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Making Politics Visible – Editorial

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The symptoms are manifold, yet the diagnosis seems to be clear: youth and politics are a bad match. Their lack of interest in political issues, growing disenchantment with politics and politicians, ignorance of basic social structures, boycott of voting booths, draw a darkening picture of „youth and politics“ and predominate public perception: Young people are anything but close to politics and participation. Educational plight, lack of vocational training, unemployment, violence, often leading to political extremism, seem to be the basic coordinates of an endangered relationship – and to make matters worse, the situation is embedded in the decline of traditional institutions like family, school system or political parties. Despite these bleak perspectives, different studies (e. g. Shell, BAT, CivicEd) have been emphasising for years that today's young people should not be labelled „politically apathetic“, but rather show a vast disapproval for its institutional aspects and the traditional political actors. This assessment is intensified by the institution-centred concept of politics, which is still favoured by the established educational institutions – themselves often trailing behind social change and not adjusting their curricula to contemporary aspects of society and culture.

What are the consequences? Although being directly confronted with them, many young people are often unable to discover and recognize political problems, issues or challenges. They are at a loss to rediscover politics – or perhaps more accurately: political issues – in their *everyday life* („Lebenswelt“) and thus often miss possibilities and opportunities for their own political development, their forming of an opinion, and their participation. For exactly this reason, this special issue of the Journal of Social Science Education raises the question, where politics becomes visible or is made visible right in the social and cultural situation of young people. In this context, our understanding of „making visible“ is broad-minded: In this issue, the authors adopt the expression in a literal sense (visual artefacts of political life) as well as in a more metaphorical way (becoming aware of political actors, processes and routines). Nevertheless, the duality of „visualisation“ and „making visible“ is present throughout this entire issue and the variety of articles adds some ideas for clarification of its character and relation.

While developing the special issue, we decided to organise the contributions in two main sections: The first part addresses the more general questions of the field (i. e. the consequences of the pictorial turn for Political Science (Drechsel), the concept of „Entertainment-Education“ (Arendt), the connection between pleasure and politics (Rhein/Müller/Calmbach), or how new media can help to the increased political interest among young citizens (Owen) and last but not least Web 2.0 as a means of political communication (Perlot)).

The second section focusses on current phenomena and presents a series of case studies. In these case studies, various medial and cultural artefacts are examined as platforms for visualising politics (i. e. graphic novels (Mahrt), history television (Adelmann), children's television (Raabe), computer games (Rauch) or online communities (Swertz)). Although this second section of the journal principally examines concrete cases, the questions already launched in the first section are nevertheless taken up and processed here. Directly following the articles by Arendt and Rhein/Müller/Callmbach, Evers for instance points out specific examples from entertainment TV shows to demonstrate that pleasure and education need not be incommensurable opposites. In the context of political education, entertainment and education can also go hand in hand. This opposition is also ultimately at the heart of Claudia

Raabe's study, titled "Children's Television as a Medium for Social Orientation". She deals with the question how and particularly via which TV programmes children at the age of 10 to 13 years old acquire social and political orientation. It is quite telling, that supposedly "worthwhile" or sophisticated programmes for children such as special children's news or other special programmes referring to society play unfortunately only a minor role in this context, as Raabe demonstrates. Instead, children of this age use daily soaps, talent or gameshows, or cartoons such as Mickey Mouse or The Simpsons, for their social orientation. Recognizing this more often than not, the educational experts in charge in the field of political/civic education have their hair standing on end. But as Nina Mart and Michael Wehner, together with Sebastian Reinkunz and Isabel Flory are able to demonstrate, exactly these media formats often bear a considerable potential that political education has not tapped yet.

By now, it should have become clear that the problem of *making politics visible* is indeed manifold. While children and adolescents – as mentioned above – often have significant difficulties in perceiving politics beyond its representation by concrete political institutions and persons, political/civic education also has difficulties in perceiving the political or social markers or signs, discourses or positions young people actually do have or show with regard to political and social issues. It is difficult for political education to recognize and acknowledge the phenomena that children and adolescents use for social and political orientation, and how they construct their image of society and find their position in it. At the same time, political/civic education also has difficulties in *making politics visible* and perceptible, as a complex and challenging and, above all, as a daily changeable subject, in concrete teaching. Seen in this light, *Making Visible* becomes the central didactic challenge for a discipline dealing with political and social issues. In his article „Escaping the Disenchantment Trap“, Rössler therefore closely examines in how far „innovative settings for civic education“ are suited to render the political more attractive to young people on a short- or long-term basis.

This issue of the Journal of Social Science Education unfolds a critical survey of the general conditions, under which today's young people are confronted with politics. In a variety of perspectives the articles in this issue keep asking for the "*visibility of politics*" – and, by doing so, also explore what civic education should learn from such phenomena for the communication of politics within the educational contexts.

Tackling the process of *making politics visible* can however not be based solely on texts. This is the reason why we asked all authors to fully exploit the possibilities of online journalism with regard to *making their issues visible*. The authors have taken this up to different degrees, but you will at any rate find by far more visual material next to and in between the texts of this issue, than is normally the case for a journal of social sciences. As the reader of this special issue we invite you not only to follow the textual-, but also this medial trail to get a closer look at the phenomena discussed here. Please note, for instance, the witty, simpsonesque author presentations by Wehner/Reinkunz/Flory. At times, the pictures are slightly concealed, as for example with the Marth or Raabe or in the diverse links by Perlot. Here, it is also worthwhile to take a bit of time and follow the traces of the images. We shall not drop behind our authors here and therefore we shall now interrupt our written editorial in order to continue with a little visual collage, in which we sum up and stage the questions raised in this issue.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dx7IkQ2QQW8&feature=channel_page

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUF5w03b8dU&feature=channel_page