of young people's local participation is their focus on youth organizations. This concerns organizations established and run by young people and for young people, and organizations open to young people allowing their active participation. It is believed that they even have unique significance, as they terrifically reflect the views, needs and interests of young people. They are also a great space where children and young people can practice, experience and learn participation and management of reality together and from one another. At the same time, unfortunately, as noted by Roger Hart (2009), in all cultures and societies, this idea of supporting children and young people in creating their own independent groups is inconsistent with the traditional images of order and social structure, and it encounters mental obstacles. Therefore, to promote these forms of participation it is emphasized that in these independent organizations, young people should see significant valuable partners in the sphere of co-management of local community in matters of importance for young people (Johnson 2009, Larkins 2014), and it is even recommended that local authorities financially support organizations of children and young people. Also, the participation of young people in non-governmental organizations is a form of local participation. The non-governmental sector is the bedrock of a democratic society, which is why participation of young people in it is very important and allows them to learn about civic activities of a different nature, and learn to influence decisions and local or regional projects. Promoting the participation of young people in such organizations by the local authorities can also have the form of financial support for those NGOs which provide such participation of youth. Political parties where youth participation has an authentic democratic character should similarly be supported. Around the world many youth organizations work in a variety of socio-cultural conditions; some are supported by local or international non-governmental organizations, which operate either directly for promoting the participation of children or they are directed at the development of local involvement and local development (see, e.g. Johnson 2009; UNICEF nd).

Local participation of young people is in part realized by the structures relevant to the given social level, in this regard, forms like c h i l d r e n ' s f o r u m s   a n d   c o u n c i l s   (y o u t h   c o u n s e l   f o r u m s)   are pointed out (Parkes 2013, p. 183). Such structures should be possible, be it in a small environment e.g. a village, district or county, or a large city or even region. An important principle of their origin is that they should be truly representative and be a platform for dialogue and partnership between young people and local and regional authorities. Their functioning and the way in which they are constituted should be strongly based on democratic principles, and on the principles of self-determination and responsibility of young people. *The European charter on the participation of young people* and other sources (Lansdowne 2011) explain exactly how such structures, such as a youth council, a youth parliament, youth forum, should work to actually implement the idea of participation. The practical experience of such structures operating are in fact different. Sometimes their position is weak and facade (Kirby and Bryson 2002; Kay, Tisdall and Davies 2004), but in some cases their local political significance is very strong (Wyness 2012, p. 245––252). Some national parliaments have more or less systematically pursued consultations on decisions concerning children having such structures. For example, permanent conferences or parliamentary committees for children and youth operate here and there, which cooperate with state actors in their affairs. Examples are national youth councils, like in Israel, where the Knesset regularly uses consultations with the national committee of children and youth (Ben-Arieh and Boyer 2005). An example is also Sweden where the very influential National Council for Young People operates (Parkes 2013). Youth parliaments deliberate regularly in Lithuania, Cyprus and Slovenia (Tisdall and Davies 2004). In Norway a permanent consultation is established between young people and the Minister for children's matters, permanent consultation seminars for children and youth are also held in Estonia (*Toward a World* 2013). In contrast, in Wales, at the initiative of young people in 2004, an organization was created called Funky Dragon, which is the advisory body for the Welsh Government. There are also forms of regional representation of young people, an example of which is the European Youth Forum (Schuurman 2010). New Zealand has developed a national programme of consultation with children, a similar national forum operates in Kazakhstan, and in Rwanda an annual youth parliament deliberates (Wall 2011). In many countries, including Poland (since 1990) local councils of young people are being created, whose idea is co-participation in the management of local communities.

All of these examples are attempts at implementing the idea of local participation of young people. Most often, they only partially fulfil the meaning and a true understanding of children's participation. Forms such as youth councils, student councils and youth forums are often initiated by adults within the scope of official processes and decision-making policies, but they could actually be run and controlled by children and youth, and oriented at areas of activity selected by children. Sometimes such representative entities may have real political power, as it was in Rajasthan, India, where a children's parliament elected representatively made significant educational reforms in the district. Similarly, actual political power was gained by children's parliaments in Bolivia and in the local parliament in Barra Mansa in Brazil (Wall 2011). However, as stressed by Vicki Johnson (2009), it should be remembered that the basic sense and development of children's participatory local or regional structures should rely on the existence of autonomous organizations initiated by children and adolescents. The paradox, however, lies in the fact that this particular area of natural and spontaneous participation of youth encounters strong negative attitudes (Johnson 2009, p. 33). This problem is a major challenge for advocates of social participation of young people in terms of exploration and actions.

Distortion of the sense of the idea of children's participation

Although the expansion of the idea of children's social participation has been taking place for nearly two decades, the implementation of its profound practical meaning in social life at the local or regional level raises a number of questions and concerns. In social and political practice there are many serious distortions and superficiality. It frequently happens that some of the children in the local community are particularly discriminated as to the possibility of participation due to their social status, belonging to ethnic or religious minorities, or disability. These phenomena require fuller recognition to minimize these types of participatory barriers (Johnson 2009). In local communities there are often apparent actions which have little in common with the idea of participation (Hart 1997). They have caused that the discourse on the correct understanding and implementation of children's social participation is constantly expanding (Taylor and Percy-Smith, 2008) sometimes even becomes radical (by contemporary standards), taking up threads of political participation of children, and additionally based on the principles of direct democracy with postulating the fundamental restructuring of social norms (Wall 2011). Researchers are more and more frequently taking

up analyses of the problems of implementing local participation of young people and phenomena, identifying the forms which basically support the exclusion of young people or significantly limit their participation in local decision-making concerning their affairs. Understanding erroneous or false forms of children's local participation can help in getting a better idea of its proper meaning and scope.

Indicated still in the 1990s by Roger Hart (1997), pseudo forms of social participation of children consist in the fact on the abuse of children by adults in the name of participation for their own interests. These include phenomena of manipulating children, using children as decoration and tokenism (Hart 1992, 1997).

Using children as decoration consists in the fact that adults use the image of the children, they use their presence to support their own project. In this case, the adults do not even pretend (as with manipulation) that the given project, activity, views are inspired by children. They use the image of children as a message that a given action, solution, proposition serves children, that it is good for them and approved by them. This also includes situations of using the images of children or organizing artistic performances of children when advertising any political actions or local solutions, or during election campaigns, when children most often have absolutely no awareness of what they are exactly involved in, they do not understand, or they do not have the complete picture of what is happening and also obviously have no influence on the course of their participation.

Manipulation with children includes situations when adults use children to support their own projects pretending that they are inspired by children and adolescents. In fact, however, they impose or show children goals and tasks, as well as measures, and also opinions and assessments they (adults) want (which are in their interest), creating the illusion that they come from children. An example is situations when children are urged to take part in certain marches, protests, or are encourage to carry posters, banners during a social demonstrations or election campaigns. If children do not understand these issues, the purpose of these activities and their part in it, then this is manipulation. Another example of manipulation is consulting certain issues with children *pro forma,* without taking their opinion seriously. Manipulation is also situations when adults seemingly gather the opinions of children in some matter (e.g. playground equipment, or the location of a youth club), but the children do not participate in the final selection of options, and the results of decisions and actions are not presented to the children.

Tokenism means situations where children are seemingly "given voice", but in reality they do not have any or have little impact on what they are doing, what they are involved in, what is happening around them. This includes situations when the children do not really have the ability to decide both about the subject of their expression, or the style and method of communication. Often children do not have the possibility to freely formulate their actual opinions, their opinions are agreed on, or the children are actually coerced into them. An example of *tokenism* is the use of the presence of children in various panel discussions and conferences, when the children (often selected by adults) express certain opinions (controlled by adults), with no real opportunity to present their positions. This position should additionally be discussed with peers, whom the young participants of such meetings represent. An example of tokenism is also popular "Christmas" sessions of parliaments, for which children were not selected in the correct way (selected by adults), and during which the children express issues or postulates, whose contents and method of presentation were decided on by adults. Often the children's participation itself in such events is not due to children's actual interest and desire to participate. Regardless of the fact that *tokenism* is a form of pseudo-participation similar to the proposed real character, it is still characterized by the lack of an important element which is awareness and full (if possible) understanding of the situation by children and their actual deciding on the desire to participate, on the content, on the manner and on the form of participation in a certain event or social initiative.

British researchers Taylor and Percy-Smith (2008), in analyzing the ways of realizing the participation of children in local communities, pointed out the most important "misunderstanding" as to its meaning which occurs in practice:

Limiting participation to forms of consultation. A significant part of participatory forms for children is based on consultation activities initiated by adults. Meanwhile, the sense of social participation of children and young people should and can be expressed in a fuller process of joint reflection, collaborative learning and acting, as well as in the form of providing them the opportunities for autonomy in the available fields. Most of these forms are possible from relatively early development levels of children. Meanwhile, children in practice are rarely included in the deliberation process of decision-making, although their development possibilities allow it. These remains to be undertaken by adults who at best take into account the opinion of children. Therefore, children are in fact still marginalized. Fuller realization of participation requires crossing barriers of only consultation and admitting

children to the decision-making process and genuinely co-deciding with them in matters that concern them.

No experiencing by young people of the results of participation and changing the situation. Many researchers indicate that for full participation of children it is not enough to ensure them some opinion representation structures or forms of consultation and even involvement in the decision-making process, if it does not carry informing them of the effects of this participation, about changes in social life that arise from it. Young people are often invited to consultations, their opinion is listened to, but they can rarely hear later or find out what happened to their "vote ", and what's more, whether the solutions or changes they proposed are taking effect (Worpole 2003). Such consultation on matters with children without any feedback or reliable information provided about the actions undertaken and their results was considered by Hart (1997) as manipulation with participation.

The participation of young people in decisions (especially political) and social life is based on the structure and agenda of adults and rules for presenting views, decisions or actions set by adults. In the formulas for implementing children's participation, adults expect children to accept the standard ways, methods and mechanisms, which are often artificial, strange for the culture of young people. This means that forms of expression or the decision-making process are imposed on them, as they are dominated by adults, and if the form of participation imposed on them is typical for adults, then this raises the question of the effectiveness and sense of participation by young people. It should be remembered that young people demonstrate far broader and more varied forms of democratic participation and autonomous participation, in relation to the standards of adults. For instance, by taking up a variety of social activities, creating own social movements, self-organization of assistance or protest, even for occasional goals and short-term actions. At the same time, young people "stay away" or even contest spaces and forms of involvement and governance (decision-making) that is typical for adults. They believe, often rightly, that this method is in itself an image of inequality, hierarchy of social life and even a lack of democracy, for example making decisions "behind closed doors" supposedly on behalf of the community (Cooke and Kothari 2001). A paradox is also when, for example, young people are encouraged to express their opinion in local councils, where they are imprisoned in a world of values and culture of adults and their priorities, while they want to articulate their values through their own actions and own choices of what they will do and where they will go. The paradox is that in situations of spontaneous participatory actions, adults fall into a moral panic; they see in

this dangerous moods of rebellion and anarchy, and young people are strongly discouraged by adults from these activities and participatory forms, or they see restrictions for it (Morrow 2005). Thus, the participation of young people is approved only if it is done by forms and participation agendas consistent with the standards of adults.

Failure to see autonomous actions of young people and their participation in everyday life. A paradox concerning the development of children's participation is that they are strongly encouraged to participate and involve themselves as if they were previously completely passive and inactive in their functioning in different environmental contexts. After all, children have always been active participants and decision-makers of their own lives. Many decisions about what happens to them at home, school, the neighbourhood, usually fall outside official "decision channels" – beyond the adults. Roger Hart (2009) emphasizes that children have always developed their social skills and participated in creating their own communities through informal activities with peers and participated with adults in an informal way. According to him, the ability to cooperate in achieving goals, experimenting with roles including leading or governing, social negotiating for the purposes of performing certain activities (often play and games), learning the rules of justice or ethical rules, and finally planning and the creative use of their abilities, and self-organization in structures – these are all, after all, the skills that children develop in relationships with peers, usually beyond the presence and supervision of adults. As Hart (1992) underlines, young people are already relatively early in their development able to create and organize social life. This was presented terrifically by William Golding in his novel "Lord of the Flies". Paradoxically, the competence of children and young people to actively create and organize social life and self-organize themselves, is demonstrated by children's gangs operating in various cities around the world. Their structure and developed subculture show an extremely high level of internal organization. It also turns out that in communities where adults are unable, for various reasons, to manage or poorly control the local situation, sometimes very young people are quickly able to take initiative and take the social organization in their own hands, becoming the initiators of social development in a given environment. Such a situation occurred in Sri Lanka, where youth movements began to operate very strongly (Hart 1992). Children actively construct the parameters of their mutual relationships, they test and adapt them to the style of their functioning, they make decisions and social choices, they undertake joint activities and mutually control one another. This means that participation (informal) is the participation of children every day and takes place in

a natural way. Meanwhile, adults, in publicizing the need for participation, forget or do not see this "informal" participation of children, or their self-organization in their own communities. This area requires careful study and description, as indicated by Roger Hart (2009).

Lack of confidence in dialogue, sense of community and integration of adults with children. In fact, the fundamental problem area in the local participation of children and adolescents is the extent to which local communities actually listen, learn and respond to what children say. Many of the problems in the development of youth participation appears to arise from the actual lack of trust between adults and young people. These negative attitudes towards recognition of children as capable of participation are a critical element for the development of youth participation (Percy-Smith 1998; Johnson 2009). In fact, adults often do not trust children and allow them to participate and decide only in their "children's" matters, beyond the responsible realms reserved for adults. An example can be, often revealed in studies on student self-governance, limitations of the field of decisions of self-governments in matters like excursions, discos or "extra" days at school, and they are not allowed to actually co-manage the environment. These negative attitudes can be eliminated through dialogue and mutual social learning (Taylor and Percy-Smith 2008).

Experiences collected in different ways allowed the Committee of Children's Rights to express the specific requirements which must be met in order for social participation of children to be real (General Comment No. 12, p. 134). Firstly, it must be voluntary. Children cannot be forced to express their own opinions or participatory activities against their will. They should know that they can stop their involvement at an stage of acting. Secondly, it must be based on reliable age-appropriate information on the expression and the importance of their views and on the possibilities and their participation, involvement in the situation. Thirdly, the participation of children must be based on respect and children must be able to initiate actions, and their own ideas. Fourthly, the issues in which children are encouraged to participate should be real, significant for their lives. Fifthly, actions promoting participation must take into account that children are not a homogeneous group, and participation needs to provide an opportunity for everyone, without widespread discriminatory scripts. Another issue concerns the support of young people in participatory activities that require certain competences, such as conducting research, the organization of meetings, associations or for seeking funding. An important condition for effective participation of young people is also the settlement of participation and information about its importance and

effects. This is to inform children about the effects of their participation, on the importance of their views in the consultation process, on the consequences of the research conducted by them, or on the importance that their opinions had in creating a certain programme, project or policy.

These criteria also includes the postulate of evaluating the quality of children's participation in the environment and programmes popularizing it (Chawla and Heft 2002). Recently, a quite serious methodological workshop was developed in this scope (*A toolkit for monitoring…* 2014; *Child participation assessment tool*, nd).

Punchline:
On the link between civil society and children's participation

Social participation of children is an issue and a significant problem from the point of view of not only children's rights but also a significant issue in the context of efforts for the development of civil society, civic engagement and local participation.

The period of increased interest in local participation as such and social participation of children began more or less at the same time, i.e. in the 1990s. The subject of children's participation was sparked by the Convention on Children's Rights after its adoption in 1989, and the development of civic involvement became the "pride and joy" of many local authorities, so much so that in some countries this trend is defined simply as civil renewal (Blunkett 2003 after Taylor and Percy-Smith 2008). Theoretical discourses on the participation of children and local participation coincided, which caused that incitements towards local civil renewal also adopted the trend of development of children's participation. In this way, local participation of children has become a manifestation and partly a measure of genuine local democracy – an expression of the full participation of community members. At the same time, it became its hope and foundation as it equips future adult members of the community, social citizens with civic competences and attitudes of civic involvement and responsibility for the community.

Currently, the global discourse of children's participation is widely perceived as the realization of the principles of democracy, democratic participation and involvement of all citizens in the affairs of the state and local communities. It is also a measure of the actual democratization of social life. It is also widely regarded as a base for future civic activity and involvement in local participation of next generations of citizens. It is noted that for building more democratic societies, more informed and responsible,

but also loyal and just, the active involvement of young people, their social participation is essential (*European Charter* 2003). It is recognized that only in this way – through young people practicing social participation in its full dimension – civic skills effectively develop, and especially: the readiness and need to act, responsibility for decisions, actions and their results awareness of the importance and readiness to act for a common good and for others, as well as responsibility for the quality of life of the community. It is also believed that through participation, young people develop the skills of expressing assessments and conducting controls of actions of governing circles, the ability to organize in formal and informal structures of various types and purposes, etc. This gives hope for their better use in adult life. The various activities promoting the social participation of children and young people at the local level clearly exposes its benefits also for the local community itself, such as improving the quality of the community reflected in the improved well-being of its members and increase in social integration and cohesion, as well as creating in this way the local environment enabling experience and sharing subjectivity and psychological welfare of all members (Chawla and Heft 2002). At the same time it is emphasized that the participation of young people often enables decisions that more accurately and relevantly meet the local needs and this helps to achieve better results of various actions and local initiatives (UNICEF nd).

Promoting the participation of children and young people by local and state authorities also entails other benefits like the developing sense of subjectivity and internal stability and constructive self-assessment as well as, in relation to this, the competences of young people to resist negative peer pressure and the difficulties of life and the challenges of modern life (Chawla and Heft 2002). In this sense, participation of young people is perceived as a kind of prevention of many negative phenomena that young people may encounter or threats that might befall them, along with the experience of violence and exploitation.

The significance of children's participation for the successful development of democratic societies, and as some stress these days, even for their survival, has caused that it has become the mainstream trend of thinking about activities under social development in many countries. Just as Janusz Korczak once thought, children's participation has also now begun to be perceived as a way of rebuilding, repairing the quality of social life, a way to restore societies and communities. In this spirit, the social participation of children has become a central social idea and its implementation at different levels of society almost a "point of honour" of the various agendas and institutions (Taylor

and Percy-Smith 2008). Today, many agencies, departments, committees and parliaments in many democratic countries encourage young people to get involved in shaping solutions, in their implementation and evaluation of activities that are carried out for children and youth, and together with them. The European Parliament (Larkins 2014a), agencies of the United Nations with the Committee of Children's Rights at the head, as well as various European organizations working on children's matters and defending their rights are striving for consultations with children, for children's participation in various activities and decisions. In many democratic countries, consultation with children and young people is already a working standard of state and local entities, and it is a common requirement in the scope of shaping policy and has taken the form of normative values (Tisdall and Davies 2004; Tisdall 2015). The pressure of implementing the standard of participation of children and youth is by some even critically considered, like for example Cooke and Kothari (2001) write about the "tyranny of participation" (after Tisdall 2015).

There are many prospects for the implementation of local and regional social participation of children. There are different preferences in this regard, different opportunities and social and cultural conditions. There is no universal solution that meets the needs and capabilities of all local communities. Although the form of realizing participation may vary, its meaning is specific. It is about genuine partnership between adults and children, about mutual respect of opinions and proposals and about mutual inspiration in the name of the common good.

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