

Silent witnesses or active participants? Patterns of children and youth engagement in local governance in Poland and Finland

Research motivation

At first glance, one can assume that already a lot is known about children's and youth participation. It is largely related to the activity of international organizations, such as the United Nations or the European Union. However, despite the increasing awareness of the importance of this issue, there is still surprisingly little sharing of experience between youngsters' participation on the one hand and local governance on the other. At the same time, a closer look reveals that the issues of children's and youth participation are often limited to a recommendation or guidelines. This research topic is undertaken as there is still narrow international research about what impact, and outcomes can be achieved and identified through the children and youth participation in local governance. Hence, in the proposed project, we seek to address already available research and the remaining knowledge gap.

Methodological approach

Our main objective is to investigate the patterns of children's and young people's participation in local governance. We want to analyse the motivation for incorporating children and youth in governance process, the architecture of particular instruments and tools, as well as the outcomes of children and young people involvement. The proposed research draws on the experience of selected Polish and Finnish municipalities. The project includes interviews with experts, local politicians, local officers, teachers, representatives of NGOs, and youth.

What does our project seek to achieve?

The expected results of the project will provide new insight into the debate on local governance, including institutions, actors, as well as social and power relations. Special attention will be paid to 1) the pressure for social inclusion imposed on local authorities; 2) advantages and drawbacks of different participative frameworks; 3) roles assigned in the governing process to different local stakeholders, the relations between them, as well as 4) impacts and outcomes of participative approaches. Therefore, by investigating different municipalities in Poland and Finland, our research contributes to the conceptual debate on the role of children and youth in local governance. Specifically, we want to outline the pathways on how their participation in local decision-making may contribute to more inclusive governance.

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