

## 6. Promoting Youth Civic Participation with Media Production: The Case of Youth Voice Editorial Board

PhD Sirkku Kotilainen  
University of Jyväskylä & Finnish Youth Research Network  
Research Centre for Contemporary Culture  
University of Jyväskylä (Finland)  
sirkku.kotilainen@jyu.fi

### ABSTRACT

Public space, especially online, is now offered more than ever before. Still, the role of public media production in youth cultures has not been very much noticed in civic pedagogic settings. This analysis provides insights into the relations between youth, civic participation and media publicity in the context of youth work. It is based on a three years follow up study of the Youth Voice Editorial Board in Finland, among youngsters aged 13-17 years. The results of the study show that youth citizenship can be strengthened with media literacy education. This process consists of three elements related with each other: youth civic participation (including media productions), media publicity, and pedagogy understood as learning community. They foster feelings of societal influence among young people and are conducive to online participation as well as traditional civic engagement and can prove effective in increasing cross-generational dialogue.

### KEY WORDS

Audiences, civic engagement, civic participation, media literacy education, media production, media publicity, public journalism, community media

## 1. Introduction

Public space to interact with each other and to make your viewpoints visible to everyone is now offered more than ever before –online. Community services as Youtube, MySpace and picture galleries along with Wikipedia and blogs involve users to public and social knowledge creation, mostly in commercial and international media environments. These kinds of online public media are in the interests of young people as they can interact and come up with their own media work. Youth researchers talk about «mediated youth cultures», where the uses of several media (like Internet, mobile phone, television) as well as the modes of expression (music, text and image added to their multimodalities), are integrated in the everyday lives of the young (Hodkinson & Deicke, 2007).

Still, the role of public media in youth cultures has not been taken seriously enough in fostering youth citizenship, in school and not in organisations offering free time activities to young people, i.e. in professional youth work. There seems to be a risk of generational divide as the youngsters are born into the age of digital media and the middle-aged and elder people just migrate into them. Especially, in educational settings, the main question should be: How to change young people's perception of the net, not just as a tool for fun but also a tool for civic activity? How to integrate online media to civic education, if educators are not familiar with mediated youth cultures?

The internet has emerged as an interesting arena for researchers to look for new ways of civic participation and social empowerment of young citizens (Bennet, 2008). However, there is a need for perspectives that go beyond the hype of empowering information and communication technologies. The older you are, the more likely to engage, the younger you are, the more likely not to engage in political matters, even on the net. Moreover, there are differences among the young: some youngsters do engage actively via the net, but for some the net is not an important media for political engagement at all (Dahlgren & Olsson, 2007; Livingstone, Couldry & Markham, 2007). Other young «activists», in order to generate cross-generational discussions, might select a variety of media, not only the net, for participation (Kotilainen & Rantala, 2009). Following this, it is important to ask: How could public media in general be integrated in fostering youth civic engagement and for promoting cross-generational discussions on civic matters? And how about the juxtaposition of political and cultural participation: is it useful when speaking about the young?

Looking closely at the Finnish case study about youth civic participation through public media production allows for a better understanding of the stakes and challenges presented above. Concerning media education, the focus is on bridging the generational gap between young people and adults and articulating youth civic agency between cultural and political activities. The more practical question explored here is: How to bring young people and youth experts to dialogue with media experts in the process?

Analyzing the roots of media literacy education in its articulation with civic agency implies to take into account the histories of national awakening, utilitarianism,

and the rise of labour movements in Western societies since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, in conjunction with the rise of modern media. In Scandinavia, and in Finland specifically, the roots go deep to the long tradition in folk (people) education. Basic literacy had an important impact on workers' efficiency, but it also developed their faculties to know their rights and gave them an overall sense of empowerment in society. From this vantage point, the present time –global media culture– seems to be marking yet another era in the long story of folk education. The multiple new literacies such as media literacy refer to various competences, coping strategies, and survival skills needed in current times (Kotilainen & Suoranta, 2007; Freire, 1973).

The case, Youth Voice Editorial Board (<http://nk.hel.fi/nuortenaanitoimitus>), is implemented as voluntary free time activity in professional youth work administrated by the city of Helsinki, the capital of Finland. The case consists of a group of young people and their supervising youth workers producing news and other journalistic material, mostly for the mainstream media, as for the main national newspaper Helsingin Sanomat ([www.hs.fi](http://www.hs.fi)), the national television channels owned by the broadcasting company YLE ([www.yle.fi](http://www.yle.fi)) and the most popular online picture gallery among the Finnish youth, IRC-Gallery (<http://irc-galleria.net>). It is part of the private Sulake Corporation, the developer of the online game «Habbo Hotel» for teenagers; it has national communities in 32 countries, so far ([www.sulake.com](http://www.sulake.com)).

The participants of the Youth Voice Editorial Board are young people aged from 13 to 18 years. At daytime they are pupils in junior and senior high school and students receiving basic vocational education. After school –sometimes during the school days– they come to work on this voluntary project with their tutoring youth experts. Twenty to forty youngsters have been regularly committed to the project and it has involved approximately 120 young people in a variety of ways during its second operational year, in 2007. These young people are not aiming at the professional level of media production, in the first place. Instead, the goal of this project –coming from adolescents themselves– is to change the contents of mainstream media, getting the adult journalists to pay attention to civic issues important to young people. Added to this, they want to make the young more visible on the media as experts of issues concerning their own generation and promote cross-generational public discussions with adults through their own media production.

## 2. Youth Civic Engagement and Media Education in Finland

In the Finnish context, the questions of civic engagement and political participation via media are especially interesting due to the view that, historically, the concept of «citizen» refers to a cultural actor rather than to a political actor. Civic agency has been actualised more in cultural spheres, such as youth associations, than in political ones, such as parties (Stenius, 2003.) Since the late 1990s, following policies of the Council of Europe, with programmes emanating from the divisions of Youth and Education, the Finnish authorities have been concerned for active citizenship. The division of Education has launched several European programmes, and the whole year 2005 was named the year of «citizenship education» in Europe. Moreover, the

European Commission White Paper, «A New Impetus for European Youth» (2001) has pushed forward youth policy in the Northern countries as Finland. In comparison to the other Nordic countries and to most of the European countries, teachers in Finland had not especially emphasised civic engagement, at least anything related to politics (Suutarinen, 2000). Over the past few years, the authorities in this country have supported several experiments, particularly online projects, with the aim of enhancing civic engagement among citizens.

Recent Finnish national governments have even taken media education into the public agenda in the cross-sectorial programmes. Such programmes have enhanced learning materials and training campaigns for educators. The Citizen Participation Policy Programme (2003-07) called for civic education reform in which media education was emphasised as a means to foster active citizenship and information society skills, including media literacy (OM 5: 2005). Additionally, the national Youth Law (Nuorisolaki 2006) aims at enhancing «youth active citizenship and social empowerment of young people»; it lays the stress on ensuring that the voices of young people are heard on issues concerning them.

As a result, administrators in national and local youth policies and youth experts in associations have found technological possibilities for youth empowerment and civic engagement with the internet. Technological development has pushed forward the state policy that has provided resources and tools and allocated public channels that didn't exist before, like youth initiative channels online for local civic participation. Additionally, different modes of professional youth assistance in commercial online communities like picture galleries have developed mainly with the support of the state. For example, adult supervisors go to the Finnish version of «Habbo Hotel» to meet the young instead of waiting for the young to come to contact them physically. It is like clearinghouse work for assistance online in several sectors of the lives of young people. Consultation online happens in the form of the professional figure of the youth expert created by the game.

Other national versions of this commercial game, for example, for teenagers in Spain ([www.habbo.es](http://www.habbo.es)) do not necessarily include this kind of youth assistance. It depends on the national youth policy, if youth consultation online and collaboration with commercial media is considered worthwhile. In Finland, different modes of online consultation and youth assistance in game environments, picture galleries, etc., have recently been included to the training programmes of professional youth experts in the universities of applied sciences.

In the case project Youth Voice Editorial Board, media are not only a tool for professional youth experts to meet and discuss with young people. Additionally, the project focuses on changing the contents of mainstream media by introducing the youth perspective on the news. For their own media production, the participating young people need adults' tutoring, at least for generating media content. In Finland, in out-of-school contexts like professional youth work in communes, media literacy education has been implemented mainly in media workshops to produce youth media all over the country for several years already. This kind of activity belongs mainly

to its own brand, «cultural youth work», which emphasises artistic expression, i.e. creating your own music, arts, etc. The case study takes a new tack from that cultural tradition, toward an increase in political work and civic agency.

Youth Voice Editorial Board is implemented in the services of Civil Society Support in the Helsinki Youth Department, though it remains in cooperation with Youth Media Centre in cultural youth work. It means that both strands, the cultural and the civic, are working together and not in opposition or in ignorance of each other. From the viewpoint of media literacy, it has been interesting to study how the professionals in these two different sections –the youth experts of civic engagement and the youth experts of cultural media production– collaborate with each other. This was the major focus of the project that yielded the most interesting results.

In Finland, media literacy education, for example in media workshops, is not a very common activity in youth work in communes, but its presence has slowly increased –partly because of the technological developments of youth consultation online. This appearance seems to be like the one in schools with the developments of e-learning and teaching with ICTs in comparison to media literacy education, i.e. «teaching about and through the media» aiming to develop critical and creative skills of media literacy. Today these two trends, the technological trend (media as a tool for different educational purposes) and the sociocultural trend (media culture as an educational content), are actively searching for cooperation and integrative practices show up continually (Buckingham, 2003).

Lately, the public discussions and claims for media literacy education have increased –partly because of recent national tragedies, like school massacres in the villages of Jokela (November, 2007) and Kauhajoki (September, 2008). In both cases, the killers were heavy internet users and game-players, as well. Discussions about these cases on public media have focused on Internet safety issues and overall problems in youth well-being (Kotilainen, 2008b). Concerning the latter case, for example, the questions of gun control law and the consequences of recent cultural changes in Western societies (especially in Finland) have been in the news headlines. As a result, Internet has been increasingly discussed as an integrated part of the (youth's) world –a part where evil can occur just as anywhere else.

Beyond those two recent tragedies, however, the claims for media literacy education in Finland grow up mostly from a broad scale of viewpoints, that all share the project of national well-being in a globalized media world. The driving force is the two-pronged vision of media literacy as a basic civic skill and as a basic human right for all children and young people. This vision aims both at providing safety for the child and giving the child a voice (Kupiainen, Sintonen & Suoranta, 2008). These viewpoints have support in the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child, valid for children and young people up to 18 years old, and in the UN Millennium Development Goals, based on the 2000 UN Millennium Declaration.

For example, article 13 in the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child says:

- 1) The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to

seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

2) The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as provided by law and the necessary.

a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others.

b) For the protection of national security or of public order, or public health or morals.

In Finland, the enthusiasts of media literacy education come from several sectors: school, youth work organisations, libraries, cultural organisations such as media and film centres and administrators from local to national governance. The first Finnish media educational organisation, Film and Television Education Centre (now Media Centre Metka), was established in 1958. The researchers and other experts of media education established a national association in 2005 for generating cooperation among experts coming from different fields and pushing forward media literacy in Finnish society. The Finnish Society on Media Education has grown rapidly. For example, it is developing online services for national actors of media education with the funding of the ministry of education (see [www.mediaeducation.fi](http://www.mediaeducation.fi)).

Promotion of media literacy has been included in the national government policy for 2007-11, and appears in several strategic documents concerning children and young people. In these policy programmes, the rationale rests mainly on visions of «the safe media environment», but also of «supporting cross-sectorial activities in the field of media education». Additionally, media literacy has been included to the missions of several ministries, like the ministries of education, law and justice, and transports and communications. Media literacy as cross-curricular theme is included to curricula from pre-primary education to high school. Vocational education curricula are currently being reviewed (Ministry of Education, 2008).

According to a national survey conducted by the ministry of law and justice (OM 5/2005), the main problems in media literacy education are the continuing project-orientation and lack of stable funding: when projects end, the follow-up may fail. Additionally, the training of teachers is still poor. Research on the area has been advanced mainly by active individuals in different fields of science, mostly in the fields of media studies and education science (Kupiainen, Sintonen & Suoranta 2008). Lately, thinking about the development of media educational practices, media pedagogy has been developing faster in other society sectors than in cumbersome structures of the formal school system.

### 3. Media Participation in Youth Voice Editorial Board

In this study, media are embedded within the social relationships and possibilities to participate in societies and local communities, i.e. civic cultures (Dahlgren 2006). Empirically, the case study proceeds from the perception that the young are active, participatory audiences sharing and exchanging information, ideas, and experiencing media as consumers and agents (McQuail, 2000, 120; Ridell, 2006). Audience activity, however, is not one single mode of participation. A Finnish media researcher Seija

Ridell (2006), for example, suggests a variety of possible actor positions for audiences, such as object of media, user satisfying own needs, experiencer looking for high feelings, and more public positions as interpreter, negotiator, visible expresser and creative actor.

Following Ridell's (2006) classification, media participation can be defined as active, as the individual's internal interaction with media, for example creating one's own opinion while watching television reality programming and / or using the offered ways of communicating with the programme, such as voting. Public media participation includes more public positions, as mentioned above. In all these positions, young people can act in media «publicity», for example discuss online or create contents themselves (Kotilainen, 2008a). This public media participation is akin to what philosopher Hannah Arendt (1958) calls «vita active». Arendt has conceptualised «vita active», the human life which has been owed to public and political issues, referring also to the micro spheres of life. She writes that being a human is always framed with being in relations with others and communality. Therefore, the young are also actors who can make new openings and public actions.

Power in media culture is linked to the publicities that can be managed through media, for example in online communities. For Arendt (1958; Habermas, 1989), publicity is pluralistic, which means that people can be visible all at the same time in full difference. Following this view, marginalised groups, such as young people, should have a share of the public space to have their say. Regarding societal themes, however, young people have seldom been interviewed in mainstream news. They are more often presented as victims, criminals or top experts, for example as the winners of different competitions (Raundalen & Steen, 2002; Unga I media, 2002). The multiple roles of the young as public agents seem to be visible only in the lockers of youth publicity, for example in youth magazines and youth online communities. For the young, it is challenging to reach out into cross-generational publicity, for example initiating discussions on political matters. For them, having the feeling of influencing, i.e. to be heard by adults, is important in generating interest in civic participation (Kotilainen & Rantala, 2008).

How are the young developing their civic identities in contemporary societies? Peter Dahlgren (2006, 273) states that civic competence cannot derive exclusively from political society, but it emerges from the overall development of the individual. Thus, «non-political contexts of civil society can have a bearing on how people engage and manage in political contexts». This questions how individuals self-create themselves into citizens, and additionally, how their skills to talk and express themselves through media then come on the research agenda. Dahlgren (2000; 2004; 2005; 2006) discusses the concept of «civic culture» as a way to approach citizenship in mediated societies. Instead of emphasising formal political terms of citizenship, this perspective underscores the meanings, practices, and identities of civic agents in their communication acts.

Four types of civic identities of young people in relation to media can be highlighted from previous research: seekers, communalists, communicators and activists



(Kotilainen & Rantala, 2009; Livingstone, Bober & Helsper, 2004). The seekers are the young people who are still looking for civic issues to engage in and communities to connect to. These young people could also be considered as potential civic agents in their own terms when the matters, communities and spaces are discovered. The communalists refer to more traditional citizens, who often think that they have possibilities of having their say in their own life sphere, but they do not consider it important to act more publicly. They tend to act in peer and hobby communities. The communicators are the young who are connected via media to multiple communities, but often do not see this interaction in political terms. Finally, activists are the young who have general interest issues they want to make public and they find public spaces to communicate.

In most cases, young people seem to be interested and willing to interact via media, especially on local issues that are important to them (Loader, 2007). Additionally, activist orientation to the structures of media can occur among youngsters less than 18 years old. For example, after the Jokela school massacre in 2007, the young living in the village insisted that media professionals needed to reflect on their own principles of good communication in news flows about crisis. The youth were upset about the methods journalists used to secure interviews with or take photos of residents, victims and their relatives –showing their private, personal grief in public. They published their claims in an announcement in the main Finnish media outlets, two weeks after the shooting (Kotilainen, 2008b). Some results were seen less than a year after in news flows about the Kauhajoki school massacre: soon after the crisis, the interviewed were mainly adults and experts; the grief of the young was not shown as openly as earlier.

It appears that the young have increased their interest for participation on media, more broadly than online. For example, the starting point of the Youth Voice Editorial Board in 2005 was a youth initiative in the events of the Voice of Youth Campaign, for changing the limited popular image of the young, which they think has been created by the mainstream media. Additionally, the young wanted to create discussion with adults on civic matters related to young people.

Youth Voice Editorial Board can be seen as a critical, even radical pedagogic project that emphasises the sense of civic agencies and collective actions in the public sphere. The aim of the project, i.e. that of ensuring that the voices of young people be heard via media, addresses the questions of communication for social change with a spirit of empowerment ‘à la Freire’ (Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006; Freire, 1973; 2001; Kotilainen & Suoranta, 2007). But what are the kinds of pedagogical practices actualised in the project? How is media publicity linked to pedagogical practices? What challenges are arising?

### 3.1. A Piece of Participatory Action Research

The study of the Youth Voice Editorial Board was carried out as a piece of participatory action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2006), in which questionnaires



were issued to young people of 13 to 18 years and document analysis, participant observation and several rounds of interviews among the young and youth workers took place. The number of young people involved in this study has been approximately thirty, and regular consultations took place with three youth workers, one of them being the expert responsible for media production of this project. The analysis focuses mostly on material gathered among youth workers, i.e. interviews, project memos, memos of researcher's consultations and the online communications between the producer and the young people, in 2006-08 (emails and information on the project's shared a wiki-platform).

The approach of participatory action research within cultural studies framework was chosen, because the case study and the general research project included the same aims of increasing youth civic engagement via public media production. Additionally, the researcher's active consultative involvement was needed at the beginning of the process, for example in tutoring the young budding journalists. For three years, it also implied attending the professional discussions with youth workers in their own meetings. So, the researcher was involved in the young people's work and the work of their supervisors in media cultural empowerment, together with all the participants. The knowledge creation in this project has been collaborative, too, especially in meetings with youth workers. The processes conceptualized by the researcher have been shared with young people, who have challenged them in critical discussions, thus resulting in the co-construction of the observation and participation practices (Kassam, 1980; Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

From the beginning of its implementation, the Youth Voice Editorial Board has linked mainstream media publicity with editorial and media pedagogical practices to youth work. This is the most innovative dimension of the project, as usually, media work in general in Finnish youth work concentrates on youth media publicity (Hat Factory Youth Media Centre ([www.hattu.net](http://www.hattu.net)), if any publicity is integrated to practices at all.

In order to implement the young people's initiative for youth media production into mainstream publicity, youth workers on the Youth Voice Editorial Board established, together with an active group of young people, a planning group that worked to make it possible to run a youth editorial board. From the beginning of this project, three persons have been involved in the services of Civil Society Support in the Helsinki Youth Department: one experienced youth worker (female) as a leading person, one youth worker (female) and one media producer (male), who was hired for this particular project. He had just passed his degree in audiovisual media studies in one of the Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland. The Youth Voice Editorial Board was his main project. Additionally, in 2007, one newspaper journalist (female) was hired for this project. The interviews, production observation and consultative meetings have been carried out mainly with the leading experienced youth worker and the media producer.

#### 4. Young People and Youth Experts Learning Together

Youth Voice Editorial Board can be classified as a media pedagogic project that integrates public journalism with youth work. Public journalism is a movement that emphasises citizens' interaction with media: journalists evoke public discussions about the topics raised by people. As in public journalism, these young people, for example, as readers of the newspaper «Helsingin Sanomat», are acting reporters, and professional journalists work as providers and guardians of access to publicity (Rosen, 1999; Martikainen, 2004). Additionally, Youth Voice Editorial Board can be compared to community media and the research undertaken on them since at least the 1970s in different parts of world. These small-scale media developments are concerned to identify transformations in media whereby people could become producers of media messages and a sense of community among people might develop (Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006).

Youth Voice Editorial Board is implemented as a press agency, a circulator of news to different media, produced by the young. The project has produced discussion programmes for national television and articles for national newspaper, on issues like young people's mental health and depression and the minor teaching of civics in the Finnish education system. Additionally, the project has produced an election machine for the IRC-Gallery before national elections, where young users can test their political opinions online with the candidates. So, all the youth productions concerning societal issues have reached mainstream publicity. Additionally, articles and programmes are published also on the youth media website *Free Your Mind* ([www.yle.fi/free](http://www.yle.fi/free)).

Youth experts have created the structures for the youth media production and they organise weekly meetings and workshops for young people involved in the project. From the beginning, the young have elected democratically a special YVEB Board with four chairmen, selected twice a year. This youth board makes decisions about the direction of the project, like choosing the professional staff invited to participate in the project. Additionally, members of the board negotiate about the space and forms of youth media production with the representatives of mainstream media. Youth workers organise these cross-generational, official negotiations, prepare young people to discuss and present their ideas; also, afterwards, they reflect about the effects with them, analyzing their feelings and ways to proceed forward.

In practice, Youth Voice Editorial Board has been organised in different editorial working groups. Young people involved can choose the group in which they prefer to participate: a) television group including shooting and set decoration, b) newspaper editing group or c) IRC-Gallery group including planning and implementing of the societal Gallup polls online.

The media production of an actual issue starts by presenting and generating ideas all together, for example in weekly meetings. After an idea has been approved by media professionals, youngsters concentrate on doing the manuscript and information retrieval before the production takes place. «For me, it has been productive to develop new kinds of media pedagogic practices together with colleagues eager to learn together, and all the pragmatic discussions! Only, we have always too little

time... Additionally, it has been rewarding to see, how within two years in this Youth Department, youth workers' attitudes towards media have changed from the necessary evil to a resource and an interesting activity environment» (media producer, email interview, 2008-01-14).

Media producer, journalist and youth workers together have developed several media-pedagogic practices to educate the young for public journalism and for audio-visual media production. For example, the meetings of the newspaper editing group start with «the observation of the week» for stimulating ideas of news. All of the participants have to tell about at least one observation from their life, connected to a social phenomenon like «recycle bins are always full». Another example is «three-question's interview», which is a peer practice of the interview technique. One can pose only three questions about an issue: the first question is of current interest, the second question can deepen the issue and the third question is future oriented or personal. A successful method among the young became the practice of «the unknown expert»: they pick up strangers from the street and interview them as experts on some issue (Martikainen, 2004).

The main challenges mentioned by the interviewed youth workers are linked to a new project that requires new modes of cooperation in the youth department and with media. They had to earn the trust of the administrators in the department and the leaders in media companies. Most adults find the nature of this kind of youth public journalism strange in the first place, because they tend to think that for all young people, the internet is the only agreeable forum for participation. Additionally, in the youth department, it has been challenging to organise the cooperation between the more culture oriented Youth Media Hat Factory as a production environment and the Services of Civil Society Support that is the home of the social content production.

The Media producer talks about a certain participation ideology that makes this project different from other youth media projects: «The participation ideology is so visible in our project. It includes a background philosophy of the young as central actors. Young people are making decisions, planning and doing themselves, and for that we have the structures like collaborative meetings and youth spokesmen system. Additionally, our starting point is that everybody can participate and influence everything, and just trying to have your say is valuable» (media producer, email interview 2008-01-28).

The Youth worker makes the differentiation with other youth work context. She thinks that Youth Voice Editorial Board is located at a different level, as it doesn't focus on using media like other projects but concentrates on media contents and aims at changing media: «Good youth workers handle their own district, including perhaps some stories about youth events to local newspaper or radio. We are discussing media contents, so we are one stage forward from basic youth work. We argue that the content in mainstream media should reflect more the point of view of young people. For example, in discussions with YLE (The Finnish Broadcasting Company), our youngsters argued for more young people in the professional program production» (youth worker, interview 2006-03-21).

The professional youth workers and the media producer have learned together with the young participants while developing media pedagogic practices and media productions. They have developed new practices, modes of cooperation with media companies and inside the Youth Department. How about the perspective of the young participants? For example, this is how a 17-year old girl, who has been involved in the project for three years, describes her relationship to it: «I have worked as negotiator in cooperative meetings, member, hostess in the discussions on television, discussant, camera shooter, script, editor and as journalist collecting background material. I've been allowed to do and learn everything I want. I've been allowed to succeed and fail freely... I have learnt how to make compromises, how to lead, to cooperate with others, to be patient, to cope with stress... media critics, braveness to express myself via media and creativity» (Kotilainen & Rantala, 2008).

For a boy, 18, the main motive of participation was the political content. After two years of participation, he names the project his «way of life»: «It has revolutionised my social networks with valuable contacts and (hopefully) lifelong friendships. The concrete media production opened my eyes to the broad problems of our everyday life... the growing understanding of doing media and societal discussions with other youngsters have taught me tolerance for different ways of thinking and general principles for acting in a group» (Kotilainen & Rantala, 2008).

Youth Voice Editorial Board has created media education practices related to civic engagement and media publicity in several ways. The analysis of data from the different actors, including young participants, makes some dimensions of the process visible (see Table 1).

<p><b>CIVIC / POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real experiences about influencing.</li> <li>• New ways to participate in civic affairs.</li> <li>• Formal participatory processes of civic engagement (for example, meeting techniques and argumentation).</li> </ul> <p><b>MEDIA PUBLICITY:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media publicity for content production, offered by several media.</li> <li>• Cross-generational audiences.</li> </ul> <p><b>PEDAGOGY:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning by doing.</li> <li>• Interaction with peers and adults like youth workers, media professionals and administrators.</li> </ul>
--

Table 1. Dimensions of Civic Media Education (Kotilainen & Rantala, 2008).

In the case of the Youth Voice Editorial Board, media publicity has not only been a channel for civic engagement, but an environment to engage with alternative ways in cross-generational publicity as well. For example, the youth made news have

been published among the news made by professional journalists in the newspaper Helsingin Sanomat. Moreover, youth made television programmes have been shown on prime time television in YLE (The Finnish Broadcasting Company). Additionally, the project has produced alternative content on social issues on the online youth picture gallery, reaching youth publicity. So, Youth Voice Editorial Board can be considered as a youth news agency / press agency producing public journalism for several media.

Youth Voice Editorial Board has produced mainly real life face-to-face meetings, interaction with peers and collaborative media production. In this project, pedagogic practices have included interaction with media professionals and administrators as well, for example negotiations, presentations and preparations for funding applications with youth workers. Besides learning media production, the youngsters have learnt the communication processes of more traditional civic engagement as well, for example meeting techniques and argumentation (Kotilainen, 2005).

## 5. Generating the Experiences of Influence in a Society

So what then is important in promoting youth civic participation? The most important aim seems to be trying to offer feelings of societal influence to young people, for the construction of youth civic identities in contemporary societies circled with internet and other media (Kotilainen & Rantala, 2009; Dahlgren 2005; 2006). Here the experiences and feelings of influence have been initiated via media production about issues important to the young actors. Media production has been included in the processes of youth work, i.e. professional youth assistance and consultation.

The results of this study suggest that one important element is media publicity that allows mainstream audiences to hear the voices of young people. More work should be done to develop cross-generational interaction, i.e. adults being audiences for youth media productions and youth voices being heard by adults. Researcher Peter Levine (2008) suggests «strategies for building audiences»: it seems that this is one of the main tasks in planning civic media education today. Implementing youth media for the young audiences is important, but for all young people it is not enough: they need cross-generational audiences for generating discussions and getting their voice out in the public sphere. All media forms and mixed media –youth publicity and cross-generational publicity– can be used, including blogs and communities online.

As for pedagogic practices, the research showed the importance of creating communities of learners, including interaction and reflection possibilities with peers and youth worker, i.e. adult as co-learner and supervisor. Additionally, the civic themes should arise from young people, not from adults' ideas. While enhancing civic engagement, participatory actions integrated to media production should be supported, i.e. getting real experiences of «having a say».

This kind of media education, through youth public journalism, cross-generational discussion and media work can foster civic identities and engage young people to participate in the local civic culture. The results show that the Youth Editorial Board

has offered media publicity for youngsters' views on societal themes not only locally but also nationally, in mainstream media. In this sense, this civic media education has developed civic culture and interactive, alternative publicity for the young. Local educators, i.e. youth workers, have had a significant, not necessarily easy, role. They were not prepared to run this kind of media project, but they were ready to learn. After the process, it seems that youth experts also need media education, i.e. they should be educated as instructors for youth media production and doing collaboration with professionals of media. Moreover, media education for educators as teachers and youth experts should extend professionals of media, too. This would make collaboration with schools and youth organisations easier in projects of youth media production. Moreover, professionals in media organisations could develop such projects themselves.

The results support earlier findings about the challenges in media education in school but offer an extension in an informal, out of school context (Buckingham, 2003; Kotilainen & Suoranta, 2007). Inadequate media competences of youth workers are one the main challenges: they need, for example, to know more about how media organisations and media publicity work. Additionally, the collaboration on several levels, with media professionals, administrators and other sections of youth work, has proved challenging for the youth experts.

One challenge in laying the stress on media production is the reflection on the process. For example, David Buckingham (2003) argues that youth experts are willing to make media with young people, but they tend to ignore reflection, i.e. discussing about aspects like media ethics. So, how can we know what young people really learn about media publicity, for example ethics on publishing one's own material or the rights of interviewed person? Youth Voice Editorial Board has faced questions like this in the processes of production, and reflection has taken place in regular project meetings. But it is a big question: How to create youth awareness about ethical issues in general? Young people don't naturally know about human rights and therefore the interest in them has to be brought from outside, or elicited in a participative way as it has been in this project. At least, these are important points for future research.

Considering young people, the needed civic media literacy skills that stand out in this research are for example, the capabilities to express one's opinions through multimodal, cultural modes of media, to feel tolerance for different cultures of expression and to understand the ways of doing media. While watching young people in process, i.e. producing media in the project, it was difficult to separate cultural activities from civic ones. Media production itself acquires cultural competencies described above, even if the content is societal. Especially concerning the young, possibilities to integrate cultural (f. ex. modes of expression) and civic (f. ex. content/issues) activities through media production should be generated in school and out-of-school activities like youth consultation.

Finally, considering youth policy and educational planning around the globe, the question arises of the political will to proceed forward with media education : if media literacy is understood as civic skills and part of responsible citizenship, shouldn't



media education have a more robust place in national and international political strategies following the principles of UN Convention for the Rights of the Child?

## References

- Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bennett, L. W. (2008). Changing Citizenship in the Digital Age, in Bennet, W.L. (Ed.). *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press; 1-24.
- Buckingham, D. (2003). *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.
- Citizen Participation Policy Programme (Ed.) (2003-07). *Towards a Mature Democratic Culture. Government Policy Programmes, Ministry of Justice, Finland*. ([www.om.fi/en/Etusivu/Ajankohtaista/Arkistoidutsisallot/Kansalaisvaikuttamisenpolitiikkaohjelma](http://www.om.fi/en/Etusivu/Ajankohtaista/Arkistoidutsisallot/Kansalaisvaikuttamisenpolitiikkaohjelma)) (24-09-08).
- Dahlgren, P. (2000). The Internet and the Democratization of Civic Culture. *Political Communication*, 17; 335-340.
- Dahlgren, P. (2004). Theory, Boundaries and Political Communication. *The Uses of Disparity*. *European Journal of Communication*, 19, 1; 7-18.
- Dahlgren, P. (2005). The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication: Dispersion and Deliberation. *Political Communication* 22; 147-162.
- Dahlgren, P. (2006). Doing Citizenship. *The Cultural Origins of Civic Agency in the Public Sphere*. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9, 3; 267-286.
- Dahlgren, P. & Olsson, T. (2007). Young Activists, Political Horizons And the Internet: Adapting The Net To One's Purposes, in Loader, B.D. (Ed.). *Young Citizens in the Digital Age. Political Engagement, Young People and New Media*. London: Routledge; 68-81.
- European Commission White Paper (2001). *A New Impetus for European Youth*. Brussels: European Community Commission.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: The Seabury Press.
- Freire, P. (2001). *Pedagogy of Freedom. Ethics, Democracy And Civic Courage*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Gumucio-Dagron, A. & Tufte, T. (2006). *Communication For Social Change Anthology: History and Contemporary Readings*. CFSC.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hodkinson, P. (2007). Youth Cultures: A Critical Outline of Key Debates, in Hodkinson, P. & Deicke, J. (Eds.). *Youth Culture. Scenes, Subcultures and Tribes*. London: Routledge.
- Huq, R. (2007). Resistance or Incorporation? Youth Policy Making and Hip Hop Culture. In Hodkinson, P. & Deicke, W. (Eds.). *Youth Culture. Scenes, Subcultures and Tribes*. London: Routledge; 79-92.
- Kassam, Y. (1980). The Issue of Methodology in Participatory Research, in Dubell, F.; Erasmie, T. & De Vries, J. (Eds.) (1980). *Research for the People -Research by the People. Selected Papers from the International Forum on Participatory Research in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia*. Linköping University, Department of Education. Report LiU-PEK-R-70; 61-68.
- Kotilainen, S. (2005). *Learning Together: Developing Civic Webs as an Innovation Experiment*, in Kasvio, A. & Anttiroiko, A.V. (Eds.) (2005). *e-City. Analysing Efforts to Generate Local Dynamism in the City of Tampere*. Tampere: Tampere University Press; 449-474.



Kotilainen, S. & Rantala, L. (2008). Nuorten kansalaisidentiteetit ja mediakasvatus. Helsinki: Nuorisotutkimusverkosto/Finnish Youth Research Network. (In Finnish).

Kotilainen, S. & Rantala, L. (2009). From Seekers To Activists: Youth Civic Identities In Relations to Media. *Information, Communication & Society*. (forthcoming).

Kotilainen, S. & Suoranta, J. (2007). Mot en dialogisk mediepedagogikk i Finland, in Vettenranta, S. (Ed.). *Mediedanning og mediepedagogikk: Fra digital begeistring til kritisk dommakraft*. Oslo: Gyldendahl Akademisk; 104-123. (In Norwegian).

Kotilainen, S. (2008a). Global Comparative Research on Youth Media Participation, Research Plan For a Sub Study of MSRI: International Research Project on Children and Media to Create Indicators for a Media Social Responsibility Index, planned by Tatiana Merlo Flores and Cecilia von Feilizen.

Kotilainen, S. (2008b). Jokela School Massacre in Finland -Viewpoints of Youths and Media. In Newsletter (2008). Göteborg: Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media. ([www.nordicom.gu.se/cl/publ/letter.php](http://www.nordicom.gu.se/cl/publ/letter.php))

Kupiainen, R.; Sintonen, S. & Suoranta, J. (2008). Decades of Finnish Media Education. Helsinki: Finnish Society on Media Education & Tampere University Centre for Media Education (TUCME). ([www.mediaeducation.fi/publications](http://www.mediaeducation.fi/publications)) (19-09-08).

Levine, P. (2008). A Public Voice for Youth: The Audience Problem in Digital Media and Civic Education. W. Lance Bennet (Ed.). *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*. Cambridge: MIT Press, MA; 119-138.

Livingstone, S., Bober, M. & Helsper, E. (2004). Participation or Just More Information? Young People's Take Up of Opportunities To Act and Interact on the Internet. ([www.children-go-online.net](http://www.children-go-online.net)) (19-10-08).

Livingstone, S.M.; Couldry, N. & Markham, T. (2007). Youthful Steps Towards Civic Participation: Does the Internet Help?, in Loader, B.D. (Ed.). *Political Engagement, Young People and the Internet*. London: Routledge; 21-34.

Loader, B. D. (2007). Introduction: Young Citizens in the Digital Age: Disaffected or Displaced?, in Loader, B. (Ed.). *Political Engagement, Young People and the Internet*. London: Routledge; 1-18.

Martikainen, A. (2004). Neighbourhood Reporters: Together Towards Online Journalism, in Sirkkunen, E. & Kotilainen, S. (Eds.). *Towards Active Citizenship on the Net. Possibilities of Citizen-Oriented Communication: Case Studies From Finland*, 95-128. Journalism Research and Development Centre, University of Tampere.

Ministry of Education (2008). Media Education: Measures of the Government. A Presentation in the Cooperative Seminar (Finland, Germany, Estonia), titled «Effective Youth Work and Media Protection Needs Media Literacy». Helsinki, 1-4, September 2008.

McQuail, D. (2000). *Mass Communication Theory*. London: Sage Publications.

Nuorisolaki (2006). (Youth Law) ([www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2006/20060072](http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2006/20060072)) (14-05-08) (in Finnish)

OM 5/2005. Mediakasvatus (2005). Kansalliset kehittämistarpeet (Media Education 2005: National Needs for Development) Helsinki: Publications of the Ministry of Law and Justice 5. In Finnish.

Ridell, S. (2006). Yleisö. Elämää mediayhteiskunnan normaalina jäsenenä. Teoksessa S. Ridell, P. Väliäho & T. Sihvonen (Eds.). *Mediaa käsittämässä*. Tampere: Vastapaino; 233-257. (In Finnish).

Raundahlen, M. & Steen, J.V. (2002). *Children in Newspapers: A World Survey*. Paris: World Association of Newspapers.

Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (2006). Introduction: Inquiry and Participation in Search of a World Worthy of Human Aspiration, in Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (Eds.). *Handbook of Action Research*. London: Sage Publications.

- .....
- Rosen, J. (1999). *What Are Journalists For?* London and New Haven, Co: Yale University Press.
- Stenius, H. (2003). Kansalainen, in Hyvärinen, M.; Kurunmäki, J.; Palonen, K.; Pulkkinen, T. & Stenius, H. (Eds.). *Käsitteet liikkeessä*, Tampere: Vastapaino (In Finnish).
- Stevenson, N. (2003). Cultural Citizenship in the «Cultural Society: A Cosmopolitan Approach. *Citizenship Studies*, 7: 3; 331-348.
- Suoranta, J. & Vaden, T. (2008). *Wikiworld. Political Economy of Digital Literacy, and the Promise of Participatory Media*. University of Tampere: Paulo Freire Research Centre & Open Source Research Group. (<http://wikiworld.wordpress.com>) (19-09-08).
- Suutarinen, S. (Ed.) (2000). *Nuoresta pätevä kansalainen. Yhteiskunnallinen opetus Suomen peruskoulussa. Koulutuksen tutkimuslaitos. Jyväskylän yliopisto. Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopistopaino.* (In Finnish).
- Unga i media (2002). *Ungdomsstyrelsen. Ungdomsstyrelsens skrifter 2002; 3.* ([www.tidningeniskolan.se/uploaded/document/2003/7/7/Unga\\_i\\_media\\_Ungdomsstyrelsen.pdf](http://www.tidningeniskolan.se/uploaded/document/2003/7/7/Unga_i_media_Ungdomsstyrelsen.pdf)) (2008-09-19) (In Swedish).