

Youth & Local Government in Hungary: Towards a Constructive Dialogue



by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree
Bachelor of European Studies

The Hague School of European Studies

Haagse Hogeschool, The Hague, 8 May 2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From my childhood onwards Hungary has been my favourite destination. As soon as I meet with people who have visited Hungary for a vacation, who have relatives in Hungary or simply know one Hungarian word; my attention is aroused and I focus completely on them. As if I return to my Hungarian roots by merely talking to people about Hungary and by listening to the impressions they obtained from this country.

During the final semester of my studies in The Hague I had the opportunity to go abroad for my graduation internship – not surprisingly I decided to go to Budapest. Being a member of staff of the Foundation for Democratic Youth (DIA) for six months enabled me to improve my Hungarian. More importantly, I could write my thesis on an exciting topic with an – albeit indirect – great societal value.

I would like to thank the members of the organisation's staff, particularly Viktória Takács and Rita Galambos. Viki, you helped me to make me laugh about myself, and Rita, thank you for keeping an eye on me. I also owe much gratitude to my former mentor at DIA, Hayo de Vries, who inspired me to write on this topic; the sentence 'keep it simple' has been on my mind more than once. Naturally, this research would not have been possible without all of those who were willing to give up some of their time for interviews; as well as those people who helped me to think 'outside the box'.

Furthermore, I am grateful for the support and enthusiasm of my supervisor Marjo van den Haspel, and last but not least, Jelmer, thank you for putting things into perspective.

Thank you all for helping me to grow beyond a mere pseudo Hungarian.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Before the change of the system in 1989 decisions were made by the communist state-party and all citizens of Hungary had to do was simply obeying these decisions; publicly questioning the communist rule was not done. What followed in the years after was a somewhat passive state of mind. Consequently, in the year 2008 Hungarians frequently do not see the necessity to become an active citizen, and what is more, they often do not know that there are opportunities to develop skills and attitudes that help one to grow into an engaged citizen. Concerning young people in Hungary one notices for instance, that they are not easily motivated and that for the larger part one has to ask them to participate in community life.

The Foundation for Democratic Youth (DIA) – a national NGO encouraging community service and non-formal learning – does not only invite youngsters to become active in their communities, the organisation also sets an example why participation and engaged citizenship are important. Considering the Foundation also works on the local level, it finds good cooperation with municipal governments increasingly important. Unfortunately DIA experiences that governmental institutions, although they do have tasks to fulfil in this area, are not yet aware of the fact that involving young people is an essential pillar of plural democratic society. Since 1989 youth issues have fallen under the control of eight different bodies on the central level and a consistent youth policy is also lacking. Naturally, cooperation between youth and local administration works occasionally as there are certain structures for youth participation on the local level. Yet this cooperation is only to a certain degree and seems to be rather ad hoc than based on solid partnerships. In general what remains is the distance between young people on the one side and local government on the other side.

The topic of this research is to investigate how and to what extent could DIA contribute to a constructive dialogue between youth and local government. Literature shows that dialogue can contribute to change in a given context; in which the objective is not to reach a compromise of some sort, but by means of exploring contrasting viewpoints it is at least possible to develop understanding and perhaps even empathy. After all, the basis of plural democracy is the inclusion of all citizens regardless their societal position or opinion. In this sense Hungary needs perhaps more time to develop such democratic tradition, since a culture of giving back to society as an active citizen is yet underdeveloped. As the research shows DIA mainly contributes indirectly to a constructive dialogue. This is because the organisation promotes such culture to become embedded in the experience of young people.

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Abbreviations

CoE: Council of Europe

DIA: Foundation for Democratic Youth

EC: European Commission

EU: European Union

EYF: European Youth Forum

GYIA: Children and Youth Fund

GYIK: Hungarian Children and Youth Conference

HÖÖK: National Conference of Students' Local Governments

IYF: International Youth Foundation

LSE: Life Skills for Employability

MaC: Make a Connection!

NGO: Non-governmental Organisation

RIT: Regional Council of Children and Youth Fund

VDÖK: Local Student Government

PART I: BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

1. Introduction

They are called the promise of tomorrow. Although it might sound like a cliché, it is perhaps true; young people do in a way make up for tomorrow's society. We should however not forget that they shape the society of today as well. In Hungary though, this is apparently not a widely accepted thought. Young people's opinions are not yet fully recognised. In this sense Hungary is perhaps still facing the leftovers of the old communist rule. Fortunately however, there are also new developments to discern. Some do acknowledge that young people are the 'new generation' and they moreover believe in their abilities. Indeed, it is with this conviction in mind that the Foundation for Democratic Youth (DIA) strives to enhance democracy from within; strengthening young people so they are able to face not only today's difficulties, but those lingering from earlier times as well.

As a non-profit organisation DIA operates in the field of youth policy. Since 1999 the organisation sees it as its mission to enhance democratic skills and values among youngsters aged 14-25. Through an approach of community service learning, various training programs and exchange projects, the foundation tries to evoke a self-conscious attitude, allowing these volunteering youngsters to develop a sense of responsibility not only towards themselves, but to their environment as well. In the end the organisation hopes that young people will speak up for themselves, grow into active citizens who try to influence decision-making and policy shaping processes and experience the influence their actions could have – however little that may be.

This paper explores the relationship between youth and local government in Hungary, particularly the constructive dialogue between both parties. In a country where top-down decision-making approaches are still everyday practice, one should not be surprised about the fact that young people in many cases are not involved in youth policy shaping and implementation processes; precisely those processes which outcomes affect them foremost. Nonetheless, in order for DIA to achieve an active civil attitude and awareness among youth, a constructive dialogue that is initiated from both sides is indispensable.

The research was carried out by means of several methodologies. Firstly literature research into theory and practice regarding youth policy at a European and national level was undertaken. Secondly, in-depth interviews were carried out with civil servants, experts and the organisation's staff. Lastly, by means of case studies young people were approached and encouraged to take part in focus groups.

1.1 Objectives

There are numerous opinions and views on the cooperation between youth and local government and the role of DIA within this triangle. However, it should be noted that they are somewhat scattered and that a concrete document covering such accounts does not exist. Furthermore, the organisation wishes to know how it should act and which steps it should undertake in those situations where a constructive dialogue is immature or has yet failed to develop in the first place. The objective of this research is therefore twofold. Firstly, it should provide the organisation with an overview of the current opinions and attitudes young people and local governmental institutions hold towards each other – of course not ignoring the position of DIA in this partnership. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it should enable DIA to optimize its approach within this tripartite relationship.

As this thesis is based on the two assumptions that DIA at the moment fails to optimally contribute to a constructive dialogue between youth and local authorities and that such a dialogue is currently not optimal to begin with, the central research question is as follows:

To what extent can DIA contribute to a constructive dialogue between youth and local government?

In order to simplify the course of action figure 1 below shows the specific phenomena studied at different levels. One should remember that the purpose is in the end to obtain a framework, effectively consisting of practical suggestions and recommendations that the organisation could implement in current and future programs or as part of its overall strategy.

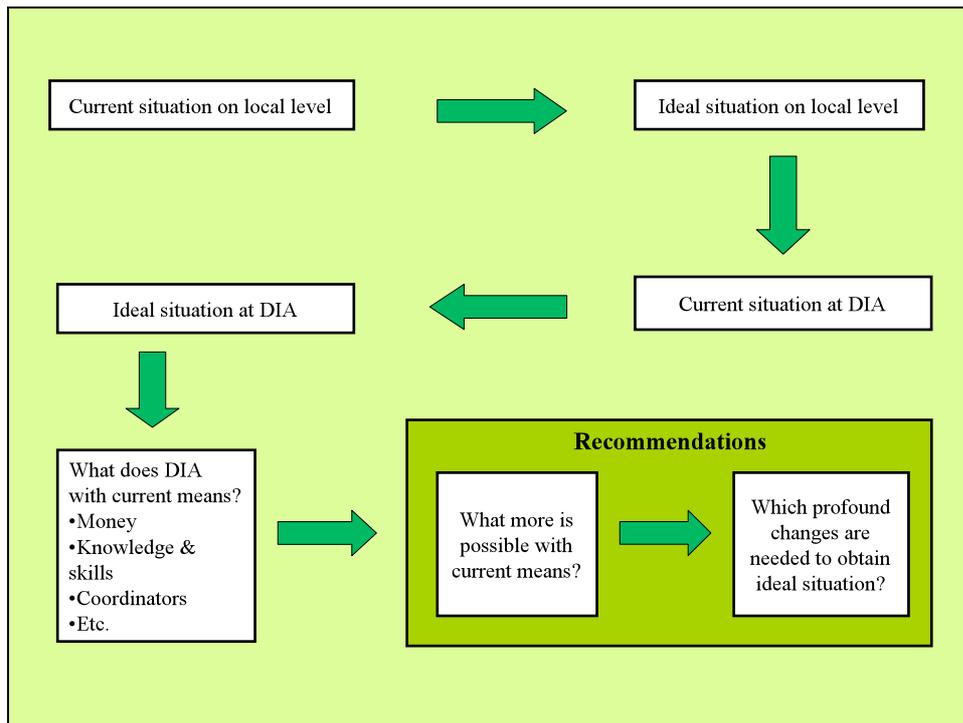


Figure 1: Németh, 2007

Using the above model as a foundation the following sub-questions could be set up:

1. What is meant by 'active citizenship' and what does it mean for young people and local government?
2. What is meant by a 'constructive dialogue' and why is it important from an educational, legal and democratic perspective?
3. Which parties are exactly involved in the dialogue and what are their interests?
4. To what extent is participation encouraged by local government?
5. What image do young people have of local government, and vice versa?
6. Do youth and local government find it important to have a constructive dialogue?
7. When is a dialogue effective for DIA?
8. How is the role of DIA perceived by young people and local government?

1.2 Chapter overview

The first chapter has sketched a background to the topic of the thesis; it introduced the topic and purposes of the research. Chapter two provides the reader with a general idea of the concepts of citizenship and participation, particularly offering a theoretical framework. The third chapter states the principles of a constructive dialogue; it offers not only a theoretical outlook, it also proposes a normative perspective. Chapter four explores the questions concerning a constructive dialogue between youth and local government in Hungary. It focuses on the current situation concerning youth policy and what the conditions are for a dialogue to prosper. The role of DIA is discussed in chapter five. Again, it outlines the impact DIA has at present with the current means and what impact the organisation believes it should evoke ideally. Chapter six reports the findings of three case studies. The seventh chapter presents the recommendations. As based on the model above, they fall apart into two categories. Firstly, they describe how the organisation could increase its contribution; with its current means, though organised in a more effective manner. Secondly, they look into the profound changes within the organisation's structure and strategy that would enhance attaining the ideal conditions of a constructive dialogue between young people and local authorities. Finally, chapter eight states the main findings of the research.

PART II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2. Concepts of Citizenship and Participation

The subsequent sections lay down a variety of notions concerning citizenship and citizen participation. Much has been said about these conceptions and many definitions exist about what these principles essentially imply. Hence outlining them to the full would go beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, this paper is primarily focused on youth-related issues. It is for these reasons that a selection has been made as to the range of topics covered. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these complex conventions are fundamentally linked and should – for the purpose of this paper – not be considered on their own merit.

2.1 Active youth citizenship

As mentioned above, the idea of citizenship is a rather contested phenomenon and its definitions exist on various levels. Although these perspectives of citizenship in general reflect several common subject matters, they tend to vary in degrees of nuance and emphasis. Academic literature proposes different descriptions of the notion. In a working paper by Leach and Scoones, for instance, reference is made to the political philosophical tradition that offers three perspectives wherein citizenship is explored: liberalism, communitarianism and republicanism. Allegedly, all three schools suggest that citizen's rights and obligations (civil, political and social) should be a central thought when discussing citizenship. Again, only to the extent in which they emphasise either obligations or rights do they differ (as cited in Weerd, Gemmeke, Rigter & Rij, 2005, pp. 12-13). Whereas liberal theory argues in favour of the central position of the individual and individual rights, the communitarian point of view states the importance of the individual as being a member of a community; individual interests are therefore subordinate. Since the common good is seen as crucial in understanding citizenship, rights are deemed less important than obligations. Janoski (1998) claims that Durkheimian theory on citizenship, which advocates the question of civic virtue, has been a key contribution to the communitarian approach on citizenship debates. Given that citizenship exists in the public sphere, it would represent voluntary activities in private and non-profit groups in civil society (p. 7). On the other hand, according to Habermas, republicanism indicates that rights and obligations should be seen

as equally important. Hence, it advocates the intrinsic value of citizenship (as cited in Weerd, Gemmeke, Rigter & Rij, 2005, p. 14).

In his study, Siurala (2002) adds a sociological dimension to the concept of citizenship. Arguably, it does not suffice to merely talk about rights and obligations of individuals – the legal definition of citizenship – one should moreover take the practice (economic, cultural and symbolic) of individuals into account. By means of including yet another element in the definition, that is the extent to which practice and legal rights are related, a dynamic aspect of citizenship comes to the fore. Citizenship could now be understood as individuals being active subjects; acting in such ways that influence social realities. Following this, a model for ‘active citizenship’ is established (pp. 34-35). The author moreover introduces the works of Isin and Wood, who in their studies explore citizenship by referring to ‘identity’. Supposedly identities are not static or unified, but rather plural and constantly changing and developing. In contrast to some of the aforementioned theories about citizenship, this modern view has shifted the notion of citizenship from a more fixed conception to the idea where citizenship and identification are linked in a continuous process (Siurala, 2002, pp. 36-37).

Without being exhaustive, further mention should be made to the theory behind active citizenship. It was previously brought to the fore that the practice of citizenship assumes an individual to be an active person. In an Irish study on active citizenship again different spheres of the concept are considered. Similar to Durkheim, the paper suggests a voluntary aspect of citizenship. Subsequent to including the above elements of citizenship, active citizenship “refers to the voluntary capacity of citizens and communities working directly together, or through elected representatives, to exercise economic, social and political power in pursuit of shared goals.” The difficulty herein, so it is argued, is that active citizenship, being voluntary and hence difficult to control, would require the different actors in the arena – ranging from government to firms, to communities and the voluntary associations – to give some of their own space to others (Taskforce, 2007, p.5). In this respect the idea of active citizenship revolves as much around all actors making a contribution to the community, and thus the common good, as it does about using one’s right to vote during elections.

Concerning active youth citizenship; in a position paper on active citizenship of young people, an active citizen is defined as “the ideal of a citizen who strives to build a better society with tools that are democratic and non-violent, respectful of the opinion of others” (World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts and World Organization of the Scout Movement, 2005, “What makes an active citizen?” section, para. 4). In this sense an active citizen is committed to the public good and willing to change the status quo. Referring to a European Youth Forum position paper, the paper claims that in order for young people to become active citizens in the first place, they need the necessary tools to develop a democratic attitude. Young people should grow into conscious human beings, feeling a sense of belonging and ownership, and responsibility towards themselves and their

community. However, it would perhaps be naïve to expect that youngsters will develop these attitudes on their own. This requires foremost education; educating young people, supplying them with information and teaching them the skills necessary to become active citizens.

2.2 Youth participation

Being closely related to active citizenship, one must not ignore the participation of young people in public life. Following socialisation theory, the classical approach on participation of young people emphasised the idea that youngsters should be integrated into society, in accordance with the existing rules and norms. Only then would they be full members of society. By imposing societal values they would consequently have to obey the status quo as passive acceptants. Simultaneously a different perspective existed among Eastern and Central European sociologists. Mitev and Mahler introduced the theory of ‘juventogoly’, which suggests that young people themselves are capable of re-inventing society as they shape values and norms by themselves. In this respect youth participation would be a form of ‘social innovation’ and youngsters would thereby develop a true sense of the self (Kovacheva, 1999; Beke, n.d.). A modern view on youth participation though, is derived from T. H. Marshall’s theory on citizenship. As cited in Bawidamann & Lyamouri-Bajja (2007) he defined participation as:

A principle of social organisation that cannot be reserved to specific spheres. It is all-embracing and needs to be practised at local, regional, national, European and international (global) level. It also does not allow for any restrictions according to gender, ethnicity, religion, choice of life-style and social status. (p. 18)

Apparently the participation of young people should focus on the difficulties youngsters experience to access the variety of civil, political and social rights subsisting in their communities. At the same time however, it revolves around a feeling of belonging to a given community and contributing to its prosperity. To this extent, the modern approach of youth participation seems to go hand in hand with later perspectives on active citizenship (Kovacheva, 1999, p. 9). In her study into youth participation in Eastern European countries, Kovacheva concluded that particularly in the former communist regimes participation of young people poses many dilemmas. Based on several studies of youth projects in these countries the report found that levels of participation in public life are low. Similarly, there is a declining interest and trust in politics and parties, and towards non-governmental organisations (NGO’s) in general. Moreover, legislation appears to be underdeveloped; coherent state youth policies towards NGO’s are lacking, and proper technology and information bases, as well as

tradition and experience about youth participation issues in voluntary associations do not seem to exist (as cited in Siurala, 2002, pp. 40-41). Nevertheless, Kovacheva (1999) also proposes that youth participation could be successful under certain conditions. In order for youth participation to flourish collaboration between youth groups and other organisations in the voluntary segment and international associations, media exposure and public support are necessary elements (p. 87).

Reports that discuss youth participation are abundant when examining the European level. In 2001 the European Commission issued a White Paper on youth related concerns. Subsequent to consultation sessions with young people from differing societal backgrounds, youth organisations, policy-makers and scholarly people the Commission found that participation must be encouraged, especially so since youngsters themselves declared the wish to be involved in community life. “They call for a radical change in thinking and practices, and above all, they insist on being fully involved in the policy-making process” (European Commission [EC], 2001, pp. 11-12). Nowadays this tendency apparently remains applicable. According to the latest Eurobarometer, 81% of young Europeans pointed out that if young people were to be consulted before any public decision about youth is taken, it would help them in acting as active citizens in society. Likewise, when it comes to political action youngsters could undertake to ensure that their voices are heard by policy makers, 29% ranks “to participate in debates with policy makers” at the top of the list (EC, 2007, p. 8).

Looking back upon the definition of participation as cited earlier; Marshall argued for participation practised at all levels in society. Although not entirely in contrast to this, the White Paper does suggest that youth participation should be encouraged at the local level foremost. In so doing, schools are to be included as these institutions provide excellent forums for participation. In addition, it should also reach those youngsters without membership to associations – be they formal or informal (EC, 2001, p. 16). Involvement at all levels can even be seen as a practice which allows all people irrespective of their social and cultural background to fully participate in society. This process is referred to as ‘social inclusion’ (Escribano, 2006, p. 14). In the preamble of the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, by the Council of Europe’s Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, it is yet again stated that “local and regional authorities, as the authorities closest to the young person, have a very important role to play in promoting youth participation.” Arguably, when striving for democratic, more inclusive and prosperous societies youth must be called upon to give their opinion on matters concerning them primarily and should be ensured to take part in decision-making (Council of Europe [CoE], 2003, “Preamble” section, para. 1-2).

2.3 Conclusion

The above text formed a brief introduction into the notions of citizenship and participation, particularly focused on young people. It goes without saying that enhancing youth participation, specifically on the local level, plays a key role in promoting active citizenship among young people. As mentioned a form of civic education is invaluable in this respect. Young people should be offered training and experience about what 'being a citizen' and 'participating in society' in fact represent. Ultimately this leads to more democratic societies. In this sense, the ideas discussed were approached from a normative perspective; it is assumed that youngsters developing into active citizens and for instance taking part in decision-making is something good in itself and worthwhile.

3. A Constructive Dialogue

It is not the purpose of this chapter to describe the etymology of the word ‘dialogue’, nor will this chapter fall into lengthy detail concerning theoretical explanations of the term. However, this chapter examines several ruling thoughts about the theory of dialogue. Similar to the previous chapter these sections will introduce dialogue from a norm giving context; they not only propose the conditions that make a dialogue into a – fruitful – dialogue, they also observe the significance of a constructive dialogue within the frame of the research. After all, it is a prerequisite to understand the above before actually expressing any recommendation to the Foundation for Democratic Youth at all.

3.1 Principles of dialogue

Worthwhile mentioning is the fact that multiple definitions on the term ‘dialogue’ are available. Yet, when contemplating upon the term ‘dialogue’ most of us will undoubtedly think of dialogue being intimately intertwined with ‘communication’, or a process commenced upon when one is communicating. This is of course true. Nevertheless, one of the founding fathers of modern-day theory on dialogue, physicist David Bohm, thought of dialogue as something more than merely a form of discourse between people. In his view there is a distinction between dialogue and a simple exchange of words. Supposedly dialogue requires a higher level of communication; as the Bohemian Dialogue implies:

In Dialogue, a group of people can explore the individual and collective presuppositions, ideas, beliefs, and feelings that subtly control their interactions. It provides an opportunity to participate in a process that displays communication successes and failures. It can reveal the often puzzling patterns of incoherence that lead the group to avoid certain issues or, on the other hand, to insist, against all reason, on standing and defending opinions about particular issues. (Bohm, Factor & Garrett, 1991, “Dialogue – A proposal” section, para. 2)

Often scholars like Bohm, but also actual practitioners of dialogue in the field, try to explain dialogue as something that it is not. Dialogue is for instance not a ‘debate’, nor is it a ‘discussion’. These forms of communication tend to emphasise the importance of a winning element during the process: An agreement or compromise of some sort should be reached and in many cases this would imply that

one party prevails. Yet, convincing the other is not the issue in dialogue. As International IDEA¹ stresses, whereas debate suppresses diversity of thinking, in dialogue this should in contrast be highly supported (as cited in Pruitt and Thomas, 2007, pp. 20-21).

Likewise, Bohm argues that during dialogue exploration of thoughts, and emotions, is the number one priority. In the end it is the objective that a deeper listening to differing thoughts and opinions could contribute to a better understanding of contrasting viewpoints (Bohm, et al., 1991, “What dialogue is not” section, para. 1-2). In this sense dialogue could be understood as a synergetic process; in that it is an open-ended phase of learning that encourages a level of conversation, which creates new experiences and more perceptive attitudes based on mutual trust of the participants.

In his work Bohm lists the circumstances that need to be present in order for a dialogue to work. These five conditions are the following:

- Suspension of all thoughts, judgements, biases etc. that would hinder effective listening and thereby the process of exploration. This is not to say that one should postpone or repress them. It is a matter of paying attention to them so that underlying patterns of thinking and acting would come to the surface;
- The number of participants should be between twenty and forty. This will allow for subgroups and subcultures to come to the fore and expose these subgroups’ processes of collective thinking. In general, according to Bohm, the differences between such groups often lead to failed communication or disagreements that could be considered during a session;
- Ideally a session should take two hours and the results would be more valuable when a series of sessions is organised;
- The essence of dialogue is equality, meaning that in dialogue hierarchy should not be under discussion. However, a group needs guidance, particularly in the beginning. Therefore a maximum of two experienced facilitators could aid – but not steer – the group occasionally;
- The subject matter could be any question that is of interest to the group and meaningful. Prerequisite is that any frustration or limitation felt by any participant is shared, thereby

¹ As an NGO The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance has several programmes that encourage democratic reform and it provides know-how to democracy builders worldwide.

helping to move the dialogue beyond a superficial conversation. (Bohm, et al., 1991, “How to start a dialogue” section)

Pruitt and Thomas (2007) state quite similar characteristics of the dialogical process. From their point of view the most significant aspect during the process is inclusiveness. They point out that if one strives for the outcomes of the dialogue to be legitimate, inclusiveness is an utmost requirement. What is more, the authors believe that “inclusiveness is especially relevant in contexts where a historical pattern of exclusion underlies the societal problems to be addressed. The role of the dialogue process in this context is to give a voice to those who usually have no say in key decision-making processes” (pp. 26-28). It is by participation of all the stakeholders that a true inclusive setting is accomplished and that change is most likely to occur.

The above text seeks to convey dialogue as an ideal. In this respect dialogue has become rather a fashion as it appears to be a solution for all problems and cure to any societal dilemma. In his paper Lefstein counters the idea that such idealized dialogue is freed from any tension or threat. The author notes that procedures and rules are vital, specifically in those cases where the connection between participants in dialogue is fragile. Consequently – referring to Gurevitch – such circumstances might lead the partakers to fear the ‘other side’ (as cited in Lefstein, 2006, p. 6). Theories of dialogue are often questioned because they insist on and assume equality of the participants. However, as Lefstein argues, it is unfeasible to eliminate power-relations during dialogue since tension, threat and therefore fear are inherent to the dialogical process itself.

3.2 The importance of dialogue

The following sections discuss the need for dialogue. Contrary to Lefstein, this paper does advocate for dialogue as an ideal. Though taking into account the essential tradeoffs, it lies at the very heart of this research that dialogue could contribute to change within the given context.

3.2.1 A democratic perspective

If we assume that participation is a key cornerstone of plural democracy, there apparently exists a causal relationship between enhancing dialogue and strengthening democracy, especially so in democratising countries. Acknowledging that inclusiveness contributes to societies that are – or at least should be – more democratic, the value of dialogue would seem indispensable. Pruitt and Thomas (2007) advocate for social inclusion on a routine basis, above all in post-cold war nations in

which governments to some level have recognised that democracy cannot take place in sheer top-down directions (pp. 11-13). It is believed that dialogue can bring change on those levels where concrete actions have failed to do so as many times agreements such as treaties or legislation do not succeed in meeting societal challenges. Since dialogue, provided used correctly, will bring change at the individual level by offering a deeper understanding of one's thoughts and actions, societal change will be within closer reach (Pruitt and Thomas, 2007, pp. 38-39).

From the European point of view, the European Youth Forum (EYF) calls for a structured dialogue to be embarked upon. The organisation holds the opinion that “the decision-making of the [European Union] has to be based on participatory and representative democratic processes, such as a structured dialogue between young people and decision-makers” (European Youth Forum [EYF], 2006, p. 7). The EYF suggests that dialogue should be advocated as a means to bridge the gap between authorities and young people. In this respect, the suggestions of the EYF coincide with the views expressed by the European Commission in its *Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate*, through which the Commission wishes to revitalize European democracy, restore faith in the European idea and deepen a sense of European citizenship. Again, it seems that dialogue could contribute to change; on a personal and ultimately on a collective level (European Commission, 2005, pp. 2-3, 11).

3.2.2 A legal perspective

Several documents on a global and European level promote dialogue; either as such or through means of participatory processes. According to Article 12 of The Convention on the Rights of the Child, children are to have the opportunity to voice their opinions:

1. State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law. (United Nations, 1989, “Part I” section, para. “Article 12”)

Referring back to the Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life; the Charter advocates for a ‘genuine dialogue’ between authorities and young people, allowing the latter to be full actors in policy-making processes that concern and affect them. Governing bodies are to establish structures that should be representative and permanent. In addition, they should see to it that any matter of interest to the target group is dealt with accordingly. Providing for such arrangements, it is thought, offers the opportunity to youth to actively participate in community life and offers a

chance to truly exercise one's civic rights and responsibilities (Council of Europe [CoE], 2003, "Part III" section, para. 5).

3.2.3 An educational perspective

Although Lefstein disagreed with the application of dialogical models as an ideal in schools, he did state several valuable contributions to the topic. Lefstein refers to the promising work of Robin Alexander on 'dialogic teaching', which stresses a pragmatic approach of dialogue and was carefully invented through consultations of both teachers and pupils. By means of collective sharing of and building on each other's ideas, pupils as well as teachers try to find common understandings (as cited in Lefstein, 2006, pp. 11-12). It is particularly in this respect that dialogue differs from monologue. Whereas monologue favours the transfer of information based on the premise that knowledge is objective and true, and education is based on presentation and mere recitation of knowledge; dialogue presupposes conversation within the classroom to expand one's views and hence refine and redefine prior thoughts and assumptions (Westerhof-Schultz, 2004, "Monological and dialogical modes of reasoning" section, para. 1-3).

Building on the Gastil's definition of deliberation as a "discussion that involves judicious argument, critical listening, and earnest decision making" Westerhof-Schultz (2004) promotes a deliberative dialogue that insist on the student being given the opportunity to reflect and evaluate competing positions through attentive discussion with its peers. Such deliberative education advocates that young people ought to experience democracy in order to understand its principles (as cited in "The deliberative cycle and some pedagogical illustrations" section, para. 5 and "Conclusion" section, para. 6). Consequently, pupils will – through practice – acquire and develop skills and attitudes such as formulation and argumentation of one's own opinion, critical listening and thoughtfulness – to name but a few. It will allow youngsters to simply learn the values that go with democratic citizenship. According to Poppelmonde, Van Rossem, De Swaef and Fransoo (2001), the underlying necessity exist therein that our world and society have grown more complex to begin with (p. 3).

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter stated the basic principles of dialogue. It sketched the context in which this research applies the term, and concurrently, it examined the need for dialogue in modern day society. Considering the latter, it was brought to the fore that from an ideal perspective dialogical processes could contribute to a transformation of the status quo. One should bear in mind though, that in

practice tensions might seem insurmountable. Paramount therefore, is the search for such conditions that try to limit these tensions that inevitably pose a risk to a useful outcome. Nevertheless, it is clear that dialogue could help in the first stages of exploration. Moreover, it might give young people a sense of ownership of the situation and in the end hopefully of their own place on this planet.

PART III: HUNGARIAN CONTEXT

4. Conditions of Participation and Dialogue

These sections show the state of affairs with regard to youth-related issues in Hungary. Despite the fact that this research primarily concerns the situation of youth participation and dialogical processes on the local level, it will yet address the conditions of youth policy on the central level as well. What is more, since one could not comment upon these matters without considering earlier times, this chapter discusses the legacy of the past up to the status quo. Particularly in relation to the latter interviews were conducted with Kálmán Paál and Márton Beke. Respectively, they are advisor to the mayor of the 9th district in Budapest on youth issues, and former civil servant of the Youth department of the Political Department of Youth, Equal Opportunities, and Drugs of the Ministry for Youth, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities. Currently Márton Beke works at HROD, an organisation supporting youth and community development.

4.1 Historical development

Until 1989 Hungary was under communist rule. In those times the communist state-party guaranteed youth participation and provided the resources to carry out the activities. Youth participation at that time was rather a compulsory or ‘strongly recommended’ event than a choice made voluntarily. Most young people yielded to the pressure of the central system and joined the Communist Youth League, which in general functioned as a pass-through of communist values. “Despite the ceremonial proclamation of youth as a significant social group imbued with the mission ‘to build the bright communist tomorrow’, their social position was one of powerlessness and subjection” (Kovacheva, 1999, pp. 17-18). The so called re-invention of society by youth, that sounded quite promising in theory as mentioned in chapter two, proved to be a plain farce in practice as young persons were not allowed to make their own choices. To decide then for the course of direction concerning their lives was in a way unattainable for young people.

Today however, Hungary is an independent parliamentary republic wherein the 1989 changes to the constitution lay down the fundamental human rights and altered the system of government and

governmental organisations (Balázs, Czoma, Forgács & László, 2005, p. 6). Kovacheva (1999) argues though, that with the transition from communism to multi-party democracy, the uncertainties and risks young persons experience increased considerably. Although the paternalistic governmental attitude allegedly disappeared from the scene, resources for youth leisure for instance – that were provided for during communism – mostly dissolved (pp. 19-20). Subsequent to the regime change central government’s attention was rather focused on redesigning legal, organisational and budgetary structures, than it was on the elaboration of content and definition of a coherent national youth policy. Instead “government youth action was characterised by a lack of ability to effectively handle macro-level problems and conflict generation prompted by uncertainty, problems of orientation, and political preferences” (Institute for Political Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences [MTA], 2007, pp. 174-175). Concurrently, the majority of the Hungarian people lacked a sincere believe in the transition to democracy; scepticism and fear remained omnipresent (Miszlivetz, 1999, p. 164).

A nationwide research carried out in 2004 among Hungarian youth shows that half of the respondents reckon the country’s economic situation has deteriorated and even more think that citizens’ living standard declined since the change of the regime. Interesting though, is the general tendency showed by this same research of an optimistic view of the future (Ságvári, 2005, pp. 40-41).

4.2 National youth policy in Hungary

This division will take a closer look on how youth policy is managed in contemporary Hungary. It will do so from a national and a local perspective. Almost 20 years since the regime change the governing bodies responsible for youth affairs have undergone significant changes and transformations (see Figure 2).

Governmental organisation responsible for youth issues	
1986 – 1989	State Youth and Sport Agency
1990 – 1994	Prime Minister’s Office
1994 – 1998	Ministry of Culture and Public Education,
1995 – 1998	Prime Minister’s Office
1998 – 1999	Prime Minister’s Office

1999 – 2002	Ministry of Youth and Sport
2002 – 2004	Ministry of Children, Youth and Sports
2004 – 2006	Ministry of Youth, Family and Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
2006 –	Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour

Figure 2: MTA, 2007

Taking all these modifications into account, the system proves to be rather instable and uncertain at the same time because successive governments all created different institutions while abolishing those of their predecessors. One could wonder whether re-inventing the wheel has been functional in this respect. Listing each institutional arrangement related to youth issues that has been established over the years is considered too exhaustive. There are however a few institutions worthy of mentioning:

- Since the transition in 1989 children, youth and student local governments (e.g. VDÖK) as well as youth information and counselling offices were created through government support. Supposedly they acted as institutions of youth interest representation;
- During the 1994-1998 socialist-liberal term of government the Children and Youth Fund (GYIA) was founded to support youth programmes on a national level. In 1995 the Mobilitás Youth Service was created. The service is the national agency responsible for managing the European Union (EU) youth's programme. As such it organises and implements EU training and development programmes related to youth;
- The 1998-2002 centre-right government reformed the GYIA, established regional youth service offices throughout the country and formed a network of Regional Councils of Children and Youth Fund (RIT), which was financially supported by the GYIA and offered help to locally based youth initiatives. During this term, government also appointed strategic partners such as the National Conference of Students' Local Governments (HÖOK). It might be questioned though to what extent the latter could act as an independent body since it was nominated by the government itself;
- During the second socialist-liberal term from 2002 to 2006, the Hungarian Children and Youth Conference (GYIK) was established by its member organisations in the civil sector. It became a partner of government and the HÖOK in 2004. (MTA, 2007, pp. 173-181)

From 2006 onwards the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour is in charge of youth policy. This body literally defines it as one of its responsibilities to:

Operate the system of national consultation in children and youth political affairs, and to ensure the participation of the young in the preparation of decisions having direct effect on the youth – except for public and higher education – by way of youth representatives, and to promote the exercise of children’s and youth rights to free expression of opinion. (MTA, 2007, p.182)

According to the 2007 National Youth Policy Report the Hungarian government nowadays considers youth policy and the good cause of the young to be top priorities. Allegedly, it therefore promotes national and local youth initiatives and it wishes to develop civic attitudes among young people. At the time of writing government has produced a National Youth Strategy and is still working on a National Youth Programme to effectively pursue these, and other, objectives concerning youth. The former is to set the basis for an integrated youth policy – a policy that requires cooperation between the youth field and other sectors. This is not only recommended from an EU perspective, but also seen as the best way to manage youth affairs (Siurala, 2002, pp. 126-128).

Characteristic for the last decades in Hungary is the relative low priority being given to the “youth question” in general – though it might seem otherwise looking at the above. More than once central government did express the desire for a dialogue with the third sector and youth representatives, yet in many cases the institutions established to invoke this lacked legitimacy and professional and financial resources. All too often, personal preferences and party political biases lead to instability and ineffectiveness. Hence, true participation of and a dialogue with young people, as partners of government in decision-making, failed to come about. Instead, young people are more seen as the cause of problems and therefore an approach of protection – legally laid down in the constitution – is mandatory. In this sense, the paternalistic view on young people, who supposedly are unable to contribute to society, seems yet to linger from earlier times onwards (Council of Europe [CoE], 2007, p. 7).

Nevertheless, a positive signal in the right direction is perhaps the fact that at the end of last year, i.e. 2007, Hungarian government invited an international review team of the Council of Europe to evaluate and assess the current national youth policy. The committee listed several recommendations to the way Hungary manages its youth policy. In the chapter related to participation and active citizenship the team states that policy-makers should aim to contact the biggest number of young people. Allegedly, organisations representing young people are there in abundance, but only a small number of youngsters are actually member. Arguably “regular consultations on local level could be one way to deal with this task”. Furthermore, government should be aware of and respect the fact that active citizenship means more than merely being a member of established structures for participation (CoE, 2007, p. 61). It was after all mentioned in chapter two that citizenship is related to identity, and that youth identities and cultures change. In addition, young people in Central Europe are to a lesser

extent interested in being a member of formal organisations. Thus, policy-making in this area must take a leap beyond the traditional structures for youth participation.

4.3 Current and ideal situation on the local level

Even though central government is responsible for designing youth policy, its development and maintenance fall under the authority of local governments. The functions, rights and responsibilities of local government are laid down in the 1990 Local Government Act and the 1994 modifications. Characteristic is its utter autonomy that is guaranteed by the Hungarian constitution. Before the regime change local authorities functioned rather as agencies of central government and likewise did local councils heavily depend on county councils (Szalai, Zay, Högye, Baráti & Berczik, n.d. p. 335). The constitution stipulates that every settlement is entitled to have a self-governing institution with the same basic rights. At the time of writing Hungary has 3 175 local municipalities, divided over 19 counties. A further 23 cities with a population over 50 000 have county status. The capital Budapest, has a special status, and is made up out of 23 districts each having a local government (CoE, 2007, p. 3). The Constitution also states that local governments are to manage their financial affairs independently, but that central government should provide funding to support the performance of local duties, as it is obligatory for municipalities, for instance, to provide preschool and primary education and to protect ethnic and national minorities. Cities have additional responsibilities and it is also possible for local authorities to voluntarily take upon other tasks, provided they are not legally assigned to other institutions and sufficient resources exist.

The difficulty lies therein that the functions of local government are not clearly defined (Szalai, et. al., n.d. p. 337). What is more, even though national government is to provide financial aid it is yet an often-heard complaint of local authorities that these funds do not suffice. Parliament is allowed to assign new duties, but fails to see to adequate financial support. Perhaps even more important is the reliance on this type of funding as state transfers make up the largest part of municipal budget (Soós, 2002, “Legal autonomy restricted by financial autonomy” section). In this sense the top-down relationship between central and local government should be brought to an end, especially so since local authorities are in the position to observe what is happening in local communities, what the necessities are and what the consequence of implemented policy is. Local governments are ready for this after 19 years of democracy, according to Kálmán Paál (K. Paál, personal interview, November 15, 2007).

As mentioned in the Hungarian National Youth Report three levels could be distinguished within local government that are to deal with youth affairs:

- The representatives: They are mainly concerned with providing sufficient information on young people. While doing so collaboration with Mobilitás is deemed necessary. The cooperation is to lead to a concrete plan about the services youth need most. The plan mentions that Mobilitás is required to consult young people for this to come about;
- The mayor's office: Ideally a youth officer is employed who is, in cooperation with various actors, able to transfer young people's needs to the mayor's office. It should be noted that this is a voluntary task for local authorities and a mere 120-300 local institutions – out of the 3 175 – have embarked on this undertaking (CoE, 2007, p. 14);
- Public and youth relations; particularly the local government dialogue. Participation is possible through consulting the local child and youth governments, local student governments; child and youth interest reconciliation forums or youth NGO's. The Report states "a significant constituent of dialogue is that it should be run publicly, in an institutional form, established lawfully, and provide young people with genuine say in the local affairs affecting them". What is more, local government or one of its institutions should see to its practise. (MTA, 2007, p. 196)

Remarkable though is the word 'should' in the third section above. Neither does the Report say that dialogue is run publicly nor that local authorities are seeing to its putting into practise. Perhaps this in itself might already imply that local institutions in reality do not involve young people in decision-making, even though in theory the structures are there.

According to Márton Beke, young people are often not involved because local government does not understand its significance and therefore representatives do not care. Authorities would rather spend the money on something else; something they know such as healthcare. It is quite common for local authorities to say that youth is not interested in community life and active citizenship. On the other hand, they do not invite young people to participate and voice their opinion; "the system is not activating them". Yet, says Beke, young people have to be asked to participate. What happens is that youngsters do not experience active citizenship nor do they see good examples to practise it within their community and to say what is on their mind. As a result, whereas youth may seem disengaged, they frankly lack the opportunities to prove otherwise (M. Beke, personal interview, November 28, 2007). In this sense the 9th district of Budapest might be a good example as Mr Paál mentions that local government is to understand young people, to know why young people act the way they do, in order to serve them properly. After all, it should be a common goal to learn from each other. Consequently, though financial resources are without a doubt important, equally if not more important are 'szív és szem'. One should have 'heart and eye' with regard to young people (personal interview, November 15, 2007). Currently, local government having eye for the needs of young people and

being involved in issues of active citizenship depends sometimes on only one or two people that understand the importance of engaging youth and that are willing to contribute to this cause. Nevertheless, in general terms people still feel exposed to the system. They adhere to the mayor as a status symbol, who supposedly holds the solution to every problem. “‘We are not free’ is still there in the minds of the people”, comments Márton Beke (personal interview, November 28, 2007).

Preferably a professional working in two or three villages simultaneously should be involved in developing the community through an integrated approach. Hopefully a change of mind could be attained, by focussing on culture, social work and youth work at the same time. In this the mayor would be a key figure; if he were to be a more open-minded figure many things would be possible – even more so since there is freedom at the local level to decide over budget allocation (M. Beke, personal interview, November 28, 2007).

4.4 Conclusion

At the time of writing Hungary finds itself in the middle of developing its youth policy based on European guidelines. The challenge remains whether decision-makers care enough to live by the procedures and policies laid down. All too often it seems, have structures for youth participation been established without in fact utilizing them in a responsible manner. For the future, it remains to be seen whether local authorities are able to serve – and engage – youth the way they are supposed to. It can not be denied that there is a need for municipal governments to sincerely ask young people to participate in community life and to encourage them to share their opinions in dialogue. Ultimately the views of young people should be taken into consideration while shaping and implementing policy.

5. The position of the Foundation for Democratic Youth

These sections report about the mission and activities of the Foundation for Democratic Youth (DIA). In doing so two interviews were conducted with DIA personnel: János Bálega, Make a Connection! program coordinator, and Rita Galambos, executive director of DIA. With regard to the topic of this particular research the focus during these interviews was on the impact DIA currently has on the relationship between youth and local government in Hungary and how this might be improved in the future.

5.1 The Foundation for Democratic Youth as an organisation

In 1999 the Americans Roger Landrum and Richard Harrill established DIA. Considering they are both former Peace Corps volunteers, they understood the meaning of carrying out community service and the added value it gives to young people and their communities. In the 1990s they created Youth Service International to enhance youth service projects worldwide and in Hungary the Demokratikus Ifjúságért Alapítvány was considered their pilot project. Initially the idea was to form a network of local youth service programs and to carry out research into community youth service in Hungary and neighbouring countries (Foundation for Democratic Youth [DIA], “About DIA – Board & Staff” section, para. “Founders”). In almost ten years DIA has developed into a recognised player in the youth arena in Hungary. As a politically neutral public benefit non-governmental organisation it seeks to promote democratic skills and values among youngsters aged 14-25 through methods like experiential learning and voluntary activities. Especially the latter is met with suspicion and disbelief in Hungarian society as during communism the ‘voluntary Saturday’ was more of an obligation than an activity one would commence upon out of free will. Nevertheless, eventually the aim is to equip youth with tools deemed indispensable to become an active citizen and to consciously participate in society. Likewise DIA strives for community based learning to be widely recognised as a practice of formal and non-formal education. The organisation therefore tries to transfer this knowledge to decision-makers and youth workers as well.

If we ought to believe Bence Ságvári (2006), the situation in Hungary regarding youth participation in communities gives little reason for optimism. In the 2006 New Youth Review he points out that “the majority of young people simply do not see the point in expressing their needs and opinions in an

institutionalised form or of voicing their ideas constructively”. Young people in Hungary do not believe they have the power to influence local, regional or national decision-making. Besides, youth does not have faith in the possibility that their interests and intentions could lead to a change of their own fate and that of their surroundings (p. 69). This might be a result of the unsupportive governmental attitude as described in the previous chapter.

Looking back upon the activities of DIA, on a larger scale one can refer to these as a form of ‘youth empowerment’. This term correctly describes the works of DIA as the organisation experiences that active young people are indeed capable of influencing their own life as well as that of their communities. Provided they are given the essential tools in a (self) confidence-promoting environment. It is with this intention that DIA tries to counter the aforementioned situation of young people in Hungary, and no less important, the organisation sees reason for optimism in this field (Galambos, 2007, pp. 17-18).

At the time of writing the Foundation manages three programs that run on a local level. Subsequent to that, the international programs enable youngsters to exchange experiences with their peers abroad. Currently DIA directs the following programs:

- The Make a Connection! (MaC) Program is the national network program that consists of 80-100 youth and/or volunteering groups. The groups can apply for the grant program through which they can ‘win’ funding to carry out community service activities. Since feedback is given on these applications the groups can adapt their requests and therefore most of the applications, if not all, win the necessary financial resources – or at least a part of it. During the entire process young people are to be involved so they develop skills as decision-making capabilities, cooperation and communication competencies among others. After voluntary actions there usually follows a reflection session lead by the mentor of the group. The objective is to evaluate experiences so the lessons learned gradually become part of these young people’s natures. In relation to this specific program DIA could be referred to as a top-down organisation forming a background organisation that offers a frame to bottom-up initiatives of self-organised youth groups (Ságvári, 2006, p. 70). For the third consecutive year the program organises the KÖZÖD! day in April 2008. Within the framework of the Global Youth Service Day over 15000 young people will make a call for social responsibility as a fundamental pillar of democratic society. Not only are youth groups encouraged to participate and carry out volunteering activities, companies and local governments are allowed to partake as well;
- The Life Skills for Employability (LSE) Program employs high school students in the counties of Vas and Zala with essential life and employability skills and trains the teachers to apply the theory successfully in practice during mentoring hours at school. Ideally the program will enhance the

students' shift from school to the job market and show them the added value of learning through participation;

- The ÖTLET program (an acronym for Volunteering, Activity, Opportunity, Employment and Experience) enables unemployed young people aged 18-26 to gain experience at a host organisation, which can be a non-profit organisation or even a local government. Again through volunteer service and equipping youth with social and life skills, their chances on the labour market will improve. The mentors at the receiving organisations are to be provided with the necessary training. DIA manages this program in the Northern part of Hungary;
- As for the international programs; in the almost ten years the organisation exists several exchanges have taken place with young people from the United States, the Balkan countries and the Netherlands among others. The European Union (EU) or, for instance, the Embassy of the United States of America in Budapest supported these projects. With regard to the former requests for funding could be made to the Mobilitás Youth Service as mentioned in chapter four. (DIA, "Programs" section)

The first two programs listed are managed in cooperation with the International Youth Foundation (IYF) seated in Baltimore. In Hungary DIA is the partner of IYF from where they obtain professional support. Furthermore, the IYF can act as a broker organisation thereby making it possible that multinationals as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility strategies support the activities of DIA. This way Nokia sponsors the network program; similarly is the LSE program funded by the GE Foundation². Whereas these two programs are supported with corporate funding, the ÖTLET program is more or less managed through state funding considering the National Employment Institute – the organisation that manages this program on the central level – is an institute of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

Last but not least, worthy mentioning is that these are exciting times for DIA as the organisation is in the process of developing a new strategy. The ÖTLET program has almost come to an end and this spring Nokia will make a decision whether or not to continue the MaC program another three years in

² The philanthropic organisation of the General Electric Company

Hungary with DIA. The activities within the LSE frame will carry on until summer 2009. Questions as how to continue on promoting DIA's message and in what form are therefore paramount.

5.2 Current position and ideal impact

In all its programs the Foundation deems it important that youngsters learn through experience. The latter quite lacks if we are to take a closer look at the educational system in Hungary. In elementary, secondary and higher education alike teaching is rather frontal. Meaning that the teacher teaches and pupils and students are mere recipients of knowledge, as described in chapter three as 'monologue teaching'. Schooling in this form is called encyclopaedic and reproductive without any emphasis on practice. Consequently the level of practical skills and attitudes of students is immature. Perhaps more importantly, few schools in Hungary pay attention to issues as active and responsible citizenship within their curriculum, though they should do so. As Galambos (2007) states "az iskolának nem az életre kell nevelni, hanem az életet kell élni az iskolában is a maga komplexitásában [...]" – freely translated this means that schools should not prepare pupils for life, but life has to be lived within school as well in all its complexities (p. 18). In a way DIA does what schools fail to do; equipping youth with skills such as being able to work in a team, critical thinking and making a contribution to society. In this respect DIA offers young people the means to commence upon and continue a dialogue – albeit that the outcomes might not always be successful. Nonetheless, as mentioned before, there is reason for optimism in this field: A growing number of schools do think about these issues and an increasing number of youngsters are willing to participate in community service-learning activities.

The fact that local governments can register to participate during the KÖZÖD! Day is already mentioned above. "Last year only one did," says Ms Galambos (R. Galambos, personal interview, January 22, 2008). In this sense the situation is less hopeful, as again it might indicate that for the larger part local governments simply do not care. There is an option for local administrations to sign a partnership agreement with DIA, but even though this agreement does not have profound consequences it frequently happens that local governments do not wish to embark on this. When they do it appears to be not so much a conscious act out of participation in or contribution to the youth area, but rather an act out of financial benefit. After all, a youth group carrying out community service implies that local government need not spend money on that particular issue. All in all, local administrations never approached DIA themselves out of genuine interest, nor did they show any intention for long term cooperation.

During the interview with Márton Beke the role of DIA on the local level was briefly discussed. In spite of local government's reluctance to support the organisation or its message DIA yet continues to work on the local level and attempts for its convictions to be known. According to Mr Beke this is partly what makes the organisation a best practice of youth empowerment (M. Beke, personal interview, November 28, 2007). In the past DIA never consciously sought to develop good relations with local administrations; it was apparently accidentally in case a good liaison was achieved. The Foundation experienced these sort of 'windows of opportunities' rather because the right person within a particular local government happened to be at the right place at the right time (R. Galambos, personal interview, January 22, 2008). Present-day DIA notices that some local governments start to develop strategies concerning youth – in line with central government as outlined in chapter four. One should however not be misled, asserts Ms Galambos. Again, at the surface it might seem as though local – or even central – administrations in Hungary care deeply about issues of active youth citizenship and empowering young people by offering them a say in, for instance, community planning. Yet, beyond the surface the structures prove to lack actual content (personal interview, January 22, 2008). As an example Mr Bálega points out that the local student governments supposedly were to replace the tasks of youth participation in community life after 1989; that to have one's say is indeed possible. Almost 20 years afterwards though, no one exactly knows what the activities of these student governments are or what this form of representation should mean (personal interview, November 26, 2007).

In relation to eventual partnerships between young people and local government János Bálega mentions that with the help of a MaC regional coordinator it does at times occur that local administration is willing to reconsider its attitude. Municipal governments approach youth groups as partners to some extent in due course. Yet, the financial support remains a problem as local administrations have little resources themselves (J. Bálega, personal interview, November 26, 2007). The role of the regional coordinator in this sense is vital, as pointed out by Mr Bálega. Instead of approaching local governments from the central office of DIA in Budapest, which might give the former the impression that the Foundation believes it knows the situation; the regional coordinator is to a larger extent familiar with the circumstances on the local level. This is because he or she visits the groups and institutions regularly. Possible tensions and suspicion may be removed accordingly. Furthermore, if the local coordinator acting as a mentor of the youth group owns the skills and attitude to constructively negotiate with local government this might bridge the gap between the mission of DIA and the situation on the local level. Nonetheless, this requires a local coordinator who is capable of dealing with such formal and bureaucratic contacts and who is able to convince civil servants of the good cause (R. Galambos, personal interview, January 22, 2008).

However, these days limiting suspicion is not an easy task in the youth field since there have been a few corruption scandals on the central level. A civil servant in the Ministry favoured alleged NGO's

in the youth area by supplying these with funds of which it is certain that these were not spent on the cause they were aimed for as these receivers were not even registered as NGO's (R. Galambos, personal interview, January 22, 2008).

The above makes cooperation in the youth field with local institutions and between NGO's themselves more difficult; even more so, according to Ms Galambos, because the competition between NGO's is high. Although DIA as a public benefit organisation does of course not sell products, it markets ideas instead. Many of the 44 000 NGO's in Hungary are struggling for survival and are applying for similar funding. In this respect DIA is always cautious because one never knows what the intentions of other NGO's are. Mr Bálega also wonders about the competition: "Akik viszik, miért nem viszik együtt?" Why is it that the organisations in the youth arena with more or less similar messages and similar target groups are competing? Why does one always seem to look at this issue from the point of view of the organisations and not from the perspective of young people? (J. Bálega, personal interview, November 26, 2007).

A step in the right direction could be clarifying the various roles; what the intentions of DIA and local governments are. What follows then are more small steps while offering clear frames in which young people can move. DIA alike, local administration should in the end also support and engage youth by creating clear frames. They should provide something young people can fall back on while leaving enough room for initiative. Furthermore, as a genuine partner local governments need to offer the necessary control and monitoring. After all, the rules of the game with regard to the DIA youth groups are also clear: A group has to sign a contract with DIA, a local coordinator must attend a training session and the groups should be in touch with the regional coordinator and so on (J. Bálega, personal interview, November 26, 2007). Nevertheless, these small steps that are necessary for the relationship between youngsters and local governments to improve systematically require time, people, energy and financial resources. It is certain that DIA at this moment does not have the capacity to provide for these matters. Similarly, in general local institutions do not have the appropriate strategies to enhance these as solutions to problems or dilemmas remain to be rather ad hoc.

5.3 Conclusion

Up until now the cultural and historical development were occasionally addressed. However, during the course of the research it appeared that the study in its entirety cannot be placed outside these contexts. The fact that Hungarian education is based on recitation, that the youth issue is approached

as young people being the cause of problems – if not in theory then at least in practice – that democratic spirit does not seem to be traditionally embedded; these and more questions are a, possibly natural, result of such historical developments. Perhaps one should not be surprised that many Hungarians are rather passive and do not see the point in making their opinion heard. If DIA decides to consciously take up relations with local institutions this depends largely on the context as well. It depends on personal contacts, on what DIA exactly wants from local administration and whether or not DIA and local administrations speak the same language. In that both DIA and local government share a goal in terms of youth empowerment.

6. Case studies

As already mentioned in the introduction young people within the Foundation's network are approached and asked for their opinions and ideas during group interviews. Existing contacts within the Make a Connection! Program have been used for this chapter, which ultimately resulted in three case studies. Tatabánya and Miskolc were visited as it followed from the interview with János Bálega that in the former town the relationship between youth and local government is to some extent already developed. At the same time the dialogue between young people and governmental institutions on the local level is systematically underdeveloped in the city of Miskolc. Furthermore, several groups were visited in smaller settlements in the Northern part of Hungary, the Bükk Hegyhát. The focus was on whether these youngsters find a sound relationship with local government important in the first place, what they think should change and how they perceive the role of the Foundation for Democratic Youth (DIA).

6.1 Tatabánya

Beginning of December 2007 the focus group in Tatabánya, a town of some 75 000 inhabitants in Hungary's Central Transdanubian, region took place. Besides the group interview with five youngsters of the TASLI group, interviews were conducted with Ágnes Tromposch, youth officer within the local government and regional coordinator at DIA, and Péter Stefánik, youth worker at the city's youth office TAHITI.

This group in Tatabánya is part of the network for a relative short period of time as it was created in February 2007. With regard to their activities, the youngsters carry out community services in a home for mentally and physically handicapped people in their hometown. Once or twice a month they meet and sometimes they simply sing together and enjoy each other's company. However, in summer all of them, the TASLI members and the disabled went for a trip to Tata as an outdoor program.

Referring to their thoughts about local government, the youngsters of this group do not see any signs that representatives think anything special about them as a group of volunteering young people; "biztos gondol valamit, de mi nem tudjuk, hogy mit." (TASLI, personal group interview, December 1, 2007). The only contact they have is with youth officer Ágnes Tromposch, of whom they say that she

sincerely tries to involve young people and make the representatives aware of the potential of youth. Nonetheless, she is on her own in this case as the civil servants, according to the interviewees, rather remain at the political issues and fail to look beyond. Ms Tromposch states it is difficult to represent the interests of young people and to attain a situation where civil servants and young people understand each other (Á. Tromposch, personal interview, December 1, 2007). In the end local government does not involve them in any decisions it makes concerning young people. For instance, the TASLI members point out that they wish for a 'közösségi tér' to be created; a place for the community that is not so much a place for entertainment, but rather offers an opportunity for all young people in town to come and share experiences in an informal setting. A sign of communication between the local student government (VDÖK) and the administration or its outcomes is unfortunately also not felt by these youngsters. They think that probably the relation between these two bodies is merely institutional and hence lacks actual content. What is more, when they were asked whom to turn to if they were to have a question or idea about youth issues or if they simply wish to express what is on their mind, they did not know it is possible to approach the student's government. On the other side however, Ms Tromposch said that the TASLI members do have this information and do know they are able to turn to the VDÖK (Á. Tromposch, personal interview, December 1, 2007). Apparently this is an incorrect assumption.

The young volunteers do however deem it important for a good relationship between young people and local administration to develop, for this is not the optimal situation. If only the attitude of the civil servants were to change they might focus more on the youth field and as a result they may find the activities of the group equally significant. As one of the group members states: "Ilyen van és most légy szí, figyeljeteK egy kicsit ráK is!" – "What we do exists, and now please pay some attention to us as well!"

Péter Stefánik also believes that the situation at local government is over-politicised; in that representatives see politics in everything. Basic trust lacks as a consequence. He thinks this is a reaction from past times. Similarly, it would be idealistic to expect that people will express their wishes from the bottom-up considering everything has been decided for them from the top in earlier times. Many people think a different approach is simply not possible (personal interview, November 30, 2007). What remains is a view on young people that is not based on reality or the current identities of youth citizenship. Furthermore, local authorities should start to become aware of the fact that money alone is not a solution. Institutions could support in other ways as well; sometimes a mere gesture can suffice. In this sense 19 years of democracy is too little time for a change of mentality – which is necessary – to come about. Apparently, though the institutions are ready, one should not forget that in the end the people ought to make these democratic institutions work properly (Pratchett & Lowndes, 2004, pp. 92-93). Verheijen (2001) states that training could be useful in the search to support administration reforms. However, particularly in Central and Eastern European countries such

tools are underdeveloped since politicians are sceptic and the emphasis is mainly on the adoption of legislation than on enhancing a different attitude and approach (pp. 29-30). Tromposch recounts that there is no training for civil servants in Tatabánya; she reckons it might be a good idea, though. The caution and suspicion, for example, may have prevented the local government of Tatabánya to sign a contract with DIA, being an organisation located in Budapest whose actions are pointed at community service. Perhaps DIA could provide for this training if there were to be sufficient funding, for instance through a grant program, admits Ms Galambos (R. Galambos, personal interview, January 22, 2008).

Regarding the difference between local government and DIA, Ms Tromposch is very clear. “Az önkormányzatban ügyek vannak, a DIA-ban emberek.” Whereas representatives in the administration are most of the time occupied with ‘matters’, the activities of DIA are focused on people; they are useful and show results. Furthermore, in DIA issues are not scattered between ideologies and the ever-present bureaucracy. She believes that DIA contributes to a dialogue by empowering these young people, which should be a task for local authorities as well (Á. Tromposch, personal interview, December 1, 2007).

It appears that the connection between youth and local government in Tatabánya has yet to develop. It should be noted that there is another DIA group in this city. TESZT (Make Tatabánya More Beautiful) started carrying out community service activities by renovating playgrounds. Most probably there is more communication between them and representatives as it involves the public space. Fortunately, it seems that local administration took up this good example to launch a program to renovate all the city’s playgrounds based on EU standards (International Youth Foundation [IYF], 2008, p. 3). Perhaps if one were to interview the youngsters in this particular group, it might put a different complexion on the matter.

6.2 Miskolc

A group interview was conducted with young volunteers from the Factory Extreme Sport Arena in Miskolc, again to discuss the current situation of young people and local government. This third-largest city of Hungary is situated in the Northern region and is characterised by its large Roma population and relative high unemployment rate. Subsequent to the focus group this section uses the remarks and answers to questions asked through e-mail to DIA regional coordinator for the Northern region, Erika Urbán.

As the name might already imply, the volunteers are active in the extreme sports scene in an old factory located on a former industrial site outside of Miskolc. The area is home to a skate and BMX park and an indoor climbing wall. It is a place where young people can meet and do what they like foremost, irrespective of their cultural and social background. At the time of writing this DIA group saw their application for funds in order to renovate one of the building's cellars into a youth club approved by the Make a Connection! (MaC) Program.

The situation of Tatabánya alike, the volunteers of the Factory Arena say that a true dialogue between youth and local authorities is non-existent in Miskolc. Once more, civil servants do not actually seem to care. Although, these youngsters add, there are also few opportunities for them to support possible youth initiatives in that there is a lack of funding (Factory Extrém Sport Aréna, personal group interview, January 25, 2008). In fact, according to Ms Urbán, local institutions sometimes use the enthusiasm of the volunteering young people to their own benefit as free employment. More than once have these active youngsters been approached to participate in the organisation of cultural programs managed by local government. However, when it comes down to taking youth seriously and listening to their opinions, civil servants fail to do so (E. Urbán, personal communication, February 18, 2008).

The group reveals several (personal) thoughts on how they think the state of affairs has grown into what it is now. There are not enough professionals that understand the situation of youth in contemporary Hungary. A representative in Miskolc may believe he or she knows the interests of young people and what kind of programs they would like. However, a young person in present-day Hungarian society absolutely does not hold the same opinion as times of course do change. Again it would seem that civil servants have no idea what is on the mind of young people these days. A somewhat more practical approach, brought to the fore by one of the volunteers, is that local administration is simply reluctant to spend money on young people or their initiatives.

Apparently the youth officer in Miskolc has not yet succeeded in representing the interests of these young people. The volunteers were quite unanimous when asked about their experiences with this officer: "Az ember nem is tudja, hogy hol van" – "One does not even know where this person is." What is more, according to one of them, the problem in Hungary is the fact that many young persons do not dare to take the necessary steps so they can make their ideas known. Naturally, partly youth does not care as well because they do not see the point of it all. On the other hand, they are not taught the skills at school to turn this tendency and develop a genuine motivation. What remains is a feeling or conviction that if an idea is shared with a teacher it will be in vain, for it will not meet any response. This of course depends on the teacher as well. Therefore, the group deems it important for changes in the educational system to be implemented. After all, teachers are not only teachers; they could also be seen as role models. In the end pupils will never forget a good example – especially if

the example is shown systematically in the years they grow into adulthood (Factory Extrém Sport Aréna, personal group interview, January 25, 2008).

With regard to the role of DIA, the group finds that the organisation fills in the gap that local government leaves open; “a DIA betölti a helyet.” Whereas the volunteers experienced that the options at a local level are limited, DIA supports young people at more levels. Among others they mention the possibility to organise or join a group, the building of skills and the grant program. The activities of the Foundation are truly based on the need of youth, which should be a principal task of local government as well.

All in all the members of the Factory Arena consider it essential that more good examples are shown – not only in schools. Next to DIA such examples should be spread by other organisations, projects, even persons for that matter. While doing so information will convey and perhaps a common language could be found (Factory Extrém Sport Aréna, personal group interview, January 25, 2008).

6.3 Bükki Hegyhát

This final case study covers the experiences concerning the topic of people – like Szablocs Varga – who live in the area of the Bükki Hegyhát, a micro-region (‘kistérség’) in the districts around Ózd. The latter, some 40 kilometers North-west of Miskolc and near the Slovakian border, thrived during the old communist days. Nowadays however, both Ózd and the micro-region are facing high levels of unemployment and the young people who live there start to leave the region in search for places with better conditions. Together with János Bálega, MaC program coordinator and Erika Urbán, regional coordinator, several villages within the micro-region were visited and a group interview took place with volunteers from and the leader of the Órhegy Egyesület, which is one of the oldest groups in the network of DIA.

It was already during the interview with Márton Beke that the area around Ózd was mentioned. Apparently local government here works together with entrepreneurs to build a youth innovation house with the aim to keep the young people in the region and to offer them a better perspective for the future. They are able to develop the region by teaming up their knowledge and resources. Likewise, says Beke, local authorities actually believe in the potential of young people; this helps a great deal in translating ideas to practice (M. Beke, personal interview, November 28, 2007).

Looking back upon the case studies of Tatabánya and Miskolc, one sees that a dialogue between youth and local government has yet a long way to go. Perhaps the micro-region is conversely a good example to investigate further as Ms Urbán comments that a dialogue between youth and local authorities tends to work better in smaller settlements.

As an association the Órhegy Egyesület has a wide variety in membership; ranging from local government and NGO's, to individuals. In 1996 the association initiated the establishment of a youth parliament with elections, representatives and a president in Ózd. This 'kamaszparlament' was to involve young people in community life and to make them familiar with the true democratic spirit. In this sense it did not only enhance awareness of rights, but of responsibilities at the same time. A former member of the youth parliament in Ózd recounts that local authorities supported them to some degree. Nonetheless, simultaneously authorities wished for a certain control over the parliament's actions. One was indeed to point out how nice the mayor was and what good a job the administration did for the city. While the youngsters in fact wanted to change the status quo (Órhegy Egyesület, personal group interview, January 25, 2008).

A few years ago in 2004, the youth parliament moved its activities from the city of Ózd to the 13 villages in the micro-region that all face the remains of communism. By encouraging the participation of young people and stressing that their ideas and projects are indispensable for the enhancement of the region, the message is among others to create a dialogue amongst different generations and to establish genuine cooperation for the future (Farkas, 2007, pp. 18-20). Over the years the presence of the youth parliament has somewhat become a natural matter for the 12 000 citizens of the micro-region. Following a recommendation made by the association, youth is considered a partner even to the extent that an 'ifjúsági bizottság' – a delegation of young people representing their village – will be involved in the strategy-making for the region's development; alongside local governments, corporations and NGO's. All of this within the frame of an EU supported program of some 8 million euros (Órhegy Egyesület, personal group interview, January 25, 2008).

According to Erika Urbán it is simply an 'élet-halál kérdés' – a question of life and death for these villages to refrain the youngsters from leaving. Otherwise mayors will find themselves on the verge of closing down schools and thereby having to witness that community life for the larger part disappears (E. Urbán, personal communication, February 18, 2007). This happened in Csokvaomány. Now that the school has vanished a DIA group is renovating a youth club near the football pitch to at least allow the young people to meet in their spare time in a supportive environment, instead of leaving them wandering around. Thus, in this respect it is also in the interest of local authorities to involve young people. Were the situation to develop in that direction, perhaps only then will for instance local government in a larger city like Miskolc start paying attention to youth, according to Ms Urbán.

There seem to be more reasons why a dialogue works better in smaller settlements. In Hangony, a little neighbouring village of Ózd, a volunteer states that contacts are easier established and that in most cases a personal link is already there. In this particular village, the director of the school is also a representative in the local administration. Moreover, although the local government monitors on a regular basis, it leaves enough space for initiative and movement (S. Varga, personal communication, January 25, 2008). In this respect, local authorities appear to provide clear frames on which youth and the community of Hangony can build.

PART IV: CONCLUSION

7. Opportunities & Challenges

While linking theory and practice this part provides the final remarks about the research into a dialogue between young people and local authorities in Hungary. In doing so, it first explores the opportunities and challenges and, at a later stage in chapter eight, a concluding statement to the central research question follows.

7.1 Opportunities

- Currently the Foundation for Democratic Youth (DIA) mainly contributes to a constructive dialogue by enhancing youth empowerment. The organisation builds essential social skills and offers a frame that leaves enough space for creativity and young people's own interests. Hence, DIA gives them the opportunity to develop a sense of belonging and provides a platform for youngsters to learn how to effectively interact with adults. These are considered essential when commencing upon a dialogue;
- The relationship between youth and local government seems to work better in smaller settlements. DIA should focus on those partnerships and approach mayors in such towns primarily. It is hoped that a multiplier effect of best practices could gradually spread the country;
- Training of civil servants could be an interesting project for the future. Provided the Foundation finds the necessary funding to implement such a project, DIA has the network to offer this training;
- The research shows that youngsters frequently do not know the course of action in case they have any questions concerning their rights and responsibilities. DIA could provide for this during the various training sessions of mentors and/or teachers; instruct the regional and local coordinators to give special attention to this issue;
- When promoting dialogue DIA could organise 'round table' sessions to enhance exploration of interests. Preferably an objective third party to reduce the tensions will be approached. The

9th district in Budapest could be a good take-off as the interest to understand young people has already been expressed here;

- Referring to the case of Tatabánya; DIA should be clearer about its mission and objectives, particularly concerning local governments. Consequently, it is thought that municipalities would sooner be inclined to become a genuine partner.

7.2 Challenges

- At the time of writing DIA finds itself in the middle of a changing environment: The ÖTLET program will for sure not return in its current setting and it is yet unclear whether the Make a Connection! program will be awarded another three-year term. Until then only the Life Skills for Employability program remains. The continuation of DIA as an organisation is crucial were the foundation to even consider giving priority to a dialogue between youth and local government;
- The scandals in the youth sector do not make the activities of DIA any easier. In fact, it will take much persuasion to convince not only policy-makers, but the general public as well, that DIA sincerely strives to contribute to the greater good;
- As a consequence of the above it is considered increasingly difficult to form a platform with other NGO's in this area as DIA at the moment might fall under the category 'suspicious organisations'. Nonetheless, for a multiplier of best practises to occur, the actions of DIA alone might not suffice;
- After almost 20 years of democracy Hungary is still repairing the gaps of not only the communist era, but also the years before this period. Although main legal and structural provisions for youth participation seem to be established, it has yet to become an embedded element in decision-makers' thinking and general attitude that young people are not to be looked upon as a problem, but as partners in dialogue instead. In this sense bottom-up initiatives – such as the activities of DIA – remain a fairly unknown aspect in community life and at the same time perhaps not even willingly received.

8. Concluding Remarks

In the first few chapters the word ‘normative’ was mentioned more than once. In a way this entire research is norm giving in the sense that I believe that a solid and effective relationship between youth and local government has intrinsic value and therefore is something worth striving for. I believe that dialogue is a generator for change. During my time at the office in Budapest and the field trips to the various youth groups I have been in the centre of dialogical processes and was able to experience that dialogue can contribute to more understanding. Unfortunately perhaps, the current situation in Hungary needs change and the parties involved need to understand each other.

At the premise of this paper lie the assumptions that the relationship between young persons and local administrations in Hungary is weak and that the Foundation for Democratic Youth (DIA) not only wishes, but also could contribute in order for this connection to improve. The central question was therefore:

To what extent can DIA contribute to a constructive dialogue between youth and local government?

There are several ways to approach this question. Firstly, the Foundation could contribute through its network with young people in Hungary. Secondly, DIA could contact civil servants at local government. Thirdly, by teaming up with other recognised organisations or persons in the field and forming a strong block, it would be possible to enhance dialogue indirectly. Lastly, a mixture of the above could naturally be a possibility as well. At the time of writing I have the impression that DIA foremost contributes and is able to contribute to a dialogue by means of empowering young people, while meeting them in their present needs and offering a clear framework. If we are to follow the line of reasoning of the Miskolc case study; young people either lack motivation to become involved or they simply do not have the courage to take steps up the ladder and approach adults. However, taking the Bükki Hegyhát micro-region into consideration, one notices that a fruitful dialogue and change of the status quo are possible, since these young persons are motivated and do effectively communicate with adults and professionals. Perhaps more importantly, they have the experience what it means to be a responsible citizen and to give back to their community. Consequently, youngsters who are familiar with the message of DIA carry this knowledge with them. It is precisely this that lacks at local government. As the average Hungarian civil servant does not have experience in contributing to the common good – particularly not when they were young themselves – it is even more difficult for representatives to understand why the inclusion of youth is important. In this respect do not only young people need more good examples, this applies to civil servants as well.

A good sign is the development of a coherent youth policy at the central level. Considering policy-making is incremental this naturally needs time and many small steps. Nevertheless, hopefully this and the recent recommendations made by the Council of Europe will lead to such conditions through which Hungary can show to the rest of the world that it deems the position and engagement of its youth population vital. Instead of emphasising a paternalistic approach, a sound youth policy should entail involving youngsters and genuinely listening to their voice from the very beginning of policy-making and implementation onwards. After all, young people are not the only ones who have responsibilities to fulfil.

As can be concluded from the previous chapters, the scandals and the overly politicised situation make true cooperation between NGO's and local governments quite difficult, especially in the youth area. What is more, I am of the opinion that Hungarians in general are not very open-minded people and that they rather live in the past and state that change is impossible, than look to the future and move on. Yet, as a society the country should look to the future and move on. After all, it is progress that any society is wishing for. This is perhaps the basic clash between DIA and local authorities: Whereas DIA does look to the future and does consider young people to be the leaders of tomorrow; local government lingers on in the past and seems to have lost the balance between politics and governing. Ultimately it depends on the context whether or not DIA decides to initiate cooperation with local government or other NGO's for that matter.

It was mentioned in the introduction that the research should lead to a practical framework for DIA. However, a change in attitude is needed foremost not only with regard to local authorities, but concerning youth as well. Traditionally young people are not considered as equal partners, but at the same time they often do not look upon themselves as having the potential to become full worthy partners. The work of DIA indicates without a doubt that good effects can be attained. Let us hope that – besides DIA – local government becomes aware of young people's potential and puts their cause on the agenda. Perhaps with the years a common language between all parties can be found.

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