



Brief description

It is one particularity of Frankfurt as a city that it has no youth council, but a school students' council as a form of youth parliament, the Youth and Student Council (YSR). It is interesting as one classic and established form of (formal) youth participation. It has a legal nationwide framework, is connected with other youth structures on different levels (city, federal states, state) and has a foundation by the city, which assures the council a right to be heard in the city council and opens doors to different city-wide networks and committees. The main space of the YSR is their bureau in the inner city of Frankfurt. It has a big conference room (freshly renovated) for meetings and representation and a small bureau with computer, printer and a few cozy seats. The YSR has a budget per annum provided by the municipality. In Germany, all schools have student representations at the level of single school councils. In Frankfurt, all schools have the right to send two delegates to the YSR which meets two to three times a year. Elections take place in the end of the year. The Board is responsible for day-to-day business with the chairmen, the consultants and members of different work groups. It meets on a nearly weekly basis. Politically it works on youth- and student-topics (like sexual education) but also daily politics (like the rising racism in Germany). The current board consists of 10 to 15 young people aged 15 to 19 years, most of them elected as board members by the general assembly of the YSR.

What we have learned about participation

Participation which is strongly legitimated and recognised may also thereby be constrained.

There is a constant negotiation of the YSR between a complex set of contradictions: engaging too much with left-wing groups probably would cost them the recognition of the city administration and other adult institutions, some of the member furthermore don't want to work with them as they see themselves more as the political liberal mid. Concentrating on the current day-to-day education and school politics or more adult-led topics (such as the mobility-board of the city) on the other side limits their scope for recruiting pupils and students less able or keen to engage in complex matters which require high skills in adapting to the inner workings of city politics.

A well Recognised and Legitimated Form of Participation can offer a tempting vehicle for personal or party ambitions.

Inner conflicts arose every time when persons who were elected onto the board who tried to use it as a platform either to promote themselves or a youth political party: *"three years ago [...] [former spokesperson] graduated from Gymnasium and therefore was out for the next year and another board member took over [next spokesperson] and he used it as a political stage for himself [...] writing an awful lot of press releases [...] talking about everything [...] and turned everybody off and in the end erected a dictatorship" (Frankfurt, YSR, GD)*. The next year the next spokesperson had "to build up everything from scratch"

Young People feel a strong sense of responsibility as representatives which it may be difficult for them to fulfil.

A discussion that constantly emerged is the question what their legitimation was given that many pupils and students do not even know about their existence. One member pointed to the fact that the YSR since many years stands for the support of comprehensive schools instead of the three-tier German school system with its hierarchy of Hauptschule – Realschule – Gymnasium: *"I don't know how students from Gymnasiums actually see this, [actually] they don't even know [...] that the YSR is endorsing this position" (YSR, GD)*.

Even when the work of a Council is strongly regulated, there is room for negotiation

The law on which the funding and organisation of YSR is based, foresees that the subjects the YSR deals with are all school or education related. But, there are debates within the board and around it how narrowly this should be interpreted. One example for this debate is the campaign that can serve as an example for typical activities of the YSR is their campaign against homework launched together with the regional students' council. These examples stand for how the work of the board is marked a) by statutory duties to represent young people in the city's governing bodies, b) by endorsing campaigns by other students' representations or c) setting their own agenda by taking up "bottom-up" initiatives by local groups of young people.

Key Challenges Identified

Is it possible not to simply reproduce certain status and gender hierarchies in such a City Wide formal body? How do friendship groups operate in the space? How 'Political' can a Youth Council be without losing its legitimacy (and possibly its funding) with and from the Municipal Authority?