

“Future Education”: Participatory Elaboration of Education for Sustainable Development in the “Learning City Gelsenkirchen”

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Abstract:

The “Future City 2030+” competition, initiated by the “Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung” (Federal Ministry of Education and Research), posits that sustainability can only be achieved through the participation of local communities. In this framework, the “Learning City Gelsenkirchen” has leaned on Education for Sustainable Development as a foundation for participatory development and implementation of the “future education” vision. This report highlights the potential this approach offers for engaging additional stakeholders, the importance of expectations, and the role of academic support.

Keywords:

Sustainable development; Participation; Cooperation; Sustainability; Municipal responsibility

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1. Introduction

Sustainability, according to the assumption in the “City of the Future 2030+” competition of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), can only be realized with the people on the ground ^[1]. Funding was therefore provided for cities and communities that develop new solutions for a sustainable future with science and the population for a sustainable future.

The “Learning City” participation project focused on the topic of education. The report first presents the participation-oriented further development of education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into “future

education.” It then describes what working with a separate approach to participation means for its sustainability and sustainability and scientific monitoring, focusing on the role of expectations and expectations and conceptual clarity. A participation-oriented understanding of future education is then outlined.

2. Participation-oriented further development of ESD into future education

The “City of the Future 2030+” competition was divided into three phases. The first phase (2015–2016) aimed to develop visions of a sustainable city, which is oriented

towards the “everyday needs of citizens”^[1]. The result of the joint project of the city of Gelsenkirchen and the FU Berlin’s vision was “Future Education”, a participation-oriented further development of the long-standing work of the agenda office in the field of education for sustainable development: “We are..... on ‘future education’, the combination of in-house inclusive, equitable and high-quality education with the ‘Education for sustainable development’”^[2].

In the second phase of the competition (2017–2018), the development of planning and implementation concepts for the realization of 20 selected visions was initiated. At the heart of the “Learning City” project was the establishment of real-world laboratories that intertwined education and space on different levels and were accompanied in their work by local scientific partners. That agenda bureau invited the city society to develop practical modules. It was a concept for the implementation of future education in four real-world laboratories with 16 practice modules, which was adopted by the city council in 2018.

In the third phase (2019–2022), practical testing and research of the concept. The network was expanded by the University of Applied Sciences Dortmund, which in the second phase has already developed the real-world laboratory “Participation in the Neighborhood” and now contributes to future education and cooperation between science and practice at the real-world laboratory level. The agenda office was responsible for the coordination of the network and the awarding of contracts as well as support and advice of the practical modules, the Free University of Berlin supported the city with **Figure 1** (Real-world laboratories of the “Learning City”).

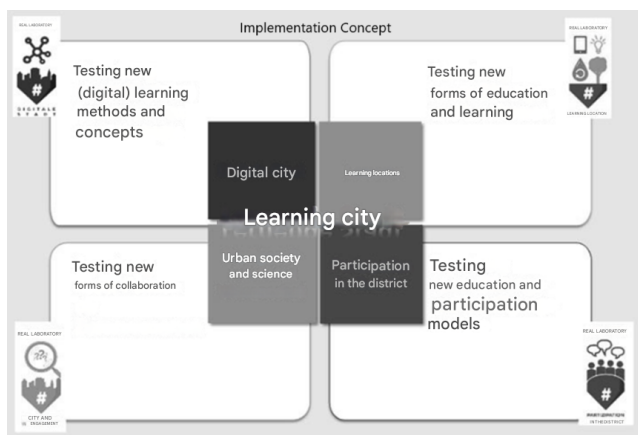


Figure 1. Real-world laboratories of the “Learning City”

Expertise in the implementation of municipal education and participation projects, continuously scientifically assessed developments and integrated the contributions of the stakeholder groups involved at the overall project level.

3. Implications for the further development of ESD in future education

At the overall project level, the extent to which the implementation of the vision “To future education” about the existing participation-oriented approach to ESD has particular potential for the development of sustainable approaches, and what role conceptual clarity and a uniform understanding of “future education” play in this.

3.1. Implications for participation

The further development of ESD into future education led to an opening up to the participation of new groups of actors. The implementation of “Gelsenkirchen avatars” in the real-world laboratory “Digital City” was carried out with students from the Westphalian University school in Gelsenkirchen. This raised questions about understanding and the limits of participation, including the question of whether the award of study services or contracts could be included. A clearly defined understanding of “future education” played hardly any role in the implementation process: In the real-world laboratory “Participation in the Neighborhood”, those involved hardly referred to the definition. The decisive factor was the follow-up ability of the term to meet their concerns, which range from environmental aspects to emancipatory educational ideals extended to reaching new immigrants. This is confirmed by political definitions, and the conceptual or definitional fuzziness within the ESD debate for responding to the diversity of the educational sector^[3].

The fact that when working with one’s concept, definitions, practical experiences, and scientific findings that are available in the work with ESD, it has been hardly problematized. On the contrary, the parties involved were rather accommodated by the fact that a time-consuming reception of existing knowledge and the examination of the limits of one’s creative possibilities. The city’s vision of future education was particularly attractive

because it was conceived as a free projection surface for the hopes and wishes of those involved, consistently from their perspective.

3.2. Implications for the sustainability of participation

Research on municipal education and participation approaches shows that high expectations are key drivers of engagement, but the likelihood of disappointments will affect long-term participation ^[4]. The field is characterized by a discrepancy between objectives and implementation, which are largely based on under-complex concepts of can be traced back to the numerous prerequisites, ex-influencing factors, and complex interactions that are concrete measures and targets, such as skills transfer or the reduction of such disadvantage.

Projects such as the “Learning City” have an impact primarily in the form of learning effects among each other and about the common concerns that arise in the course of cooperation ^[5]. This is useful because exchanges about the different perspectives of those involved, their motives, and understandings are essential for successful implementation and anchoring ^[6-8]. In addition, this can also increase the “generally increased problem-solving ability” ^[9]. However, since the success of participation is often reduced to the achievement of complex goals, essential prerequisites are not taken into account or are taken for granted ^[10].

3.3. Implications for scientific monitoring

The initial plan was to convey realistic expectations to avoid disappointments and to prevent the end of participation. Given their importance as drivers of participation, however, the high expectations were deliberately used to initiate processes of understanding and to promote them in a targeted manner through scientific classification. Disappointments in achieving

the goals were responded to by referring to external factors and the lack of prerequisites. It was also shown to what extent these prerequisites had been created and that they also contribute to a generally increased ability to solve problems — an unplanned factor but one that is particularly important for the future viability of the city. Viewing the “learning city” as a learning and understanding process led to relief and encouragement at all levels.

4. Conclusion

The further development of ESD into “future education” was particularly attractive for the participation of urban society in the development of sustainable approaches, as this vision represents a projection surface for their wishes and expectations. At the same time, however, the long-term nature of the participation is jeopardized, as the high expectations of those involved do not take into account the basic prerequisites for cooperation. These under-complex ideas often mean that successes are not recognized as such. Scientific support can support participation projects by not clarifying unrealizable expectations, but consciously using them to initiate learning and understanding processes. Conceptual openness is not a shortcoming, but rather makes urban visions particularly attractive, especially since the compatibility of uniform understandings and the right to participation is questionable: Who determines what future education is? How is it ensured that all those involved are taken into account equally, and how is understanding enforced among all those involved? Blurred definitions provide an opportunity for exchange among those involved who feel addressed and motivated by the term. What future education is develops in the process, as do the prerequisites for its implementation — and thus for greater future viability.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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