

How to develop and manage participative organization in social services with children?

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Abstract: *The idea that children and adolescents can and should participate in decision-making in the context of management social services for youth and children started to be discussed relatively recently in the Czech Republic (Nosál & Čechová, 2014). Earlier views on participation focused mainly on adults, and at the same time the area of services for children and teenagers was based on the assumption that by involving adults (parents, teachers, social workers) the best interests of the child would automatically be represented. McNeish and Newman (2002) note that currently there is no longer a debate about whether to include children and young people in the decision-making process, but rather ways are being sought to find different approaches to participation which apply in different conditions and situations. In the Czech environment, however, it still seems that the involvement of children and teenagers in decision-making in the context of social service management is not routine. The text is one of the outputs of Czech-Swiss project, whose research and practical aim was to analyze and transfer practical experience from children and teenagers participation in the Swiss social services.*

Key words: children, participation, social services, development of organization

JEL Classification: D23 · L32 · L23

1 Introduction

All children have an important right to participate (Grugel, 2013). Several provisions in the Convention on the Rights of the Child refer children's right to participation ("Convention on the Rights of the Child," 1989). Participation is one of the key principles of the Convention, as well as one of its basic challenges. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to participate in decision-making processes that may be relevant in their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard—within the family, the school, the community and social services. This right is especially valuable for children in the child protection system (e.g. children in risk). Social workers have a responsibility to facilitate and secure this. However, participation is not an easy process and can be really challenging. Children can participate in many ways - in matters that affect them personally or those that relate to children in need or to all young citizens. This paper refers to research on all these aspects, drawing particularly on the views of the children themselves. While this paper focuses on children, many of the principles and practices promoting their participation are equally applicable to families and other service users.

2 Methods

This study is one of the outputs of the Czech-Swiss project, whose aim was to transfer practical experience from children and teenagers participation in the Swiss social services. On the basis of this project a series of theoretical and empirical studies arose. The following study focuses on the conceptualization of the issue of participation and elaborates the concept of participation, which we encountered within the case study in the Riedererholz children's home (St. Gallen - Switzerland).

3 Research results

The idea of participation currently brings very significant suggestions with regards to the innovation of social services in the field of social work with children, teenagers and their families. It should, however, be noted that participation is not a simple and easily applicable concept. Besides, in the literature, there are various concepts of participation, and each of them brings a specific point of view or a way of understanding participation and also a specific concept for the participatory processes. Therefore, we consider it necessary to define my understanding of participation, by means of which we will interpret my research experiences from the Riedererholz children's home.

3.1 Participation of youth and children in development and management social services

According to the Academic dictionary the term participation can be defined as attendance, involvement or interest (Kraus, 2009). Current debates around participation and marginalization dominate the agenda of many European politi-

cal forums. There is an increasing concern about the stability of social cohesion and a growing number of particular groups of people who are regarded as being at risk of being socially excluded or marginalized. In current discussions welfare services - understood in a broad sense - are centrally positioned: there are high expectations that welfare services can hinder marginalization and enable participation (Matthies & Uggerhøj, 2014).

Boyden and Ennew (1997) however, explain that there are at least two basic concepts of participation. According to the first the term participation is a synonym for the simple attendance or the presence at a place or activity. The second approach seeks the essence of participation in the sharing of power and it understands participation as a form of empowerment that allows all parties to actually participate in decision-making. Although we prefer the understanding of participation as a form of empowerment that allows a realistic contribution to decision-making, we recognize that this requires a much more sophisticated approach than is described in the first concept of simple participation, which appears to be relatively easy to reach.

The participatory approach to children and teenagers is based on discussions of participation, which were originally carried out in the context of adult members of society, i.e. citizens with voting rights. The authors Sherry Arnstein (1969), Brager and Specht (1973) who are now considered classical, published reflections on participation of adults which is still influential to this day. Arnstein (p. 216), for example, in her notion of participation emphasized the idea of sharing resources in a democratic society and she understood participation to be a means of fundamental social reform:

„...citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parcelled out. In short, it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society.“

The visionary work of Arnstein (1969), Brager and Specht (1973) has been intensely elaborated upon in the last two decades in the context of participation of children and teenagers. For example Kaplánek (2012) in relation to children understands participation as a tool of the education of a democratic citizen, i.e. an individual who is capable of "everyday democracy" and is prepared for the maximum participation in the decisions that concern them. According to him, it is already necessary to experience participation from childhood, and in all socialization systems: in the primary (family) and the secondary (kindergartens, all levels of schools, educational establishments, alternative care facilities). It is therefore essential that children in social care also enter into the participatory processes, because these children are particularly vulnerable and for them the participatory experience is a means of strengthening and empowerment.

In general, it seems that regarding the participation of children and teenagers the same principles can apply as those relating to the participation of adults. However, it is necessary to take into account some specifics, which are relevant to childhood and the young age of the subjects. McNeish and Newman (2002) point out that in the context of the participation of children and teenagers the following factors should be considered:

- Social interpretations of childhood in a given culture: The influence of adult's attitudes and their assumptions about the abilities of young people and in what they should or should not be involved, affects the way in which in a given culture or society the participation is socially accepted.
- Legal and social competence: Social and mainly legally children and teenagers do not have the same degree of autonomy as adults. In terms of the participatory processes it is necessary to reflect these limits.
- Continuity and speed of development: The fact that children and teenagers are with regards to their development subjected to significantly faster changes than adults means that there are also ongoing changes in their interests and abilities. These changes also affect the participatory process.
- A different perception of time by adults and by children: Although we have universal timekeeping devices, time perception is relative and subjective. This also applies to the perception of time in relation to age. While a year may seem infinite to a ten years old child, for an adult it may be a relatively short period. In the participatory processes timing can thus be a sensitive issue that needs to be assessed with regard to all the participants.

Knowing that while considering the participation of children and young people it is possible, with certain restrictions, to use the ideas from adult participation, We are now going to outline the basic reasons on which participatory thinking is based when working with children.

3.2 Reasons for involving children in management of social services

When discussing the Riedererholz children's home we found again and again that the principle of participation seems to be very important to the home workers, that it is a certain philosophical framework for their work. Then what are the reasons for participatory practice? There are many good arguments for involving children in decision-making. The

range is very diverse and among them we can find ethical, political, legal, pragmatic, religious and philosophical motives (Thomas, 2012). Some of them we will now present and outline.

One group of arguments refers in particular to the need for enforcement and implementation of children's rights. In principle, it points to the fact that children are citizens and service users, and share the same basic rights to attend and participate like everyone else. They should not be denied these rights. Another group of arguments relates to the development of the rights of customers and users. Different groups of customers and users of social services express their wish to participate in the development of the services. Their interest in and specific pressure are increasing (even in the target group of children and teenagers) as they want to influence the goals and the form of services that are provided either by state or non-state organizations. The participation can also be viewed as a simple legal obligation. The children's right to participation is contained in a series of legal documents, particularly in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (specifically Article 12), in the Law on Social Protection of Children 359/1999 Coll. (and of course others). Participation can also be understood as a tool to improve the services provided. The consultation with children enables an improvement of the provided services and their adaptation to the changing needs. The children can help define them. Participation therefore leads to more accurate, more appropriate decisions that are better informed, and thanks to the participation the likelihood that the jointly made decisions will be implemented and will be more effective increases. Benefits of children participation for groups and organisations summarises Ministry of social development (*Involving children: A guide to engaging children in decision-making*, 2003):

- It's an opportunity to understand children's issues and needs better.
- Because children bring new perspectives and knowledge.
- You can develop more effective policies, services and programmes by including children's perspectives in their design, planning and delivery/implementation.
- You can build a more positive, democratic organisation.
- You can decide where to use your resources (like money, people and time) more effectively.
- You can promote positive attitudes towards children.

Participation gives children a certain level of influence and an element of choice and can help them understand their own wishes and needs. Another set of arguments emphasizes that participation leads to a strengthening of the democratic processes. Through participation children become better prepared for life in a democratic society and therefore can become active members of their community. At present, the question of development of "civil-mindedness" has also become highly attractive and political. Children as the future citizens (with voting rights) must be able to learn "somewhere" how to be active members of their own community and state, how to participate in their management (governance). In favour of promoting participation experience also shows that participation improves the protection of children. Participation is proving to be an important element in the protection of children. Repeatedly it has been confirmed that it was the failure to listen to children, which in specific cases contributed to their abuse. Other arguments then point out that participation helps to develop important life skills, mainly: communication, negotiation, prioritization skills and decision-making. This set of arguments is followed by another, according to which participation does not only support individual skills, but also encourages the development of the whole personality. Effective participation in fact may contribute to the development of confidence in their own abilities, to increase their self-confidence and to help clarify their own identity. Many authors see participation as a universal process, which is also associated with the transcendence of our being. A man becomes a man precisely because they participate in the divine dignity, in their environment, in society, in the context of culture. Participation is presented here as something fundamental and innately human, without which a man cannot be a man-

Based on the above arguments, participation could be seen as a panacea that will eliminate all the difficulties and problems of society and individuals. Such a simplified understanding would certainly be naive and incorrect. Participatory discourse brings important focus on democratic values, which brings the interaction of man with his social environment into focus. Such an object of interest is perfectly in line with the core values and focus of social work. At the same time it is to be noted that the practical implementation of participation has a number of ideological and practical limits. As Helay pointed out (Healy, 1998), participation is a process that must be seen in context. However, in order to rigorously analyze the contexts that influence participation, one must first clearly define the areas in which the participatory processes occur. Each area is undoubtedly restricted to different contexts that define the specific conditions which either limit or support participation, its potential and necessary forms.

3.3 What needs to be prepared for children and youth participation

Matthies and Uggerhøj (2014) define participation as an involvement of people in the decision-making process, in management and administration. The same authors, however, in addition to political participation also refers to participation in the economic and social spheres. According to them the context of economic participation is especially about a co-decision in the areas of work and the job market. Social participation by Matthies and Uggerhøj then relates to the af-

filiation of a citizen to social groups and to possible voluntary memberships in clubs, associations and other organizations.

However, there are also other typologies of areas, which describe the application of participation from another standpoint. When working with children and teenagers participation may be implemented in five areas according to McNeish and Newman (2002): 1 / individual decision-making; 2 / participation in the development of services; 3 / participation in the community; 4 / participation in politics and 5 / participation in research. The first area of participation is therefore an area of individual decision making and relates to the decisions relative to all aspects of a young person's life. Therefore in this sphere the point is to allow children to be involved in decisions about themselves. Participatory law applies not only to normal family life, but also especially to situations where there is a crisis and the child enters the system of social (as well as health) services: for example, when a family and marriage disintegrate, in situations of child neglect, in foster care, when in need of a medical treatment, etc. This does not mean, however, that the participatory rights should only be limited to a crisis. To the contrary, participatory thinking must permeate an everyday approach to child care, it is a component of individual social work. In crisis situations, however, the assurance of participatory rights is essential. How can we support the increase in the quality of services in individual decision making?

McNeish and Newman (2002, p. 195) provide a list of important conditions that need to be complied with and possibly developed, in order to support young people during their individual decision-making process:

Figure 1 Key factors supporting individual decision-making

Informing children	Children should be treated as equal partners, who should be adequately informed so that they can make informed decisions.
Adequate time and explanation	Children should be provided with sufficient time and adequate explanation, so that they could understand well both the situation and the possibilities.
Ongoing consultation	The decision making process must not be limited to a single meeting during which the decision is made, but must be set up as a continuous process. This must be matched by an offer of ongoing consultations.
Nonjudgmental support	The support must be available and above all nonjudgmental.
Adequate place and conditions	It is also necessary to prepare a suitable location that is sufficiently comfortable and private, so that the child feels comfortable. The standard consulting rooms are equipped to meet the needs of adults and are therefore not suitable for children.
Time for preparation	If the child should enter into the process of participation in the decision-making, in which an adult will participate, the child must be prepared for such a situation and the situation must also be re-evaluated with the child afterwards.
Impartiality	A worker who facilitates the participation process must be capable of an unbiased attitude. Especially in cases where the decision-making process takes place in collaboration with parents and other specialists and their attitudes and opinions may vary greatly.
Attention to the priorities of the children	For the child to feel that they are a real partner in the process of participation, it is necessary to take into account their priorities, although this may diverge from the priorities of adults.
The presence of the child's "advocate"	In many situations, it is preferable that the view of the child is represented by an advocate who presents and explains the views and opinions of the child. Especially in cases where it is not possible to create such conditions in which the child (young adult) could represent their interests alone.
Sensitivity to the specific needs of children	The involvement of a child in the decisions-making requires specific sensitivity to all their needs.
The importance of feedback	The feedback in the case of individual participation is very important, since many children have the impression that, although they were heard, their opinion ultimately had little influence on the final outcome of the decision. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss and examine the resulting situation with the children.

Adapted according to McNeish and Newman (2002, p. 195)

The staff of the Riedererholz children's home pointed out that a prerequisite for participation of children in individual decisions, was the placement of the child (his interests) at the centre of the whole process when working with him, both in terms of organizational conditions, in terms of social work methods and in terms of ethics. Social services are set up to meet the needs of the child, therefore participation in their fulfilment is according to them a logical part of the realization of this noble mission.

The second area concerns the participation in the development of services. In this area the children and young people as service users can participate in the planning, delivery and evaluation. The involvement of children and young people in this area can help the more adequate shaping of services that can then better meet the needs of the target group. It should be noted that while the involvement of children and young people in all stages of service development is in recent years fairly common in Switzerland, the issue of children and young people engagement in this context is still quite taboo in the Czech Republic. There are many forms of participation of children and young people in service development (see Fig. 2). Some of the common forms of participation of children and teenagers in the development of services abroad (Switzerland) are mainly consulting, but also more active forms of participation, where young people cooperate on a long-term basis with project managers. Some agencies, for example, engage young people in the advisory, or directly in the governing bodies. In most of these bodies the young people cooperate with adults, but there are also cases where these bodies are composed entirely of young people. Other forms of participation of children and teenagers also include participation in tenders for representatives of a service or project, collaboration in shaping the principles and standards of a service or project and a presentation of a project. Recently, an increasing effort has been made not only to engage young people in designing new projects, but also in their evaluation.

Figure 2 Overview of forms of service innovation by engaging children and teenagers in Switzerland

One-off consultation with children from the target population (in / out of care)
Active (long-term) cooperation with managers
Establishment of advisory bodies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committees • These bodies can be composed only of young people, combined
The involvement of former service users <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of services • Training of workers • Provision of services to children and teenagers

Experience with the involvement of children and teenagers in Switzerland was first made in the private non-profit sector, but it is also increasingly imported into the public service.

Another (third) area of children and teenager participation is in the community sphere. This area of participation opens up new opportunities for children and young people to participate in community development. The community here might be a local community, but also interest groups that do not respect common geographical location. The fourth area of participation is the area of politics and public opinion. New ways are being investigated which would encourage children and teenagers to be involved in influencing public opinion and politics. Often it is done through the involvement of young people in the media and public campaigns or their participation in public discussions, etc. The last (fifth) area of participation can also be the area of research. Young people can participate in research in various roles, as consultants, interviewers, they may participate in the formulation of research questions or the questionnaire and, of course, they may enter into the next phases or activities of the research.

3.4 Levels of participation

Literature recognizes not only the areas of participation, but also the levels and forms. By the form of participation we understand ways of how to learn it, implement it and raise its level, while the level of participation on the other hand rather assesses the degree and quality of participation. Sinclair (2000) compares the concept of forms and levels of participation by various authors:

Figure 3 Forms and levels of participation

Arnstein (1969)	Thoburn, Lewis Shemmings (1995)	Hart (1997)	Shier (2000)
Civil proceedings	Delegated power Involvement in the development of services	Decisions initiated by children, shared with adults	Children share power and responsibility for decision-making
Delegated power		Decisions initiated and implemented by children	
Partnership	Partnership Participation	Decisions initiated by adults, shared with adults	Children are involved in decision-making
Reassurance	Involvement Consultations	Consultation and information	Children's views are taken into account
Consultations	Full awareness/information	Decisions implemented by adults, children are informed	Children are encouraged to express their own opinions
		Tokenism	Children are listened to
Therapy	Reassurance	Decorating	
Manipulation	Manipulation	Manipulation	

Sinclair (2000, p. 2)

The Figure 3 presents a typology of forms and levels of participation by various authors, who base it on the general (political) concept of Sherry Arnstein (1969) and adapt her model to the situation of children and teenagers. Perhaps the most famous models of the level of participation of children and teenagers include Hart's model (1992; 1997). He distinguishes between types of participation in regard to the degree of power that is shared with the children. As we consider his classification to be representative and especially usable in practice, we will pursue it in more detail in the text below. Please note that the orientation of Figure 4 in comparison with Figure 3 is a reversed polarity in terms of the degree of shared power. What is Hart's typology helpful with? It can help on the one hand to distinguish what can be actually considered actual participation, but it also on the other hand supports our thinking about the level of participation which is reasonable in a given situation.

Figure 4 Levels of participation according to Hart

	<i>Level of partici-</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>
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	<i>pation</i>	
False-participation	Manipulation	Situations where children are involved only as an illustration of attitudes, opinion of adults.
	Pretence	The situation when adults deny their participation in a project and pretend that it was completely solved by children and teenagers (although it was not).
	Ornament	Situations where children are used to justify certain activities, but they do not understand the reason and are not involved in the project.
	Decoration	Involvement of children is formal, for example, the children may participate in discussions, important meetings, but the conditions for their meaningful participation are not formed.
Actual-participation	Information	Children are provided with information, adults have full control over the planning and implementation of the project. Children remain only the recipients of services.
	Consultation	Children can express their opinions about the plans or their implementation. Adults, however, still exercise control over the project, but children's views are taken into account.
	Representation	In this form of participation the children are involved in the preparation and management of the project. Often, representatives of the children are selected to the management of a team. However, the children in these forms of participation rather present their personal views and do not represent the views of other children.
	Partnership	Partnership means that young people together with adults collaborate on all aspects of a mutual project. Within the partnership there is real power sharing.
	Self-management	In the context of self-management the projects are planned and managed by young people and by children. They decide themselves whether and under what circumstances they involve adults in the project.

Adapted according to Hart (1992; 1997)

The area called false participation, represents different forms of child participation where such involvement of children is seen only as instrumental with regard to the interests of the adults. Adults through "the involvement of children" reach their own goals. Children are subordinate to adults in their powerlessness and their engagement is not authentic. It does not express their essential interests, views, feelings, though the adults may think it does or they may pretend so. In contrast, the area of actual participation includes such forms of involvement of children in which children gain an opportunity for authentic expression, while the level of implementation of their own interests varies according to the type of participation. While in the context of information the children are seen to be rather passive recipients of the adults' notification, in the context of self-management they are becoming autonomous entities, fully implementing the power over their own projects.

The staff of the Riedererholz children's home uses all these levels of actual participation, while the level of participatory involvement of children in decision-making is carefully evaluated in specific situations or in relation to specific problems. Also in the literature there is a discussion about whether it is necessary and desirable to always strive for the highest level of participation. Many authors believe that the participation level must be carefully assessed with regards to the relevant circumstances of the child or children involved. For example, according to Treseder (2004) the idea that it is always necessary to achieve the highest participation level is quite misleading, because in different situations and contexts it is necessary to choose such a level of participation that best meets the interests of the child. Also the experience of the Swiss system of child protection confirms that the purpose of participation is to benefit the children, rather than to expose them to undue burdens or responsibilities. Participation therefore should be accepted as one of the tools supporting efforts in promoting the child's best interests, not as mechanically applied device.

4 Conclusions

The right for children and young people to participate in decisions affecting their lives was established in Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1989. Since then, children's and young people's participation in child welfare and protection services has been the focus of research, policy development and legislation. The Convention determines that children must be heard and that their views have to be taken into account in accordance with age and maturity (Vis & Thomas, 2009).

International research community first focused on whether children and young people had a say in decisions about their lives. This was followed by a growing knowledge of the benefits of children's participation in such decisions, an awareness that has been increasingly transformed in legislation. A lot of studies have emphasized the importance of

participation for the development of children, especially children in care. For example, participation in decisions about their lives helps children feel connected and committed to the decisions that are taken (Woolfson, Heffernan, Paul, & Brown, 2010); it may lead to an increase in self-esteem (Vis, Strandbu, Holtan, & Thomas, 2011) and personal mastery.

Additionally, by taking children's views, wishes and expectations into account, interventions might be more responsive and therefore more effective (McNeish & Newman, 2002). Although there is a general agreement about children's and young people's participation, it is difficult to put into practice.

In this study, we drew primarily from the inspiring experience of my study visit to the Riedererholz children's home in St.Gallen in Switzerland. We supported our experience by studying other professional literature in order to verify whether and how my experience from abroad corresponds to the state of research on the topic of participation of children and teenagers, especially from domestic and Anglo-Saxon environments. We discussed key issues related to the promotion of participatory thinking in an organization. First, we briefly outlined the basis for participation of children, next we discussed the meaning of the topic of participation of children and teenagers, we also described the areas of participation of children and young people and lastly we considered the levels and forms of participation. Based on these concepts and knowledge we finally stated our pre-requisites for the involvement of children and teenagers in the development and improvement of the quality of social services and we proposed a model for the implementation of participatory practice.

From this perspective, we consider the participatory philosophy as a source of possible and perhaps even necessary inspiration, which should penetrate into the life of the Czech institutions caring for children, as it represents an important element of their humanization and brings them to such a state that it creates hope that their assistance will come closer to what children really need for themselves and for their future lives.

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