TRIANGULATING YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP: COMBINING ETHNOGRAPHY AND DATA MINING

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ESA 2017 Athens

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Research project funded by the Academy of Finland

Combining ethnographic research with data mining and survey data to understand youth participation and how the political life shows itself to the young people of Finland today

How does political socialization happen? What kinds of socializations are encouraged by the official participatory systems?
FOCUS ON THE FORMAL SIDE

- I like boring things
- The official perspective: what is the nature of the political engagement our official structures are teaching to kids / the kids learn through them?
THEORETICAL TRIANGULATION

- Combining methods (and thus datasets) becomes easier, if you have a theoretical model guiding the research
- Which questions are relevant?
- Theoretical clarity helps empirical messiness.
CIVIC IMAGINATION – WHAT IS POSSIBLE IN POLITICS?

• And into what direction are the participatory programs we create to teach young people what participation is, guiding their civic imagination?

• What kind of questions are they asking?

• What kind of a playing field are they envisioning?

• What seems possible? What seems relevant?

(Civic Imagination borrowed from book of the same name by Baiocchi et al, building on Arendt etc)
JUSTIFICATIONS

• We also ”triangulate” by using separate theoretical devices to understand same issues

• Here, if the civic imagination is the main tool, then justifications and grammars (Thévenot, Boltanski & Thévenot) serve as the triangulating position

• Relevant tools: industrial justification (common good based on efficiency, measuring things etc), and the liberal grammar (or grammar of individual interests)
You can build moral argumentation on rather technical basis (*On Justification, Boltanski & Thévenot 2006)*

…but often, especially when combining technical justifications with argumentation based on the private interest of the speaker (rather than some explicit common goods, you end with a purely technocratic view of politics.

Especially in combination with the problem-solving civic imagination.
EMPIRICAL CASES
• “The ideas of the youth”
• An e-democracy service where young people can submit their "ideas" – these can be discussed and then escalated to those who make decisions
• Run by the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Education
• Over 500 ideas submitted by young people all over the country since 2015
• I wrote a scraper in Python and downloaded the ideas with their attached discussion
EFTERRÄTT PÅ FREDAGAR

19.1.2017 klo 10.40  @Annika6C

Vi önskar att få kräm, någon typ av bakelse, pudding, glass, fruktblanding (allt som är sött och gott).
More services to Nastola!
We’d like to have a Lidl next to the S-Market in Villähti. Also, more free sports facilities to Nastola!

Pudding on Fridays!
We would like to have dessert, perhaps some kind of pastry, ice cream, fruit salad, or basically anything that is good and sweet.

Schools should start teaching coding at earlier age
I am aware that coding shall be added to Finnish curriculum at some point but I think we should start teaching it already because it is a really nice profession and would create new jobs to Finland and would make so many things possible many are interested in…
DISTRIBUTIONS

- **Local?**
  - Yes: 79%
  - No: 16%

- **Technical?**
  - Yes: 78%
  - No: 16%

- **Private Interest?**
  - Yes: 51%
  - No: 43%
YOUTH COUNCIL

- This section relies on the ethnographic work done by Georg Boldt in a youth council in Helsinki region
- Youth council are official and representative democratic organs for underage children
- Run in most municipalities (notably excluding Helsinki)
- Elected members have (in many places) representation among the official municipal organs
TOP 5 TALKED ABOUT ITEMS IN THE YOUTH COUNCIL AGENDA

In order of time spent:

1. Announcements
   I was there and there and met with N.N and M.M

2. Other issues
   I am thinking of presenting an idea like this / we have received a request like this

3. Committee member elections

4. Dirty-ish personal politics

5. Various political initiatives
   Free contraceptives, unisex bathrooms etc
CONCLUSIONS

• What is the kind of civic imagination that gains expression through these structures?

  = Personal politics, self-advancement, making liberal demands, ”fixing everyday issues” and personal promotion

• Also happening are more “ideological” strands of politics – value conflicts, structural issues, power as societal-level issue

  • …but these are mostly repressed and marginal, and quite often overtly racist

• Is this the kind of democracy we want young people to learn?
THANKS!

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