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Preface

At first two exercises are presented that attempt to challenge the reader to find a personal position concerning the conflict between two principles. The real-life examples are meant to show that it is normal that several principles compete with each other in everyday life.

The question is whether the professional should follow participative ideas (alternative A) or should perform progressively (alternative B).

**EXAMPLE 1**

At a residence of senior citizens the regular breakfast ceremony has been put into question. Up to now, the breakfast has always been taken together at the same time in a big room. The central kitchen sends the various breakfast foods, such as bread, butter, jam and ham (which are almost invariable) and the staff of the residence serve them out.

The educational co-worker asked the residents during a participative procedure whether they would like to see changes to the breakfast and which ones they would prefer. She suggested an individual breakfast served outside in the garden, possibly together with neighbours, lasting perhaps a longer period but essentially self-organised. The result of the procedure showed that the residents were not interested in making a big change to the breakfast ceremony. They only asked for certain details of the breakfast to be changed (e.g. tomatoes).

**How should the educational co-worker react?**

*Alternative A (participative):* She accepts the proposals of the residents.

*Alternative B (progressive):* She follows her own ideas, which she will have to defend in a talk with the head of the residence.
EXAMPLE 2

A European project against 'racism on the work floor' has been planned, and a decision has to be made between two ideas. The first, participative, idea is to organise workshops for immigrants in which they can present experiences from their own situation. The second, progressive, idea is to organise a Linux network course for women immigrants.

Which idea would you support?

Alternative A (participative): workshop for immigrants
Alternative B (progressive): network-course for women immigrants

Introduction

In the first part, this contribution presents a person's own comprehension of social participation, and it proposes a model of phases in which different areas of participation are differentiated.

In the second part, an overview about different locations of participation is given. The participation of children and young people, district and regional management, initiatives of immigrants and participation on the internet are stressed. Interventions through participative methods in so-called 'social focal points' are additionally discussed. In the third part, the role of professionals in the participative method is discussed. The situation of professions in Austria dealing with greater social systems or communities can be regarded as inadequate. In the fourth part, the attendance at participation processes is analysed. On the one hand, there is the problem that certain people do not or cannot participate; on the other hand, it has to be recognised that some persons tend to be completely involved in unpaid work. Despite the fact that these activities are important for society, this is a problem. In the fifth part, the opportunities of social participation are resumed. Qualitative, social and individual opportunities are described, and misguided participation processes are criticised. Finally, in the sixth part, several so-called 'best-practice-examples' from Austria are presented. They offer an impression of social participation in Austria.

Social participation

Participation is often reduced to a narrow political context (e.g. participation in elections, role as politician, demonstrations), therefore it is important to stress that the following text is related to social participation. Social participation stands for the common attendance to
realisation processes that are mainly addressed to the life circumstances of the participants. Social participation is based on dual communication, but it is always implemented in a social collective, which develops into an active system.

Social participation brings together both socio-cultural and socio-political contents. It often starts from daily life, but also touches a general dimension. It combines, as McDaniel (2003) mentioned, ‘civic-ness’ and ‘social-ness’. Beyond the diverse socio-cultural forms activities can be seen that can be described as art, both in a social and in an aesthetic sense. As Karisto (2001, p.245) states, “art and culture have often been contributed to the emancipation processes of oppressed social groups by giving them a ‘voice’.”

The different perspectives of a social collective enables the participative process to be characterised as discursive and conflicts laden as usual. The discussion of different perspectives is an explicit task of the applied methods and the mediating instances.

Social participation can normally not be fulfilled during a short, one-off contact but it normally succeeds during a longer process that includes different phases.

The first and fundamental possibility of participation is made concrete by the selection of a topic or problem. The second possibility of participation arises during a planning phase. The analysis of different alternatives happens during this phase. It contains a creative potential, and important compromises between conflicting interests have to be found.

The third possibility of participation relates to the phase of realisation and performance. People experience themselves strongly as participants, and above that, a lot of decisions are made during the realisation phase.

At the end, but also parallel to all other phases, lies a phase of control and reflection. It deals with the correcting and navigating evaluation of the whole process.

Participation refers to all phases, which have to be understood as dynamic and overlapping. If social participation is initiated professionally, the preparation and mobilisation of people and the setting for the first contacts remain unchangeably predefined.

In comparison, Hollihn (1979, cit. Moser et al. 1999) proposes the following forms of participation: information, discussion, decision and control. While the control function is represented in the phases above, the other dimensions seem to be a microstructure of communication processes.

Locations of participation

Initially, a geographical classification is applied. Beginning in one’s own
life area, the local residential house or the housing estate, units for participative methods can be spread over districts or other parts of cities or regions. Political identities have to be taken into account sensitively. Qualitative focuses are for example training centres (e.g. schools), factories and public institutions and areas (e.g. hospitals, parks, streets). Areas of participation can be displayed circularly, but they can also be networks (related to certain subjects) or even have a virtual form on the internet. The qualitative differentiation of civil society, which can be understood as the collection of all participative processes, is widespread (c.f. Salustowicz 2001). The issues of generation, poverty or self-help-activities (c.f. Schaurhofer et al. 2000) may be emphasised. Women’s projects, which embody women’s interests, are also of central importance and tradition.

Participation of children: the participation of children in different forums, if old enough, especially in the communal politics, goes against the opinion that children are not to be taken seriously (c.f. Bartscher 1998). As Bukow and Spindler (2000) state this: ‘Democracy discovers its children’.

Participation of young people: The participation of juveniles is undertaken in order to reintegrate young people. The reduction of the voting-age at communal level is a direct political expression of this movement (c.f. Palentien and Hurrelmann 1998). Schools can contribute effectively to this (e.g. Böhme 2001). In particular school social work offers different participative strategies (c.f. Vyslouzil and Weißensteiner 2000).

District and regional management: The concept of ‘social city’ redefines the life of cities (c.f. Alisch 1998, Bruhns and Mack 2001). The aim of this is to revitalize different districts. The functional separation between housing, business and work is to be stopped. Public space is to be recognised as living space. District management is supported by different disciplines: social, transport, energy and educational policy. District management can be regarded as one of the most exciting methods of participation, which goes beyond the narrow sense of empowerment or community work. The work of all groups of inhabitants, of all ages, together with the connection to different political bodies shows the possibility and the complexity of social participation (c.f. Hinte 2002).

Virtual participation: A virtual social area has invented a new platform of participation. Neighbourhood has a global meaning. In particular information exchange and protest can be spread within a changed quantity and rate (e.g. Klein 2001, Siedschlag et al. 2002).

Initiatives of immigrants: Cultural and social initiatives by immigrants work against the difficult political situation. In particular, protests against racism are useful (e.g. www.no-racism.net).
Projects of participation, which are created by professionals, usually do not follow structural concepts but are planned as reactions to the specific region where there is a concentration of problems. Due to these so-called ‘social focal points’ the debate about social regional projects also has to deal with the devaluing selection of people. Therefore projects have to be sensibly legitimised.

Generally social services can be organised (a) structurally or (b) in a deficit-oriented way:
(a) The structural implementation can be intended to prevent deficits (prevention) or to produce a socio-cultural atmosphere (conceptive). The inhabitants are not discriminated against, but the socializing aspect of society can be critically discussed.
b) The deficit-perspective needs criteria that legitimise selection and intervention, even if they are only introduced to liven up the participation.

The analysis of a social area can also be done from outside or together with the inhabitants. This elucidation should help to decide whether a project of participation would be useful. The external description can be criticised since it claims to understand the local circumstances from outside. But it can not be taken for granted that people participate in a reflective analysis of their own life. There is no legal obligation for people to serve as medium of their life situation. From a methodological point of view, there can be serious doubts that such an obligation would be helpful. Hopf (2001, p.265) expects that ‘people, who live in poverty and misery and who are fully engaged in survival, will not be very interested in public and political activities’.

Indicators of social areas are often discussed in a system-related way, e.g. high unemployment, especially unemployed young people, no age spreading, traffic noise, low incomes, high amount of people at risk of poverty, already many poor people, violence, high crime rate, a great number of low-standard flats. Subjective dimensions are more rarely mentioned. Kiss-Surányi (2002) has, for example, collected the following variables as a result of her qualitative analysis: language difficulties, integration problems, lack of future perspective, psychological stress due to migration experiences, difficulties with the western life style, problematic relations with neighbours, family violence, excessive alcohol consumption and delinquency.

Although the Styrian way to Richter’s (2001, p.20) saying, ‘We do not live in Chicago’ ‘Weiz is not Berlin’, is true, the focal point concept strengthens socio-cultural activities by professionals (e.g. fashion show, soccer game, theatre). This fact can encourage baseline descriptions of social areas to be exaggerated and not be accepting enough.
Professionals and participation

There are two types of professional access to participation: (a) the adaptive use of participative methods. Some participative processes are relevant to all social professions. It is difficult to say to which extent participative methods are implemented in the training and practice of the different fields of social work. As far as training is concerned, the broad studies of social work offer a certain pool. (b) The explicit use of participative methods. The overview of social professions of Austria ALSO (Heimgartner 2003) shows that professions specialized in participative work in communities and specific regional areas are rare. Professions that care for single persons or family constellations dominate over professions dealing with social systems. They work according to case management and they contact or form case-related networks, but there is a lack of a primary orientation to social systems or communities. The individual perspective has a great tradition in financial affairs (e.g. in welfare of young people); but a change is very slowly becoming noticeable. Social systems, areas or networks, are central units for participation processes but they tend to be neglected in the Austrian professional scene. During all phases of participation it can be difficult for professionals to accept the directions in which participative processes move. The expertise of participation work is related, to a small extent, to the capability to communicate one’s own values and ideas, but the task is to establish such infrastructure and social conditions that people are empowered to reflect, discuss and react. Moser et al. (1999) differ between four positions of interventions: animation, conception, organisation and mediation. It is important to consider that ‘the intention of the professional position is to empower the people addressed so that they temporarily or definitely take leadership’ (Moser et al 1999, p.126).

Another important idea is that participative procedures expect a high acceptance of the principle ‘participation’. It is not only forbidden for professionals to dominate the process, but neither should the participants do it alone. In contrast to that the methodological line of participation is fixed and it definitely cannot be changed by participation. While discussion or role-games can be exercised on fictitious examples, non-serious participation is usually not accepted as exercise. Participation depends on the emotional involvement of people. Pseudo-participation is similar to a pseudo-hunger. There are almost always some contents which are relevant to a group and which can be changed by participative action.

It should not be neglected that working conditions for professionals (district manager, mediators and so on) are often inappropriate. Often short-term and low financed social projects face solid and persistent local traditions, which leads to an imbalance between professional status and
work difficulty. It should be observed that social work gets strongly involved in personal lives, but the professional does not function at a personal level. The limitation of projects is combined with the wish of sustainability, but it should be clear that engagement is reduced after an official finalization. Although the personal network is necessarily tight, the professional has the duty to draw back again.

The participants
There are two kinds of trouble connected with a participation strategy that have to be overcome: the trouble in case of absence and the trouble in case of presence.

(a) The trouble in case of absence
Complex processes of participation can be evaluated by the sample of participants. Resources of time and money, personal ways of life, and different social competencies usually do not produce connected lives on different micro-places. The inhabitants are spread over a narrow geographic area – due to social centrifugal forces. Therefore it is possible that ‘exactly those groups of people remain excluded, to whom the project is addressed and for whom something has been wanted to be changed. Which welfare recipient, which unemployed worker, which solitary mother can volunteer for district development?’ (Hamberger 2001: 18) The daily realities of society – including hierarchies, education differences, and property conditions – cannot be cancelled easily when it comes to social participation.

Life circumstances, which lead to a hiding and to motivational barriers (e.g. psychological illness, neglect), are not easily bridged, simply by general encouragement. In particular, the exclusion and isolation of whole groups endangers the balance of the participants (e.g. the elderly). Some projects perform short checks to secure the sample of the participants representative to the target group. For these analysis, in as far as they are participative, the charge of superficiality clings to a project like a gecko. From the proposition of Moser et al. (199, p.19) ‘animation, participation and democracy form a triad’ it follows that singular questioning and mobilisation attempts that are not bound to a creative process do not mirror the local situation sustainable. A single contact to a marginalized group guarantees their naming, but it does not bring about a political change.

The possible absence concerns not only marginalized groups but also established public and private institutions can demonstrate closeness. To realize a general networking the potentials and limits of institutions of the different sectors should be included – politics, business, medicine, education and so on. Lipski und Kellermann (2002) report about the considerable successes of German schools, which see themselves as centres of community education. The schools of Austria (c.f. Vyslouzil and
Weizensteiner 2000) and Switzerland (c.f. Drilling 2001) are obviously less engaged in school social work.

(b) Problems in the case of presence
The following three researchers criticise the unpaid involvement from the gender-perspective: Backes (1987, p. 80) wonders, 'how open today long ago outmoded life ideals for woman and families are related to saving interests, reduction of social work, unemployment, and the crisis of society' Funk (1996, p.126) mentions in the context of volunteer work 'the exploitation of femininity as a foundation of our society', and Schmidt (1987, p.3) recognizes 'a hidden guideline', which allocates paid work to men and social volunteer work to women. The acceptance of unpaid, socially relevant work is problematic for people without a secure existence. 'As there is neither now nor in the past a lack of participation of women in social work (Maurer 2001, p.812)', a transfer of paid to unpaid work ruins women's jobs. This cements the unjust division of paid and unpaid work. Heimgartner (2000) gives the example that after three years of childcare a woman fails to get a paid job. So she starts to work unpaid for the community. Nevertheless, protection against exploitation has to be open for educational and participative interests. Therefore, there is a need for controlled conditions (e.g. a time frame). The different relations between civil participation and the labour market have to be taken into account: development of paid work, paid staff as participants, integration by participation, prevention of paid work due to unpaid work (c.f. Heimgartner 2000).

The opportunities of social participation

Participation focuses on different aims: as regards content, solutions are expected which succeed in quality due to their diverse perspectives regarding forced solutions of single persons. During the housing project 'Denggenhof' in Graz, ten work groups were established. They can be seen as products and they work out concrete measures (Gross-Pirchegger 2003). Work group 'Neighbourhood and Communication', senior citizens 'Five o’clock Tea', girls meeting 'Power Girls', boys-meeting 'XY Come On', young peoples' meeting 'Kick-.. (Point)', handicrafts meeting, work group 'Animals Kept According to Their Own Needs', project 'Johannes-Park', work group 'Deficiencies of the Buildings', urban area newspaper and so on. New internal resources can be discovered, but people also achieve to gain external resources.

As well as social changes, which are the genuine advantages of participation, participative methods can lead to several developments. Participants can gain trust and responsibility. A more cultivated social
togetherness can develop. The social understanding refers to all fields of conflict since those arrangements can be designed. If cooperative agreements are done and conflicts solved, strategies of violence are reduced. Social participation can therefore also be regarded as a preventive measure, but it would be a reduction of its influence to restrict it to the prevention scene. Strategies of dealing with life-dominating problems and cultural values can follow. Plans and intentions refer not only to individual biographies but the quality of life of the public is also formed. Using Bourdieu’s words, both the social and cultural capital of the collective can expand.

A measure of social capital can be orientated on the definition of the OECD, which focuses on social networks, norms, reciprocity and trust. In particular, the aggregated community’s social capital is an important indicator. As Putman (2003, p.1) describes it, the measuring of such dimensions is ‘not simple, of course, but anyone familiar with social research over the last half century knows that it is hardly impossible.’

On the individual side, capabilities can develop due to the new experiences. Participation generates a setting that can be similar to a practical training. Identification can increase while personal life circumstances are shaped. Karisto (2001, p.246) emphasises that ‘Well-being is dependent not only on resources but also on people’s capabilities: their capacity to make use of available resources.’

Social participation can also fail, as the following examples will show; the alibi participation, the cosmetic participation, the superficial participation and the inert participation are mentioned.

**Alibi participation**

Alibi-participation can be described as all those participative settings that are started after all important decisions have been made. Contacting a group (e.g. juveniles) is rather done to promote the decision than to look for participation. Back-door participation is a promotional strategy to anchor decisions. If the young people’s centre is already built, the program printed and the budget confirmed, it would be deceitful to invite young people to a participative meeting.

**Cosmetic participation**

Cosmetic participation can be described as all those participative offers which allow a co-determination only on a tiny section of a big project. After a social centre had been built, I was invited to participate. It turned out that my participative framework concerned the colour of the doors. Nobody was interested in talking about the social area and the public rooms.
Superficial participation
Sometimes central issues are not spoken about; they are factored out. Instead, a lot of trivial issues are discussed emotionally, e.g. grassed over areas for dogs, which is important for the community and a starting point for several participative processes. Maybe other issues (e.g. violence, stereotypes, poverty, unemployment, isolation,) are present which should not be taboo but instead should rise to a level of public discussion.

Inert participation
Participative processes need time and patience. But if the procedure persists in discursive circles and no transformations follow, it will court people’s resentment.

Best-practice examples

One of the most prominent examples of social participation in Austria is ‘das Schöpfwerk’ in Vienna (www.bassena.at). The project includes a settlement of 1700 flats and about 5000 inhabitants with mainly low incomes. The initial situation was characterised as ‘negative image of the settlement” and “passivity of most of the inhabitants’ by Schnee and Stoik (2001, p.189). The superior aim was to improve the quality of life of the people. The functional aims - to develop people’s own initiative, to take responsibility, to improve the social and political interactions - are attached to the main aim.

The analysis at the beginning yielded several problem areas regarding the inhabitants: excessively high living costs, isolation and passivity, lack of responsibility, and local needs. The inhabitants were methodologically supported in different ways: calling staircase work, activating questioning, moderation, mediation, interviews, media work, activism, supervision, and documentation. The district centre ‘Bassena’ turned out to be the intermediary house (350 m2 with group rooms, cafeteria, and event-hall). This centre is financed by the City of Vienna and a team of five guides it. They represent different fields (e.g. social work, therapy, journalism, new media, management).

Several successes prove the intensive work of the inhabitants and various subjects of responsibility. The living costs have been reduced. The costs of the refuse collection were reduced by 84%. The firm was changed and a special control-system installed. The number of the house representatives quadrupled and their co-determination has been settled in the articles of the building administration. They have their own radio station which broadcasts once a week for an hour. Their own newspaper (Radio Schöpfwerk), which is financed by advertisements, reports about local events and happenings. A local trading exchange circle for different services has about 30 families as members. A political regular’s table is held four to six times a year.
The permanently active ‘Armutskonferenz’ collects and fosters Austrian projects against exclusion and poverty (www.armutskonferenz.at). It represents the association of nation-wide organisations like alliances, umbrella organisations of social initiatives, social projects, institutions of social research, social projects and people affected (e.g. poor people). The Armutskonferenz is a member of the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN). The Armutskonferenz calls attention to the topic of poverty and it contrasts the relative wealth of other people. People affected have the opportunity to articulate themselves and to search for solutions. A prominent example from the social action side was a task put to politicians to buy products for a family using the official benefit payment for one day. What happened was that - despite the affirmed attention of the politicians and the selection of special offers – the politicians put too many products in their shopping trolley (c.f. Stelzer-Orthofer 2000).

A prominent part of the Austrian social art scene includes the famous ‘WochenKlausur’ (http://wochenklausur.t0.or.at/). A multi-professional team of artists develops a solution for a given social problem for a number of weeks. The concept of the method is to jump over bureaucratic and nominal barriers with the creativity and attitude of artists. Topics of these interventions, which have been carried out since 1993, include homelessness, drugs, status of older people, work law for immigrants, school life and room, arrest of asylum seekers, unemployment, future of work and language schools. During the time of the project the team offers work with a high intensity and media support. Public information work and networking is present in the selected place (c.f. Steurer 2001).

An interesting project on another field is also the do-it-yourself construction of solar technology. A workgroup called ‘renewable energy’ has initiated a movement for the self-construction of solar equipment (c.f. Selvicka 2001).

‘SIGIS’ is an Austria-wide platform for self-help groups is (Service and Information for health and social initiatives). SIGIS contributes to a friendly climate for self-help groups. The self-help group scene is supported by diverse activities (e.g. advisory services, public relations and networking). A collection of self-help groups shows the diversity of such groups in Austria (c.f. Fonds Gesundes Österreich 2003).

Kinderbüros (children’s bureau) work in Austria at the interface between children and the (institutionalised) public (e.g. www.kinderbuero.at). Together with children they give information about child-relevant topics and they plan interventions to better the life situation of children.
focus in the year 2002 was on city development, politics and administration, rights of children, child-friendly living, and alliances between children associations. Lawyers for children and young people (Kinder- und Jugendanwälte) give professional advice (e.g. www.kinderanwaltschaft.at).

The group 'Interact' stages forum theatre. A play they have prepared themselves and which gives attention to a local social problem, is performed twice. The second time, people have the opportunity to leave their role as spectators and to try out alternative actions. The spectators react to the ideas played and after that the scene is commonly discussed. Central topics include public space, violence in the family, homelessness, and experiences of immigrants. A popular project is 'permanent breakfast', which pleads for the recapture of public space. Breakfast is eaten in selected public areas - some of them by the side of a busy road. Passers-by are invited to join them for breakfast. The situation is utilised to eat and to discuss. Participants are encouraged to host public breakfasts in their turn (c.f. Wrentschur 2003).

About the exercises

The solution, demonstrated by reality, looks like this: (Example 1) the professional stuck to the proposals of the inhabitants about their breakfast. But she continually tried to encourage them to conform to her ideas of breakfast. (Example 2): the Linux-network training for female immigrants was started. The training is meant to be a protest against traditional conventions. The awareness that other projects are based on participative ideas facilitated the decision.

References


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SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AS A PRINCIPLE: A CHALLENGE FOR SOCIAL WORK
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