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Political Youth Education in Germany. Presenting a Qualitative Study on its Biographically Long-Term Effects¹

- The impact analysis generated a typology of biographical sustainability and shows the effects of extra-curricular political youth education in Germany.
- We identified four typecasts for biographical sustainability of political education: political commitment, occupational orientation, politically enlightened attitude and acquisition of basic activatable political skills.
- In this process political youth education has three functional differentiations of effective directions: political education can instigate further engagement with politics, has a strengthening or supporting function or can show the other.

Purpose: There is an impact analysis presented, which explores the long-term effect of extra-curricular political youth education from the perspective of participants.

Methods: The former participants retell their own education and life stories about five years later. Life stories were then interpreted in the course of research workshops and reconstructed as individual studies.

Findings: The impact analysis generated a typology of biographical sustainability and shows the effects of political youth education by means of single case analysis and case comprehensive topics.

Keywords:

Political youth education, extra-curricular, impact analysis, adolescence, sustainability

1 Introduction: Political youth education in Germany

1.1 Post-war history

Government-funded extra-curricular political youth education in Germany can be looked at as a special achievement of post-war Germany. The reeducation program of the allies, and in particular of the United States, initiated offers for adolescents to overcome their involvement in an authoritarian following and to start a democratic process bottom up. This took place during seminars for adolescent team leaders or pupil representatives during international encounters, such as one organized by the educational institution Jugendhof Vlotho taking place in Great Britain 1948 with 300 team leaders. The agenda of the program included the direct confrontation of experiences during fascism, and it succeeded in bringing together “young fascists and anti-fascists” at conferences. Sometimes even “former

National Socialists” were involved in the discussions (Lorenz, 2003, p. 93-95).

The Federal Youth Plan, which was first started in 1950 with the relatively high sum of 18 million DM as annual budget was aimed at supporting a democratic attitude. The Federal Youth Plan was thought of as a counter-project to the totalitarian and centralistic youth organizations of the Third Reich. At its beginning, the project supported mainly ideologically independent providers of youth work. Also at the beginning of the 1950s, providers of professional extra-curricular education joined at a national level, and the first programs for youth educational teamers were started (Schillo, 2011, p. 10). In the early 1950s, many people took part in educational tours to the United States, to learn about American ideas regarding democracy. Among these was even Jürgen Habermas, the protagonist of ‘ideological criticism’, who called himself a ‘product of reeducation’ (Widmaier, 2012, p. 11).

Although the post-war period in Germany was marked by substantial social and material hardship, the initiative of the Allies to provide guidelines and the ensuing government funding succeeded in establishing political youth education with a higher degree of institutionalisation in comparison with other western European countries. Government-funding for professional organizations providing political youth education outside schools is unique to Europe, and has sometimes been considered a ‘prototype for export’ (Schröder, Balzter, & Schroedter, 2004, p. 190).

During the 1970s and 1980s political youth education experienced profound upheaval and expansion with the emergence of new activists (mainly from the student movement) and also from changes in government programs and funding. The concept of “political education”

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and of youth “politicization” included gradually more aspects of life. The women’s movement in particular put private issues into a political context. The idea of ‘democracy as a form of life’ spread almost to the level of the classical understanding of democracy in Athens where ‘the whole material-spiritual life context’ is affected (Negt, 2010, p. 321). Even in the 2000s, this experience of politicization of everyday life and its closeness to the classical concept of democracy can be used as reference for a concept of the political sphere. It represents a common thread of humans (Arendt) without a previously fixed aim of political education heading for a narrowed-down target of particular interests (Brumlik, 1997).

In the mid-1970s, many federal states passed legislation concerning the funding of political youth education and paid release from work for educational leaves. On the basis of extra-curricular initiatives, an educational movement founded new training institutes, independent education clubs, self-organized conference centers and educational institutions. Conceptual debates and experimental testing were common during this period. Notions of political education changed markedly from one of knowledge transfer and teacher-led instruction to others of self-activated learning, project learning and action orientation. The hallmark of the new forms of learning is to seize upon experience as a site of learning, and to emphasize the social experiences that are furthermore gained from participation in social and political movements. Social experiences are seen as flowing and merging into educational work; educational work offers the opportunity to reflect on experiences in the new social movements. The movements into which education flowed were many – the youth, ecological, women’s, peace and alternative movements –, and education workers developed manifold activities involving different strata of the population. The overall *action orientation* of these two decades changed the self-concept of political education permanently. In hindsight, it can be considered a ‘silent triumph’ (Behrens, Ciupke, & Reichling, 2003, p. 296).

A new reckoning of time began with the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), and has continued through the more than two decades of subsequent regime collapse throughout Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The view that ‘there is no alternative’ [to the market economy], first articulated by Margaret Thatcher, has been taken up by Angela Merkel. From the 1990s, funding for political youth education decreased as the social future became thinkable only in the context of capitalistic production methods. But in the wake of rising xenophobic and extreme right-wing tendencies (e.g. leading even to violent attacks on asylum seekers’ homes) political youth education has received new attention in the form of short-term projects since the early 2000s (Lynen von Berg & Hirsland, 2004, pp. 15-18). A series of special programs has been initiated by the government setting new tasks to political youth education through the funding of programs like: Xenos, CIVITAS, entimon, and others. Political youth education has been

considerably re-empowered through this social countermovement to right-wing extremism and the related creation of new jobs and funding. In particular, current concepts are revised and new ones developed in order to enable staff with different attitudes and approaches to work with a right-wing oriented target group, whose attitudes and positions differ significantly from their own.

During the past one and one-half decades, approximately since the year 2000, political education has met new challenges by the turning away from politics of vast groups of the population and other post-democratic trends (Crouch, 2008). At the same time, powerful transnational citizen and protest movements have evolved like the “movement of the globalization critics,” originating in the G8 meetings from Genua 2001 to Heiligendamm 2007, or “Occupy” which started as a reaction to the global economic crisis. Other movements have developed out of local protests against large-scale public construction projects (Stuttgart 21) or nuclear waste disposal (Gorleben).

In the early 2000s, political education scarcely profited from these movements’ and experiences in activation. It had been in a defensive position since the 1990s as the neo-liberal mainstream leveraged strong pressure for political education to economize and demonstrate its effectiveness. Neo-liberal thinking edged people into more self-regulation and self-responsibility in nearly all domains. In Germany’s public discourse, voices could be heard against the necessity of political education. In this neo-liberal wave, political education struggled to find a contemporary profile. For example, it tried to become more distinct from social education, and to move closer to political science. Through this orientation, a “gutting” of political education should be avoided, because a number of socially committed projects had been run under the label of political youth education. Other discourses claimed that a concept of political education which is closely connected to the everyday life of young adults asserts a connection between social and the political issues (Schroder, 2008, 318). Today, in the professional training of future pedagogical staff studying social work, pedagogics, sociology or political science a connection between social and political issues is created more often (Hirsch, 2014, p. 62).

In Germany, political youth education is legally incorporated in ‘youth work’ according to Article 11 of the Children and Youth Welfare Act (KJHG 2014) as its first central theme. Though the Act is new, it has its origins in and reflects the wording of earlier legislation passed in 1990, when youth work was still largely synonymous with political education. While during the 1970s and 1980s nearly all youth work was centered around demands on political education and was thus politicized completely, nowadays we have to deal with the contrary effect. Political education has been drawn into the wake of professional applicability. This tendency reveals the neo-liberal aspects of nowadays education. Staff has turned to everyday pragmatism and no longer takes part in local youth political debates (Scherr & Sturzenhecker 2014, p.



374). In the following part the contemporary concept of political youth education will be displayed.

1.2 Knowledge, judgment, action as the triad in political youth education

Knowledge, judgment, action – the so-called triad of political youth education – refers to its sub-goals: to impart knowledge, to enable judgement and to encourage participation. This triad can be found in relevant theoretical literature and is also prominently placed in the Children and Youth Plan of the German government (BMFSFJ, 2012):

“Political education shall impart young people’s knowledge about society, state, European and international politics including politically and socially important developments in the fields of economy, culture, technology and science. It shall enable forming judgement on social and political events and conflicts, enable one to claim one’s rights as well as to discharge one’s tasks, assume responsibility towards fellow citizens, society and nature and encourage participation in the creation of free and democratic social and state order (BMFSFJ 2012, p. 141).²

Political education only takes full effect when the opinions and judgements of participants are developed or changed, supported by the newly gained insight and on the basis of already existing competences. This kind of positioning to selected political questions intends to encourage the participants to action and to intervene in political – that is public – space. This does not only refer to political committees or forums but to any kind of public expression of opinion.

Though the triad is claimed to reflect consensus, at least the hierarchy of the components has to be looked upon as out-dated. The current approach in seminars and projects prioritizes action, accompanied by the acquisition of knowledge and judgment. Particularly action-oriented media relations show ways to encourage youths to address a topic, outline their position and put it forward to a limited public via their interest in media and technology. Biographically acquired opinions and judgements often form the initial point or “fish hook” for seminars if firm attitudes and prejudices are questioned and screened.

At the same time three more aspects need to be emphasized which are not conveyed in the wording of the triad. To start with, judgment is still often reduced to a cognitive process even if the *inclusion of emotions* is inevitable – as well in its collective dimension. Judgment is accompanied and interspersed by emotions. Secondly, the former distinguishing lines between *personal development* (social education) and political education are not maintained in practice, as the personality of participants is strengthened in order to encourage their political engagement. Thirdly, dynamics of the phases of youth and the results of research on *adolescence* have to be taken into account in professional political youth education. Namely, we know that adolescents’ political positioning is infiltrated by their identification with (and distinction from) persons who are important to them,

and particularly those who introduce them to political positions.³

In conclusion, political youth education can be characterized as following. Political youth education entails support and encouragement for independent thinking, and it does so through pedagogically-informed opportunities to engage with matters of democratic communities and finding one’s position in the political. Successful political youth education builds on the lifeworld of its participants and anticipates the inclusion of emotional influences on the formation of positions and attitudes. Moreover, it addresses the specific status of adolescence as one of transition with particular needs for identification and distinction. The relationship between one’s self and the world can only be understood and acted from and upon if it has been penetrated in a cognitive, emotional and social way.

2 Initial situation and case history of the impact study

The effect of educational processes is a very important subject in pedagogical debates (Ahlheim, 2003, p. 5). Supporters and organizers of political education, and especially pedagogues, are interested in knowing how pedagogical arrangements and personal interventions in the educational setting are effective, so that they know, how to stimulate and motivate participants for action. The effectiveness (and hence validity) of political education is broadly supported in professional discourse, but exact measurements of effect and success have been so far considered impossible (ibid.). Some authors even argue against attempting to make such measurements. Faulstich (2007, p. 100), for example, sees a danger of empiric reductionism if the success of political education is gauged in terms of being able to ‘command’ participants, to ‘achieve’ a desired political perspective and to ‘measure’ this process. Impact research in the humanities too oscillates within this area of tensions, and should be aware of its opportunities as well as the challenges and limits. Bourdieu emphasized this contradiction:

“If you want to see the world a bit like it is and want to talk about it like it is one has to accept that one will always be in the complicated, vague, impure, diffuse etc., thus in opposition to ordinary concepts of strict scholarship (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 34).⁴

In other words, it is not fully possible to measure educational effects on human beings; any attempt to do so must also incorporate rather messy descriptions of the uncertainty of the educational process.

On the one hand, during the past two decades, such debate in Germany has not been restricted to pedagogy, as government funding has been connected increasingly to evaluations. Evaluations are expected to prove the effectiveness and effects of funding as well as to assess innovative concepts. The support program ‘Political Education’ of the Children and Youth Plan (KJP), through which the federal Ministry for Children and Youth funds personnel and administrative expenses of extra-curricular political education of adolescents and young adults



up to the age of 27, was likewise evaluated (see Schröder et. al., 2004). The evaluation included a quantitative research with questions about the whole program, supplementary interviews, and an analysis of references, looked upon as first nationwide survey within (German-language) professional literature. It examined the actual target groups, methods and content, the role and the impact of staff, and the learning that was achieved (Schillo, 2011, p. 13). Student participants, it should be noted, were not questioned in the survey.

On the other hand, few efforts have been made to synthesize the data from evaluations. In this respect, Helle Beckers' work (2011) can be seen as the next important step towards a substantial impact research. She systematized all available evaluations from German-speaking countries dealing with empirical research on political education during the years 2000 to 2010, to provide the first synoptic view and overall assessment of research on political education during this decade. She concludes that the state of research regarding extra-curricular political education can be described as 'desolate'. What studies do exist offer only a fragmented view: they were carried out from the perspective of different scientific disciplines, in the context of different professional discourses, and the evaluated periods and subject areas clearly depended on the various conditions for funding. Long-term or coherent studies were scarce (ibid., p. 161). Becker claims that longer-term and systematic funding of research on effectiveness are necessary. Regarding political education, she notes: "Many questions concerning the logic and methodology of research are still to be dealt with. Up till now there is no convincing and transferable research design for extra-curricular political education" (ibid., p. 165).⁵ Furthermore, she claims the lack of differentiated and necessarily complex considerations on possible methods reconstructing educational processes and results (ibid.).

Hedtke, Zimenkova, and Hippe (2007) published a similarly critical assessment of survey data on democracy education in Europe. To-date, most results are passed on indicators of the popularity of European politics as a subject matter for youth, but the authors argue that research should be organized as an interactive process. That is, research should include case studies that capture local diversity, result in a dense description of the context, and through which stakeholders (both teachers and pupils) contribute their opinions. Furthermore, enlarging the viewpoint to institutions of extra-curricular education would also mean that "youth workers" could be considered such people who address the concerns of youth not only at school but in all aspects of their adolescence.

3 Research design of the impact study

Some of these recommendations were incorporated into the methodical design of the study to be presented in the following pages (see also Balzter, Ristau, & Schröder 2014). Firstly, the youth (now young adults) get a chance to speak, thus enabling the reconstruction of educational processes and the preparation of case studies. Secondly,

the study was nationwide and included respondents from various social backgrounds and with various educational experiences. Finally, the project examines the long-term effect of educational impulses and thus the sustainability of the educational experience.

Normally, the only evaluation that students make of a political education course or event occurs immediately at its conclusion. This procedure leaves little room for the participants to reflect on complex educational processes; nor do they have the opportunity to consider the effect of these educational experiences on their personal biographies. Thus, the idea was born to conduct later interviews in which interviewees look back to the seminars. This approach creates the possibility to process and reflect on the character of the education received, something that often takes full effect only after some time, perhaps months or years.

Furthermore, our choice of the age-group to interview was shaped by a consideration for the developmental capacities of self-reflection. As a developmental stage, adolescence is characterized by contradictory dynamics, which can cause great variation in their short-term assessments of educational effect. Adolescents are strongly present-oriented, and do not pose to themselves the question of how educational activities will benefit their biography. Their attitudes are rather more influenced by changing mental states and behavioral patterns. Comparatively, young adults are more able to perceive and describe effects from their educational experiences.

On this basis, an interview design was developed to target young adults from the ages of 18-27 who had taken part in an episode of political youth education at least five years previously, between the ages of 14-18.

At this point, the question arises as to which methods would enable past educational experiences to be decoded and reconstructed. The most adequate method for investigating biographical sustainability seemed to be the biographical-narrative interview, a technique which activates the memory to place, link, and relate the self with its experiences. Subjects were asked to tell their whole life story, thus opening the opportunity to place their experience with political education in a broad stream of memories concerning education and authorities (such as those related to family, school, peer-groups or clubs). In this way, we sought to capture a view of the biographical sustainability of political youth education. Life stories were then interpreted in the course of research workshops and reconstructed according to Rosenthal (2011) as individual studies.

Access to survey participants was gained through educational institutions and former youth educational teamers. The selection of interview partners was guided, apart from methodical criteria, by the aim of reaching the widest possible heterogeneity in terms of a sample of theoretically relevant categories (Rosenthal, Köttig, Witte, & Blezinger, 2006, p. 20). Gender, regional origins, social status, ethnic and other elements of cultural background, and the range of providers (who offer extra-curricular political youth education) were all taken into



view. Contrary to the presumption that it would be difficult to find interviewees – considering limitations on accessing personal data through educational institutions and the geographic mobility of young adults – we fortunately found many interested persons. On the whole, 23 interviews and four group debates took place. About 50 young people took part in the study. The analysis of the data followed the interpretive paradigm and the six steps of the interpretative procedure according to Rosenthal (2011, p. 187): “The aim of the reconstruction is, to analyse the biographical meaning of the experience of the past as well as the meaning of the self-presentation in the present”.⁶ Important for this kind of analysis is the preliminary postponement of the key question while the structure of the case is worked out. We outline below the resulting typology of biographical sustainability. The typology gives some indication of the long-term effectiveness of extra-curricular political youth education.

The biographical-narrative interview, as a very open-ended and explorative method, seems to be well-suited to elicit the meaning of political education for young adults. The researchers got deep insight into life stories, the complex ways in which political youth education and educational authorities cohere in the experiences of young adults, and into the various perceived functions of political education. The research workshops with students, educators and other scientists provided a circle of intersubjectivity that was crucial to the qualitative research process and helped to control for blind spots.

4 Typology of the long-term effectiveness of political youth education

A typology of cases deducted from the individual interviews is used to organize the resulting data. Furthermore, sorting the interviews according to the typology helps to depict the context and the relationship to the research question. Therefore “similarity relations in surface characteristics” are irrelevant compared to “similarities in deep structure” (Kreitz, 2010, p. 99).⁷ Which social cases are structurally similar or belong to the same type is determined by the configuration of the components and their functionality for the whole (Rosenthal, 2011, p. 24). Thus, we identified four type-casts for biographical sustainability of political education and three functional differentiations of effective directions in the empirical material.

The key question we asked was:

In what way have the impulses that began in a political education seminar or project found subsequent expression in further life?

Moreover, the following questions were of special interest:

How do the influence of political youth education relate to former knowledge and attitudes, which are affected by family or other biographical influences?

And, how do subjects deal with the contradictions and conflicts between different spheres of influence in their life?

We labelled the first type in our typology, *political commitment* and included in it the stories of adolescents who became politically active because of the impulse they received in a seminar. The process of politicization triggered by the extra-curricular education was obvious to the subject and could be described in terms of the trinity (knowledge, judgment, action) of goals and methods ascribed to political education.

More surprising was the discovery of an *occupational orientation* that resulted from extra-curricular political youth education. Occupational orientation – the second type – is neither amongst the core targets of political education nor obvious on first sight. It can be counted as a hitherto mostly unnoticed side effect. Subjects with stories of this type recounted that they had been led to pursue employment in the political field following their exposure to political education.

The third type, *politically enlightened attitude*, can be ascribed to education’s immanent political impact as such. In this case, political education stimulates the individual’s critical engagement with society. The primary effect of political education is described as a challenge to previous patterns of thought and action and an enhanced development towards a politically enlightened (and sometimes enlightened acting) citizen. Subjects in this category reported their interest in gathering information on political events and developments, critical consideration and discussion of social issues, and (last but not least) the use of their right to vote.

The fourth type, *acquisition of basic activatable political skills*, is characterized by the development of specific abilities which form the basis for political action. Amongst them are empowerment of self-confidence, the experience of self-efficacy, the acquisition of social skills (e.g. communication, interaction, ability for conflict and consent), as well as skills in presentation and rhetoric. These abilities which are trained in political education are so far mainly used for private purposes and in the field of work.

There is, moreover, a great affinity between the first two typecasts. In many stories of the adolescents both effective directions play a biographically major role or are collateral. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the politically active as well as the one working in the political field have acquired respective basic activatable political skills and a politically enlightened attitude.

While outlining the four effective directions the question arises as to whether responsibility for these effects lies only with political youth education, and (if not) the degree of responsibility that should be assigned to other socializing factors. Further analysis of the interviews led to the extraction of three different ways of referring to the function of political education. This so-called functional differentiation gives some indication of whether and how political education is linked to former political experience or whether the adolescents were faced with an entirely new perspective. As the data verifies, political education can support already initiated developments; give significant impulses; or open up the political field for the first time. The functional



differentiation of effective directions can be conceptualized in three categories:

First: The interviews indicate that events of extra-curricular political education can *instigate* further engagement with politics. Political education is often described as being a key event contrasting with past experiences.

Second: On the other hand, the *strengthening or supporting function* is built on former biographical experiences outside of political youth education. In such cases, political youth education could have led to a decision for action or a change of attitude; or could have awakened interest and motivation for further examination. When participants had previous political exposure, they often deliberately used political education and their already existing competences were intensified and differentiated by the educational experience.

Third: The functional differentiation – *showing the other* – focusses more on domestic socialization. It refers to a discontinuity during biographical development in which events of political youth education are described as having allowed adolescents a basic enlargement of their horizon of previous experience. Unlike in their normal social environment and background, they come into contact with political questions and critical perspectives during seminars. They can enlarge their knowledge of political context, sharpen their judgement and gain insight into possible (political) fields of occupation and participation. Adolescents are offered a realm of experience where they can try out themselves and gain access to the political field.

Comparing these results with other studies, there are some interesting parallels. The type *political commitment* resembles the type *participatory citizen* developed in the US American study “What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Nevertheless, the methodical approach and target group (practitioners and scholars) of the American study are very different from ours, and therefore the results are only contingently comparable. In the American case, three conceptions of the “good” citizen emerge – the personally responsible, the participatory, and the justice-oriented – to the question “What kind of citizen do we need to support an effective democratic society?” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 239) The first type, *participatory citizen*, means an active member of community organizations and/or improvement efforts (ibid., p. 240). Certainly, the concept of “political commitment” in our study is defined much closer to the political field.

Another German study focusing on long-term effects in international youth work came to a quite similar result concerning the functional differentiation. Thomas et al. (2007) worked out four different processes to integrate the experience biographically. First: *nice to have* – the exchange experience did not leave any noteworthy traces in the biography. Second: *mosaic* – the exchange experience contributes to a certain development to lead a participant to other events. It fits in as a ‘tesserae’ into one’s entire biography. Third: *domino* – the exchange experience is a trigger for a string of follow-up events

and activities. Fourth: *turning point* – the exchange experience initiates a turning point in one’s biography (Thomas, Chang, & Abt, 2007, p. 7, English Summary).

The typology will be illustrated with a case study in the following section, exposing its in-depth structure by way of example. For this purpose, the case study of Mareike will be introduced representing the third type: development of an enlightened political attitude.

5 Summary of Mareike’s case reconstruction: “To be able to shape one’s own life even concerning computers”

The case of Mareike – against the backdrop of her biography – is an example of how the impulses of a political youth education seminar further the development of an enlightened political attitude (type three) and its transfer to other areas of society.

Mareike, aged 23 during the interview, grew up with her two younger brothers in socio-economically difficult circumstances because her father was frequently unemployed. Thus, the family can only dispose of limited economic capital. The mother – the key power in the family – cared particularly about the best possible support and schooling for her children. She saw to it that all three of her children attended grammar school (grades 9-12) instead of pursuing technical education. Mareike, being the first-born, took responsibility for herself and her two brothers to whom she is very close. After her parents separated, the difficult economic situation escalated, especially because the father did not pay any alimony. Mareike’s single mother lived with her children in a 3-bedroom flat, and eventually took in a fourth child as a foster child. In the orbit of her strong mother, Mareike developed a pragmatic way of dealing with limited economic resources and at the same time achieved high responsibility for family solidarity.

At the age of 17, Mareike learned about open youth work (called info-café) through information at school and about political youth education directly from a teamer at the café. The pleasure of playing computer games, the personal atmosphere, and attractive terms at the café enticed Mareike to take part in her first seminar. The topic was (according to Mareike’s narrative)

“... making a film, I still remember it was about media addiction, a topic which was not yet popular in 2005. [The discussion was about] whether that is something one has to be aware of or an illness which has not been noticed by society so far (Transcript lines 69-73).

Methodical implementation skillfully wove the interests of adolescents together with a critical inquiry (and competency) into the topic. Mareike experienced a strong (and favorable) public reaction by taking part in a youth-media-festival, at which her seminar group showed their film about the computer game fair. More seminars and projects followed and even led to a prize. Mareike received a fresh impetus from political youth education; political education encouraged in her a different self-determined point of view and a critical

attitude, which she transferred to other social areas. She described this transfer as the ability “... to know and to watch advertisements on TV more consciously, or to watch films more consciously, as you have already learnt something about it (Transcript lines 1795-1797)”.

The transfer achievement is further shown by Mareike in another example during the interview. She described an advertisement about child and youth protection which ran as a trailer in cinemas. Mareike explained that this trailer shows the importance of parents for their children: parents have to take an interest in their children and start talking with them at an early age about the internet and computer games. As she spoke, she remembered that the info-café had even offered counselling for parents.

The fact that she took over responsibility from an early age, skillful pragmatism and her experience in political education – said Mareike – encouraged her at her first job to stand for elections for the company’s youth representative a few years later. After being elected, she is convincing from the very beginning and becomes politically and unionized active. The collective striving for better working conditions for young employees gave Mareike an important feeling of belonging, and as time passed she became active also against the ‘right-wing’ groups.

It is important to note that the personal address to Mareike was crucial moment to her decisions – both to take part in the seminar of political youth education, and to stand for election as youth representative. Thus, it is a personal relationship with a political education teamer that drew Mareike to access political education, and it was a personal commitment to union work that drew further into the political field. The importance of a personal relationship exponentiates with adolescents who have not had such input at home because the personal address arouses a feeling that one is entitled to be concerned with politics. We assigned Mareike’s case to the category of politically enlightened attitude. In her biographical narration, the experiences she gained during seminars of political youth education helped her develop a critical perspective.

6 Significance of pedagogical persons and learning venues – Selected comprehensive topics

The empirical material showed topics with a more general importance beyond the individual case studies. Below, the two topics of learning venues and pedagogical persons – both being central factors of extra-curricular political youth education – will be introduced by way of example.

6.1 Pedagogical persons

The personal dimension in extra-curricular political youth education is particularly important for at least two reasons. On the one hand, under non-formal conditions of learning, ‘learning from others’ can be used in a wider range than in formal conditions of learning. Furthermore, new and sometimes unfamiliar worlds of experience can be facilitated by learning venues and methods. Pedagogical staff accompanies participants on this exploration

and often seem to be *key persons*. In general, adolescents are responsive to accessing new things via extra-familial persons. These other adults offer them the chance to get to know and experience a critical attitude. Thus, they are encouraged to question their received opinions and gradually develop their own attitude; that is, they develop the power of judgment. The judgment that occurs through political education entails interaction with others, and can therefore be described as *related judgement* (Schröder, 2005).

Testaments to the importance of pedagogical persons are manifold in the interviews. Aspects which are mentioned repeatedly concern their expertise and the student’s encounter with the teamer’s attitude.

For example, Sandra confirmed “*that particularly the people who ran the seminars* (Line 1518)”, shaped her a lot, “*as they are in a good mood, ... absolutely involved in the topic* (Line 1529)”. She was particularly impressed by their expertise and the ways they structured debates and formed arguments. The pedagogues succeeded in encouraging her to contemplate, precisely because her opinion differed from the ones they expressed. Chafing at different opinions was an essential learning experience for Sandra and significantly influenced her access to the political field.

Likewise, for those with a big distance between their parental home and politics, persons working in political education loom large in influence. It is they who discover the interest and potential of adolescents, and support them to gain access to the political field. This often leads to educational success, sometimes to an occupational orientation towards political education or the political sciences, or to a political commitment. Even in the biographies of subjects who specialized in fields far from political education, those who came from circumstances with little economic or socio-cultural capital identify the personal influence of supportive adults such as school teachers, private music teachers, or staff in open youth work.

6.2 Learning venues, distant and close

Learning venues have come into focus as a dimension of education during recent years. Political education has numerous and diverse venues. In the following section, we will distinguish between approaches that are ‘distant’ and those that are ‘close’. In distant learning venues, the distance from the living environment itself provides new realms of experience and learning for adolescents. Close learning venues offer good links with their familiarity and simplify the transfer of new knowledge to a familiar environment.

6.2.1 Distant: educational institutions, memorials, journeys, excursions

By their very distance from everyday life, “distant” or unfamiliar learning venues simplify access to new topics and contents, to the extension of present attitudes, and to the reduction of prejudices. Esthetic experiences as well as group dynamic processes outside the ado-



lescents' normal environment can contribute to the effectiveness of these venues. Educational institutions can turn into places of exceptional and sensual experience by spatial charm, joint meals and playful adventures. At places with a direct connection to the topic – i.e. memorials and museums – access occurs primarily through the participants' emotions and proves successful. During educational journeys and excursions, participants profit furthermore by their 'dynamic' character: being on the way and having to adapt continually to new situations stimulates learning processes, as one is led out of current patterns of behavior and thought.

The empirical material proves the effectiveness of distant learning venues. Statements on educational institutions, memorials, excursions and journeys are to be found in many of the interviews with descriptions such as that made by Mona *"that the educational institution was something special, thus making everybody present feel to be part of something special (Lines 154-155)"*.

Members of one project group with adolescent migrants were interviewed during a group discussion. They had visited a concentration camp in Eastern Europe as part of their analysis of the Holocaust. They described this visit as an impressive and formative experience. The group took subsequent journeys to other memorials and even to the Middle East. The participants described these excursions and journeys as *highlights* (Line 271) of the project, due to their high information content. *"Particularly in this country (in the Middle East) we met with a group of adolescents, there was communication and ... this exchange of information ... is something really great (Lines 281-284)"*.

Another interviewee, Paul, noted the social contrasts from his journalistic exchange seminar to Eastern Europe. For him, it was encounters and direct communications with people through which he had learned new and unknown things about the country. Direct experience of cultural difference and social imbalance impressed him a lot, and he found it more formative than the theoretical debates held during the project's seminar sessions. This impressive experience was crucial, he recounted, to his eventual decision to take up sociology at university. He wants to study people's differences in order to understand them better.

6.2.2 Close: on site, in the living environment

"Close" learning venues show their advantages if the barriers for taking part in an event are to be kept low. The familiar setting offers possibilities to connect. Fears and worries concerning distant, unknown and foreign places can be excluded. In this way, events of political youth education are easily included in normal living environments. Thus, one can reach especially those young people who do not have the resources to tolerate feelings of "foreignness" outside their familiar living environment; this lack of resources can be general or temporary. "Close" venues are also favorable for transferring new knowledge and experience into everyday life.

These aspects of "close" venues also come up repeatedly in the interviews. Thus Ann-Kathrin and Alexander

were both active in Children and Youth Parliament. Ann-Kathrin mainly saw it as *a good opportunity to do something locally* (Lines 37-38), and to affect changes in her own environment. Alexander pointed out that he could establish relationships and build up local networks through his activities in Parliament. He also came to know more about his hometown, and could identify more easily with others around him. In addition, belonging to the Children and Youth Parliament was of vital importance to him for getting in contact with politics on a local level. Local issues and initiatives appealed to him because they were closely connected to his living environment, and he could experience immediately the effects and consequences of political action.

Marianne, Susanne, Manuela and Esra took part as guides in a travelling exhibition on the persecution of Jews during the Third Reich in their hometown and its close surroundings. According to their statements, they were fascinated by their role in passing on to other adolescents an understanding of an unknown and difficult topic. With this alienation effect, they could also reflect on themselves and learn.

Marie, Cem and Mario took part as "ambassadors" in a program for voluntary work, recruiting pupils locally for volunteer projects on Volunteers' Day. The program's local reference made it easy for them to gain access to their commitment and to link it to their own sphere of everyday life. They identified highly with their position as ambassadors. Interestingly, the political education seminars they attended took place in a distant educational institution, which – as mentioned above – had its own appeals. Marie enjoyed attending the seminars *"as they formed a highlight amongst the ambassadors. You could learn a lot and above all get to know a lot of people (Lines 1306-1308)"*. Getting in contact with like-minded people and group dynamics during seminars were facets of interest to which Mario also pointed. Thus, we see in this project that close and distant learning venues may correlate favorably: access to the everyday environment and life which enabled action was coupled with possibilities to learn and reflect with like-minded people at a distant learning venue that was juxtaposed to everyday life.

7 Quintessence of the impact study

Political youth education in extra-curricular settings has been state-funded in Germany since 1945 and has been evaluated also in a nationwide survey in the last decade (Schröder et al., 2004). In the present article, a new impact analysis is presented, which explores the biographically long-term effect of political youth education (Balzter et al., 2014). In the framework of this impact study, former participants were asked to retell and to reflect on their own education and life-stories some five years after their participation in political youth education. The impact analysis based on such biographical-narrative interviews was able to generate valid results regarding the biographical sustainability of extra-curricular political youth education. The qualitative research methods established access to young adults



(aged 18-27) and their reflections on the biographical benefit of their previous educational activities at the ages of 15 to 18. Based on the interpretation of these life-stories, the direct and indirect effects of political education on the formation of social and political identities could be documented. The impact study of Balzter, Ristau, & Schröder (2014) generates a typology of biographical sustainability and shows the effects of political youth education both by means of single case analysis and case comprehensive topics. The main findings of this study are summarized in the following nine statements.

1 The impact study shows again clearly that there is no *simple cause-effect-scheme* concerning educational and developmental processes. The presented impact study clearly shows that one cannot predict in a general way which learning methods will be most effective for which participants. Thus, only beneficial factors can be named, particularly regarding politically distant target groups.

2 The implementation of a *variety of teaching methods* is important as each method can take various effects depending on situation and context. But all methods chosen should stimulate action above all. Furthermore, it is important that the pedagogical staff acts self-reflexive and is able to reconsider and change methods – often developed by the middle-class shaped civil society – by an interactive dialog with the target group. This is especially relevant in those cases, in which the target group is not middle-class oriented.

3 *Pedagogically active people* working in political education have to help adolescents understand how life conflicts which are often perceived as being private and individual are political. Their support and encouragement, in their role as counterparts and models, help adolescents to feel entitled to interfere politically. The interviews have shown that often other *extra-familial adults* offered essential mediation and support at the right time (Hafener, 2009, p. 269).

4 *Learning venues for political education* bear a special importance, too. Educational institutes are often experienced as places leading out of everyday life and familiar learning experiences, thus opening up new experiences. This is true for sometimes very distant venues like memorials which can trigger new levels of controversy. Close learning venues, on the other hand, facilitate access and have a positive influence on transfer to the living environment of the adolescents. Nearly half of the interviewees took part more than once in offers of political education. They often chose different offers in the same place, continued their intercultural encounters or entered a long-term project.

5 *To take part in experiences* of private, public or professional life must be of utmost concern. In order to get to know, take up, and be able to interpret dialogically, one needs methods which are oriented biographically and environmentally (Negt, 2010).

6 Part of these experiences and dispositions form *adolescence*. Intertwined with adolescence are changes, new chances and re-allocations in all areas of life. This topic still leads a shadow existence in the discussion

about political youth education. But adolescence is situated at the seam between continuity and discontinuity, between stability and change. Here we find connecting points for political education (Schröder, 2012).

7 Regarding *the content of political education*, current questions or experiences in the living and working environment must be the starting point. It remains important to target connections starting from specific topics, because political education is primarily *joining the dots* (Eis, Lösch, Schröder, & Steffens, 2015).

8 As interviews in our study proved, commitment and political awareness can only develop if the various areas of action are complimentary and augmented. From the viewpoint of providers and organizers, special attention should be given to *working in networks or linking competence* between youth organizations, clubs, institutions near schools, and youth educational centers (Schröder 2014).

9 Obviously, *social activities* are more easily entered into by young people with educationally distant backgrounds than are overtly political activities. These adolescents are particularly dependent on social approval, as it has been hitherto more or less denied to them because of their origins. Political education must strive for and support *the bridging between the social to the political*, again and again (Balzter & Schröder, 2014).

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Endnotes

¹ In this article, we use the expression “political education” because of its specific history in Germany, as explained above. The concept, however, is similar to those of “civic education” or “education for civic citizenship”, as used throughout European professional discussions.

² This wording can be found in the directives of the original KJP program since 1993; it has endured despite several changes of federal government and revised versions of directives.

³ Regarding all three aspects see Balzter, Ristau, & Schröder (2014, p. 23-27); for the relevance of emotions in political education see Schröder (2016); for theory of adolescence see Schröder (2012), and in English language see Schröder (2006).

⁴ Translation of the quote by the authors.

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