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Youth Participation in the Decisions, which Affect Their Lives: Is it Democratic Participation?

For any democratic environment it is important that all members have opportunities to participate in decision-making processes that affect them and their surroundings. The role of youth participation nowadays is more and more emphasized. So what is the tendency of youth participation in decision making? Do young people participate sufficiently and actively enough? Do they feel excluded and marginalized from decision-making processes? Does youth participation follow the principles of democratic participation or is it becoming the form of "new tyranny"?

To analyze participation I will use the work by Sherry R. Arnstein "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" (1969), where eight levels of participation are presented: *Manipulation, Therapy, Informing, Consultation, Placation, Partnership, Delegated Power, Citizen Control*. These levels Arnstein divides in to three groups: the first group - Non-participation (Manipulation and Therapy), the second one - Degree of Tokenism (Informing, Consultation, Placation) and the third - Degree of Citizen Power (Partnership, Delegated Power, Citizen Control). The third group of participation levels could let to reach the quality and effectiveness of participation involving citizens in planning and decision making processes, feel responsibility and power that they have significant effect on their lives.

Roger A. Hart adopted Arnstein's ladders of participation and presents Ladder of Youth Participation (1992) as a model for youth participation development.

The other trend is participation as a new tyranny. J. R. Lucas gives us the point of view that participation is the best guarantee against tyranny; however, nowadays scholars bring these concepts together and describe participation as "the new tyranny". Critique of participation is provided by Cooke and Kothari in the work "Participation: The New Tyranny" (2001) with which authors break the "popular" opinion and belief that participation is definitely good and raises the question of whether participation has become a kind of tyranny, when agencies are implementing participatory practices in ways that serve their own agendas and confront with the lack of legitimacy.

So using presented Ladders of Participation and critique of participation we could ask, where do we stand with youth participation? What are the trends of youth participation in the decisions, organizations and institutions which affect their lives: is it leading to democratic participation, or passing by the principles of democratic participation and turn to non-participation or even becoming the kind of new tyranny?

The central study focuses on a survey method. The empirical part, during which the particular age pupils from three different types of school were investigated, was held in Lithuania.