Creative Methods in Sociocultural Community Development to Further the Participation of Citizen Groups in Decision-Making Processes

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L'article propose de tirer les leçons de trois cas de participation à des processus de décisions impliquant des étudiants en travail social dans le contexte de la vie démocratique suisse particulièrement ouverte à ce type de démarche. Perçue comme une base importante du développement durable, la participation doit s'appuyer sur des conditions facilitantes, dont un partage des pouvoirs et de la responsabilité du processus. Le temps et l'utilisation de méthodes créatives constituent également un gage de succès. Les cas étudiés confirment que les participants à ce genre d'exercice n'en tirent pas seulement des bénéfices immédiats, notamment sur le plan de l'autonomie et du sentiment d'appartenance à un groupe social et à un territoire donné, mais y trouvent le fondement d'une participation sociale élargie pour l'avenir.

Mots-clés : Méthodes créatives ; participation ; processus de décision.

The article focuses on learnings based on three cases of participation in decision-making processes involving students in social work in the context of the Swiss democratic life particularly opened to this kind of initiative. Perceived as an important base for sustainable development, participation has to lean on basic conditions, such as shared powers and responsibility of the process. Time and use of creative methods are also essential for success. Observations confirm that participants in this kind of process benefit directly from it, in particular regarding gain of autonomy and development of sense of belonging to a social group and a given territory, but also find there base of a wider social participation in the future.

Keywords: Creative methods; participation; decision-making processes.

El artículo propone sacar fruto de tres casos de participación a procesos de decisiones que implican a estudiantes en trabajo social en el contexto de la vida democrática suiza particularmente abierta a este tipo de gestión. Percibida como una base importante del desarrollo sostenible, la participación debe apoyarse en condiciones favorables, de las que están un reparto de los poderes y de la responsabilidad del proceso. El tiempo y la utilización de prácticas creativas también constituyen una prenda de éxito. Los casos estudiados confirman que los participantes a este tipo de ejercicio lo tiran ni siquiera beneficios inmediatos, particularmente según el plan de la autonomía y del sentimiento de pertenencia a un grupo social y a un territorio dado, sino que encuentran allí el fundamento de una participación ensanchada para el futuro.

Palabras clave: Metodos creativos; participación; procesos de decisiones.

Political participation in Switzerland

Switzerland is well known for its democratic political structure. The political system is a direct democracy in which the citizens can exert influence on political developments not only through elections but also through popular votes. In addition to the parliamentary procedures, Swiss voters can also vote directly on issues introduced by the parliament or by groups of citizens launching a referendum. There are two requisitions to be met: the content of the referendum may not conflict with (1) the Swiss constitution and (2) with international laws. Every year, several public votes take place on factual issues, laws and also the budget. On some voting weekends, a total of ten issues on a national, cantonal and local level is put forward.

The cantons in Switzerland have an extented autonomy and possess their own constitution, government and parliament. The juridical bases and practices can differ from canton to canton. The cantonal or national constitution regulates on what issues and laws the people have to vote (obligatory referendum). Amendments to the constitution, for example, always have to be decided by the people. All other issues may be brought to vote by handing in 50,000 signatures within three months after being admitted by the parliament (facultative referendum). 100,000 signatures are necessary to introduce a referendum for a change of the constitution. On this level, not only the majority of people but also the majority of cantons is needed in order for the change/proposal to take effect.

The facultative referendum also applies to major communities, but the number of required signatures is lower. In small towns there will not be held a referendum, but issues are discussed and voted on in an annual assembly at municipal level. Immanent to a referendum is the possibility that a proposal could be turned down. For that reason, any administration will aim to obtain widespread acceptance for a proposal before launching it. Extensive consultations with interest groups, e.g. syndicates and other organisations, are an important tool in obtaining their opinion before the proposal is passed on for legislation. Taking into account the opinions of all parties is a way of circumventing a time- and money-consuming referendum. This means that at an early stage communication with all politically active groups is of great importance in Swiss politics.

Participation in decision-making processes on a local level

As can be seen in the graph above, participation in political processes has a long tradition in Switzerland and is part of the political culture. Besides the formal participation, the number of informal participation procedures has continuously increased since the 90's. This means procedures, where all citizens can participate in decision-making processes, without restrictions as to age, gender, voting status, and nationality. The benefits are "not only to create acceptance, legitimacy and increase the probability to efficiently and effectively carry out political and planning projects but also to brace the projects widely and strengthen the identification of citizen groups with the district they live in, especially of groups that are excluded from formal participation processes (e.g. children, youth, migrants)" (Peter, 2008, S. 2). Informal participation can be part of a cantonal constitution, or the canton applies federal law. Article 1 and 2 of the federal law for city and regional planning state: (1) the public authorities assigned to planning tasks inform the population about the objectives and the course of the plans according to this law and (2) they make sure that the population can participate in planning processes in an adequate way" Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 2008, p. 3). On the level of cantonal constitutions similar paragraphs can be found, e. g. the constitution of the canton Basel City: "If authorities carry out consultations on

projects of general interest, they inform the public and guarantee to all persons concerned the opportunity to make representations (§53). The state involves people from the neighbourhood in opinion- and decision-making processes if their interests are immanently affected (§55)." (Kanton Basel-Stadt, 2005, p. 13) How participation can be achieved is laid down in the «»guidelines for neighbourhood participation." If an interest group is directly concerned, further steps for participation will be decided in a hearing. But it is also made clear that informal participation considered as an additional offer to people living in the neighbourhood. (Kanton Basel-Stadt, 2007, S. 2) The collaboration needs to be carried out through neighbourhood organisations which are politically neutral and consist of a minimum of 20 persons. This means that participation is subject to limitations. The affected citizen groups need to have sufficient information about planning issues and be in contact with neighbourhood organisations. Do they really reach all groups concerned and do they have sufficient resources to support the groups in their own opinion-making processes which might be necessary before contacting the authorities? Not all groups have equal access to information, e.g. persons with an immigrant background. They sometimes have to overcome a language barrier and may not have enough knowledge about the political system and participation possibilities.

Maria Lüthringhaus carried out a research on participation in urban development and found that the social status of a person, e.g. their education, will greatly determine how people apprehend and process information on planning processes. Furthermore, cultural capital and economic capital is of great importance. Persons with more economic capital participate more frequently in political decisions, since they need less time to satisfy basic needs. (Lüthringhaus, cited in Willener et al., 2007, S. 65).

For children and adolescents, participation also not matter of course either. A representative Unicef study revealed in 2003 that the degree of participation of children and adolescents on a municipal level (public space) is only 7%. Unlike family matters, where participation increases with the age of the children, it decreases in decision-making processes concerning public space. In general, children and adolescents are only marginally allowed to decide on issues that affect adults (Unicef, 2003, p. 21). The Federal Commission for Child and Youth Affairs characterises many political basic conditions as not supportive of participation and ask federal goverment, the cantons and municipalities to involve children and adolescents in decision-making processes (Eidgenössische Kommission für Jugendfragen, 2001, p. 54).

This indicates that on a political and constitutional level, participation of all citizen groups is provided, but in practice, there is still a great deal of potential to carry out participation processes. The role of persons and organisations working with citizen groups and, consequently, the role of the, communication between them and local authorities, is of great importance to further participation. They also need to provide adequate settings and basic conditions, and they need have at their disposal a variety of methods suitable for their target groups.

Community-development workers are trained to take on this intermediate position. They work in organisations with children, adolescents, migrants, and swiss citizens, seniors, etc. in their neighbourhood. They provide knowledge concerning the target groups and are able to estimate which groups might be affected. They offer contacts to stakeholders and can easily tie in with neighbourhood resources. They offer an education and experience that enable them to create adequate settings and design participative projects, all of which is essential to opinion-

and decision-making, to the articulation of citizen group needs and communication between all concerned.

Student projects at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts - Social Work

At the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (LUASA) – Social Work, projects methodology is especially emphasized in the Community Development course. Between their fourth (full time students) and sixth semester (part time students), students carry out a project by themselves or in groups of up to three students. Parallel to the design of and working on the project, they visit the two methodology modules ""Interventions in Community Development" und ""Project Methodology in Community Development". In most cases the projects are realised in the organisation where the students completed their internship. Most students do their internship in organisations that work with children or adolescents, or in community organisations. In addition to these projects, students may do external projects or partake in a project realised by an institute of the university. The projects are rewarded with 12, 18 or 24 credit points, according to their size,.

The significance of participation in student projects

The participation of the target groups is a central element of project methodology at the LUASA – Social Work. It guarantees that projects are target group orientated and involve the group's interests and ideas. This increases the identification with the project and the chance that the target groups themselves support the project in an adequate way. Participation is seen as a basis for sustainable development. The involvement of the target group, their identification and gradual handing over of responsibility to the persons concerned are important factors for a sustainable success (Moser, Müller, Wettstein & Willener, 1999, p. 183).

A target group suitable project design implies that the applied methods and created settings meet the target group's skills and encourage them to collaborate. Methods used with children, adolescents or adults can vary considerably. The degree of participation also needs to be adjusted to the skills of the target group. At the LUASA-Social Work, four degrees of participation are distinguished according to the scheme of Maria Lüthringhaus (2000, in Willener et al., 2007, p. 61): (1) Information, (2) Involvement, collaboration (3) co-decision, and (4) self-administration. It could be said that sustainability is more likely to be achieved through the highest possible degree of participation, but as mentioned before, the conditions for participation differ among persons and groups. Participation might need to be experienced and learned, which implies starting a project on a lower participation level and increasing it with growing experience and confidence of the target group.

Basic conditions (balance of power, decision-making authority, finances) are decisive for participation. Project leaders must answer the following questions:

- Who should be informed about the project?
- Who should collaborate, in a situation analysis e.g. as an informant?
- Who will decide how the data of a situation analysis are to be interpreted?
- Who decides on the actual form of intervention?
- Who should evaluate the project?
- Who decides on a possible prolongation of the project?

- Who needs to be informed about the termination of a project?

etc. (Willener et al., 2007, p. 64)

The students are asked to consider in their project concept which degree of participation is adequate and possible at what point of time during the project. Before starting a project, they need to analyse which possibilities for participation actually exist, e.g. before commencing a participative investigation in the neighbourhood, the importance of the results needs to be clear to all involved. They need to know if there is a possibility or an expectation that they co-decide on the realisation or are involved in the realisation. A solid clarification of roles and basic conditions avoids the rise of unrealistic expectations, which might then lead to disappointment during the course of the project. The project leaders need to be fully aware of the balance of power and the room for action (Willener, 2007, p. 61-62).

Participation can also be a way to achieve educational goals within a project. Using participatory methods e.g. children can learn to create their own ideas and also realise them. The acquirement of self- and social competencies, e.g. leading with other people's ideas or the acceptance of responsibility might be in the center of a project. It is important to know about the children's abilities and to find the ideal dosage of challenge and coverage (Willener et al., 2007, p. 62).

Participation can also be understood as an objective of a project, "as a way of enhancing democracy (…) and justice of power systems" (Carigiet et al., 2003, cited in Willener et al., 2007, p. 62). If adolescents participate in a neighbourhood change process by means of partaking in a project, an objective could be to create awareness and basic conditions that make participation in future decision-making processes possible. This creates new democratic structures. Participation is not only a basic approach but a goal of the project as well..

The use of creative methods in student projects requires/deserves special attention. Students are asked to develop new and innovative projects; moreover, creative methods, especially when working with children and adolescents, play a key role since working with these target groups demands a mixture of concentrated working and creative and playing elements. Creative methods can also be applied in projects with adults, but conventional forms of collaboration such as meetings are used more often.

The following projects serve as examples of how participation processes of children, adolescents and adults can be initiated, designed and realised by community development students.

Example project 1: children's participation in the city of Basle (cp. Meder, 2006)

Initial situation: In 2006, the city of Basle planned to redesign the biggest park area in the Kleinbasel neighbourhood. In collaboration with a foundation and an organisation that works with children in Basle, the authorities decided to let the children participate in the planning and realisation process. An initial situation analysis in the neighbourhood revealed a high children's interest to participate. A space of 200 sqm was allotted to the children for their plans. A project leader (at that time a student at the LUASA – Social work) was put in charge of designing and carrying out the participatory process.

Objectives: The children should create ideas and make a plan for the foreseen area. That would then be presented to the public and the planning commission. In addition, the children should

also participate in the realisation of the project. The participatory approach should guarantee a lively use of the new playzone. The use of mobile elements should allow later and continuous changes by the children.

Methods: As an introduction, the children played games to know each other, walked the area and learned about its history through a theater performance. Thereupon, 33 children worked in a three day planning workshop which was designed in three phases. The first phase was the "phase of analysis" in which the children analyzed playgrounds in the city in general and specifically in the green zone as it had presented itself up to then. All that came to mind was allowed and collected. In the ensuing "fantasy phase" the children drew a picture of what they imagined to be an ""ideal playground". All drawings were discussed in the plenum and the most appealing ideas where carried over to the next phase. In the final "planning phase," the children created handycraft work models. At this point, the project leader brought in aspects of playground safety and budget. Finally, the children selected the model they wanted to present to parents, authorities and the public. After presenting the model, the ideas where brought to realisation. About half of the children worked manually during realisation and carried out pertinent work.

Results: The children's wishes consisted of a coloured slide, a standpipe with a pump, a labyrinth and a trampoline. Involving children in the realisation of the playground had been difficult due to their lack of physical strength and safety regulations of the construction company, But they nevertheless helped to build the labyrinth and the standpipe. The slide and the trampoline could not be realised due to the limited budget and safety reasons. After realisation, the playground was opened with an opening party.

Significance of the creative methods: The methods applied had several effects. On one hand, the children were able to develop their own ideas and define common interests about the future playground. Through the participatory and creative process, the children's wishes were "translated" into a language that their adult project partners were able to understand. The presentation for parents and authorities and the inauguration through the children were important events within the project. Especially during the inauguration party they experienced once again that their wishes had been taken seriously and their collaboration was appreciated. These interests were visualised and presented to the public and the authorities in form of a model which could be used by the planning authorities The events also demonstrated the children's potential (Meder, 2006, p. 11). It appears that especially in working with children, the use of creative methods is necessary, to keep them in a participatory process for an extended period of time. Creative and playful elements help them to keep on to a decision-making process. Meder states that "games are again and again necessary, because children are not used to work so intensely and focussed in a project" (Meder, 2006, p. 12). On an individual level, the creative methods support the children in their development, stimulating fantasy and creativeness itself. They exercised developing their own ideas and represent them as a group. The development of manual skills is also worth mentioning. Last but not least, the children experienced their participation in a rewarding and appreciative way. They learned that it is possible to contribute their own ideas in the neighbourhood's development – a realization which might encourage them to participate in future projects.

Lessons learned: The evaluation shows the importance of transparent basic conditions of a project and the difficulties to find the balance between an open space which activates fantasy and creativity and project limits like budget and/or safety aspects (e.g. the slide and the trampoline). On the one hand, the target group should be able to develop their own ideas, on the other hand

the restrictions, which might be difficult for them to comprehend, need to be clear, so that the developed ideas can actually be realised. Created ideas that fail to be realised might cause frustration or disillusion, which can be contraproductive for further collaboration and participation. In this project, this would have meant to impart an idea of the space of the playground, e.g. using real measures for the model (Meder, 2006, p. 14). If the project leader does not possess all the necessary knowledge (e.g. playground security standards), external experts need to be called in to clarify the basic conditions. Participatory processes with children require a great deal of time. The higher the degree of participation, the more time is needed. Not only the creative process but also keeping the children informed about the ongoing project requires adopted methods and therefore more preparation time.

Example project 2: adolescent participation in the city of Wil (cp. Sulzer, 2008)

Initial situation: In June 2006, the City of Wil launched a project to develop an urban-development concept. The objective was to adapt the Richtplanung (directive plan for spatial development) from the 1980's to today's living conditions distinct by spacious mobility. A new integrated city planning was seen as indispensable and defined as a legislation goal for 2005-2008. For the feasibility of the project, a broad acceptance by the population was considered decisive. The population should be involved in a broad participatory process. (Stadt Wil, 2005, ¶1)

The most important board for opinion-making was the Forum Stadtentwicklung, which consisted of members of political parties, school inspectors, regional communities, districts and various church and social institutions (e. g. youth wor). Adolescents were not involved either in the forum or other boards of the project. This fact was already noticed by

communal youth work in 2007. At the same time, the Forum Stadtentwicklung suggested to involve adolescents in the project (Sulzer, 2008, S. 5). In the city of Wil, participation is not explicitly regulated by law, but the städtische Kommission für Jugendfragen (the communal commission for youth issues), according to its regulation, advances participation possibilities for adolescents in all communal domains (Stadt Wil, 1992, p. 2).

In 2008, a local youth worker and student of the LUASA – Social work assumed the responsibility to design and carry out a project which should involve the young people's interest in the urban development project.

Objectives: As described above, a goal of the project was to involve the adolescents' interests in the urban development concept, and especially keep an eye on differences and girl's interests towards public space. Besides this, the project should provide an impulse for sustainable development and help to establish youth participation as an attitude in political processes in Wil (Sulzer, 2008, p. 9). Another intention was to raise the adolescents' interest in the development of their neighbourhood.

Methods: in order to include the adolescents' point of view on urban development, several research methods were put into practice, e.g. an inspection walk through the district (accompanied by youth workers), and auto-photography (autonomous). The walk-through inspections of the district were done in groups of two or three adolescents, who were accompanied by a youth worker. To distinguish between the different interests of boys and girls, gender specific groups were formed. The track of the walk was decided by the adolescents and they photographed their

most important whereabouts. Afterwards, the results were gathered and questions discussed in an open discussion. Additionally, during one week four adolescents photographed places they thought to be positive or negative in the city. The pictures were collected and interpreted together with the project leader. A third method was a written survey in school classes about positive and negative aspects of the town and the wishes and needs of the adolescents.

Results: During the three interventions, over 100 adolescents were able to express themselves about living in Wil. All results from the three sources were collected and visualised on a map of the city. Together with a report they were handed over to the planning authorities for implementation in the concept. The survey revealed that most of the adolescents showed a great interest in speaking out and giving their opinion and articulating their needs. In relation to urban development it was possible to show where they liked or disliked to spend their free time. Wishes for the urban development were improvements in mobility (extension of public transport in the evenings and on weekends and a bike-friendly city) and in options for going out and spending free time. A specific issue for girls was not feeling secure in the area of the railway station during evening and night hours. Boys wished more space for sports. Originally, it was planned to hand over the report and the map to the authorities on a special event, but due to lack of time it was handed in by the project leader. The implementation in the concept was checked on the basis of the revised report of the planning company and the revised urban-development concept in 2008. The interests of the adolescents were included. The feedback of the authorities was positive and the project leader was assured that the ideas and wishes would be considered in the development process. This positive experience on both sides might be a basis for further participation during the process. The project leader commented that "a first step is done, many more need to follow. Youth work has to assume its responsibility and thump future participation of the youth in large-scale political projects." (Sulzer, 2008, p. 20)

Significance of the creative methods: The creative methods allowed the adolescents to criticize existing circumstances and create ideas for improvement. Additionally, authorities and adults obtained an insight into the adolescents' living environment. It became apparent where and why adolescents like to spend their free time and which places are avoided by boys and girls. Unlike in Basle, their needs and wishes were not revealed for an area that was especially reserved for them, but they became visible as citizens of Wil with their own perspective on public space.

Willener writes about walk-through inspections carried out by children or adolescents: "they are a central method to get to know their [the children's or adolescents'] understanding and use of a certain environment. First-hand information come together and serve as catalysers for further discussions" (Willener, 2008, p. 155). Willener also states that for these walk-through inspections, a certain trust from the side of the young people in the project team (..) is needed and that the project team needs to have collected information about the area beforehand. (ibid. p. 156). The project leader lives in Wil and was working for the local youth work which made it possible to meet these requirements. The auto-photography fulfilled the same function (criticising existing conditions and allowing an insight into juvenile living environment), with the addition that the pictures can be presented and discussed with other groups or, in this case, the planning authorities.

Lessons learned: The aspect of time resources also appeared as a difficulty in this project. The collecting, interpreting and documenting of all data gained in the interventions was time-consuming. Originally, the targeted degree of participation was "co-decision", involving adolescents

in the project lead. The expenditure of time was underestimated and conflicted with the city's tight time schedule for the urban development project.

Example project 3: adult/senior participation in the community of Pfaffnau/St. Urban (cp. Graber, Wyss & Kollros, 2005)

Initial situation: In 2005, the LUASA – Social work accompanied the project Vita-Vision 65+, carried out by the commune of Pfaffnau/St. Urban. The objective was to develop goals for seniority politics. Between May and October 2005 three students carried out a subproject titled Einbezug der Bevölkerung (people's involvement) in order to conduct a broad participatory analysis of people's desires. The project should collect data involving the people which would assist the project leading group 65+ in pursuing their goals. (Graber, Wyss & Kollros, 2005, p. 4).

Objectives: Applying participatory methods of collecting data as many persons should be able to express themselves about being an elderly person in the community. Collecting the data should focus on positive and negative local aspects and an envisioning of life as an elderly person. In addition, it should involve three suitable areas of the overhead project (accommodation at age, the local home the elderly and leisure/social life/mobility). The results should be handed over in form of a written report that would serve as a basis for further proceedings in the project.

Methods: In order to obtain first impressions and focus on seniority in the community, the project leaders went for a walk guided by seniors.

Data was mainly collected by means of a survey sent to all citizens over the age of fifty, as well as qualitative interviews. Ten interviews covered the subjects

living at age, mobility, elderly people seen in the context of church work and involvement in senior groups. All persons under fifty years had the opportunity to comment on the subject through special letterboxes installed at central locations in the community. The chosen method on the subject "the local home for old people" is interesting. Collaborating with local primary-school classes, the project leaders worked with children who made drawings conveying their perspective on the home for old people focussing on beautiful and ugly impressions. Additionally they worked on a list of visions for the future. The drawings were discussed with the inhabitants and the managers of the home.

Results: The senior-guided walk helped the project leaders to gather initial information and have a personal impression. "we gained a good impression of the living environment and the characteristics of the communes. Through our guides, we obtained much information about the history and important events (Graber, Wyss & Kollros, 2005, S. 17). The survey with over 50% returned forms showed the people's great interest in the subject and was the main data source. The data was analysed in collaboration with the project groups 65+. The significance of the qualitative interviews differed according to the degree in which the interviewed person had already been involved in the project.

The letterboxes were only used to hand in the forms for the survey. There were no further representations of people under the age of fifty.

The children's drawings were spontaneously exhibited at a party at the old people's home. They showed many new but also well-known negative and positive aspects and visions.

All results were handed in to the project group 65+ at the end of the subproject.

Significance of the creative methods: A walk-through was also applied in this project. It primarily served the project leaders to obtain insight into the life of seniors in the community and gather further information. The walk took place during the main stage of collecting data. The project leaders themselves criticized that it would have been better to do the walk in the very beginning, before starting to collect the data. (Graber, Wyss & Kollros, S. 17).

The children's drawings in the old people's home are particularly interesting. Consciously, the project leaders chose to work with a target group whose living environment is totally different from the old people's home and who hardly spend time there. The children were able to show a totally different and unprejudiced view on the institution.

Lessons learned: The students emphasized especially the collaboration with the project group 65+ as significant for the successful conclusion of the project. None of the project team lived or worked in the community, which made the project group 65+ an indispensable partner and source of information for the subproject. By means of its long-term involvement, the team provided significant knowledge during the whole project.

Summary

In all projects presented the participation of the target groups was both an instrument as well as an objective of the project. The positive experience showed the potential of citizen groups in decision-making processes and will be an important step to further participation in the future.

It has to be pointed out that in all three projects existed a basic willingness of the authorities to involve citizen groups. This was crucial to make the projects feasible. But if there is only little keenness on people's involvement, pilot projects can serve to initiate first steps in participation. They might be easier to carry out because of their temporal and financial limitations, then trying to implement permanent participatory procedures. When negotiating with local authorities about a project, the time resources need to be carefully calculated. Participation needs time, and the higher the degree of participation, the more time is needed.

Participatory processes enable citizen groups to represent their needs and wishes and involve them in a decision-making process. Identification with the city/community's/living environment and acceptance of the decisions made is developed and contributes to sustainable changes. Looking at the methods, it can be said that there is not a ONE participatory method, but the art is to find and adopt the right method or a mix of methods for the problem at hand and the local circumstances (Peter, S. 6). Creative methods are of great value, especially when working with children and adolescents, because they can be easily adapted to the target group's abilities. Through their playful interventions they can stimulate and maintain the target group's interest and concentration on the subject. The creative process allows innovative ideas and actions, but requires clear arrangements and transparency in terms of basic conditions and goals. Otherwise, the involvement can create disillusion and disappointment and will be contraproductive.

Creative methods serve to realise one's own wishes and ideas and visualise them for others. This serves as a basis for discussion and negotiation on common needs and interests of a group. The products of creative processes (drawings, models, pictures, etc.) demonstrate wishes, needs, worries and the living environment of the target groups and make them visible to other project

partners. In a manner of speaking, the products "translate" them into a general language which can be understood by other groups and project partners. E.g. planning authorities are enabled to understand children's wishes, needs and living environment by means of a model. Language barriers can be overcome. This contributes to a positive change of perception of the target groups and their potential as the future generation and for urban/neighbourhood development. This hopefully opens doors for future involvement.

Overlooking the current experiences with participatory methods in Swiss cities, they are mainly positive. The potential of voluntary participatory processes should be further promoted and used more broadly. The methodological instruments need to be advanced and sharpened. (...) What is missing in Switzerland is an empirically assured public knowledge of the functioning and effects of informal participation (Peter, 2008, p. 4). For that reason, the LUASA -Social Work has launched a research project to develop a systematic on participatory processes and projects in Switzerland over the last years and analyse the status quo of research on participation in Europe.

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