**Political youth education in Germany.[[1]](#endnote-1)**

**Presenting a qualitative study on its biographically long term effects**

**Abstract**

Political youth education in extra-curricular settings has been comparatively well funded in Germany since second wold war and has been evaluated in a nationwide survey during the last decade. Now there is an impact analysis presented, which explores the long-term effect out of the perspective off participants. The former participants retell their own education- and life story about five years later. The impact analysis generated a typology of biographical sustainability and shows the effects of political youth education by means of single case analysis and case comprehensive topics. The quintessence is summarized in nine statements.

**Contents**

1. Political youth education in Germany
   1. Post war history

1.2 Knowledge, judgement, action as the triad in political youth education

1. Initial situation and case history of the impact analysis
2. Research design of the study
3. Typology of the long-term effectiveness of political youth education
4. Summary of Mareike´s case reconstruction: „To be able to shape one´s own life even concerning computers”
5. Significance of pedagogical persons and learning venues – Selected comprehensive topics

6.1 Pedagogical persons

6.2 Learning venues, distant and close

6.2.1 Distant: educational institutions, memorials, journeys, excursions

6.2.2 Close: on site, in the living environment

1. Quintessence of the impact study

**Keywords**

Political youth education, extra-curricular, impact analysis, adolescence, sustainability, pedagogical persons, learning venue, the political

1. **Political youth education in Germany**

1.1 Post war history

Government-funded extra-curricular political youth education in Germany can be looked at as a special achievement of post-war Germany. The reeducation program of the allies and in particular the United States initiated offers for adolescents to overcome their involvement in an authoritarian following and to start a democratic process bottom up. This took place during seminars for adolescent team leaders or pupil representatives during international encounters as in Great Britain 1948 with 300 team leaders organized by the educational institution Jugendhof Vlotho. Finally direct controversy about experiences during fascism was on the agenda, succeeding in bringing together “young fascists and anti-fascists“ in conferences. Sometimes even „former National Socialists” are involved in the discussions (Lorenz 2003, p. 93-95).

The federal youth plan, which was first started in 1950 with the relatively high sum of 18 Mio DM was aimed at supporting a democratic attitude. The federal youth plan was thought as a counter project to the totalitarian and centralistic youth organizations of the Third Reich. To start with, they supported mainly ideologically independent providers of youth work. Already at the beginning of the 1950s, shortly after professional extra-curricular education joined forces nationwide, the first programs for youth educational teamers were started (Schillo 2011, p. 10). During those years, a lot of people took part in educational tours i.e. to the United States in order to learn about American ideas regarding democracy. In this respect Jürgen Habermas, the protagonist of ‘ideological criticism’ called himself a ‚product of reeducation‘ (Widmaier 2012, p. 11).

Although the post war period in Germany was marked by substantial social and material hardship, the initiative of the Allies for guidelines and the ensuing government funding succeeded in establishing political youth education with a higher degree of institutionalisation in comparison with other western industrial countries. SchröderBalzter

During the 1970s and 1980s political youth education experienced the profoundest upheaval and expansion concerning new activists mainly from the student movement and also concerning government programs and government funding. Politicization included gradually more aspects of life. The women´s movement in particular put private issues into a political context. A mental attitude spread along the idea ‘democracy as a form of life’ which got close to the classical understanding of democracy in Athens where ‘the whole material-spiritual life context’ is affected (Negt 2010, p. 321). Until today this experience of politicization of everyday life and its closeness to the classical concept of democracy can be used as point of reference for a concept of the political sphere. It represents a common thread of humans (Arendt) without a previously fixed aim of political education heading for a narrowed down target of particular interests (Brumlik 1997).

In the mid of 1970s many federal states in Germany pass legislation concerning funding of political youth education and paid release from work for education leave. On the basis of extra-curricular initiatives an educational movement founded new training institutes, independent education clubs, self-organized conference centers and educational institutions. Conceptual debates and experimental testing are characteristic for this period. Notions of political education change markedly from knowledge transfer and teacher-led instruction to self-activated learning, project learning and action orientation. The central motto for learning is to start with experience and to seize upon this. Social experiences are furthermore gained in social and political movements. They flow and merge into educational work, thus offering the opportunity to reflect on experiences in the new social movements with the help of educational work. In the 1970s and 1980s a wide field of movements – youth, ecological, women´s, peace and alternative movements – develops with manifold activities involving different population strata. *Action orientation* changed the self-concept of political education permanently. On looking back research calls it a 'silent triumph´ (Behrens, Ciupke, & Reichling 2003, p. 296).

Starting with the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Middle East a new time reckoning started. This change of era gives a new meaning to the formula of `there is no alternative´ which was first used by Thatcher and later taken up by Merkel. As of now social future concepts are only thinkable in the context of capitalistic production methods. The change of era is particularly drastic in Germany. During the 1990s the rise in xenophobic and extreme right-wing tendencies is soaring and leads to violent attacks on asylum seekers´ homes. As a reaction to these developments, political youth education which funding had decreased gradually, receives new attention and temporary project promotion (Lynen von Berg & Hirseland 2004, pp. 15-18). A series of special programs is initiated by the government setting new tasks to political youth education and funding programs like: 'Xenos', 'CIVITAS', 'entimon', et. al. The social countermovement to right-wing extremism and violence as well as additional jobs and funding lead to considerable empowerment in political youth education. In particularly current concepts are revised and new ones developed in order to enable staff with different attitudes and approaches to work with a right-wing oriented target group, whose attitudes and positions differ significantly from their own.

During the past one and a half decades, approximately since the year 2000, political education has met new challenges by post-democratic trends (Crouch 2008) and a turning away from politics by vast groups of the population. On the other hand, powerful citizen and protest movements evolved across borders like the “movement of the globalization critics” originating in the G8 meetings from Genua 2001 to Heiligendamm 2007, or “Occupy” which started as a reaction to the global economic crisis. Some evolve as local protest against large-scale public construction projects in Germany projects like “Stuttgart 21” or the disposal site for nuclear waste in “Gorleben”.

To start with political education could scarcely profit from the movements´ impulses and experiences in activation. It was located in a defensive position since the 1990s as neo-liberal mainstream enforced a strong pressure to economize and be effective on political education. It edged people into more self-regulation and being self-responsible for nearly everything. In the public discussion in Germany, voices could be heard against the necessity of political education. In this neoliberal wave, political education was struggling for a contemporary profile. For example, it tried to gain a clearer profile by distinction from social education. Therefore, political science was declared as reference science. The different pedagogical perspective was regarded as a watering down of political education as nearly every socially committed project was run under the label of political youth education (Schröder 2008, 318). Meanwhile, advanced discourses claim that it is not primarily a question of reference science but one of the understanding of the political (Mouffe 2007). The training of political referents in the various courses of study of social work, education, sociology and political science is creating a connection between social and political issues hence focusing on the explicitly political dimension (Hirsch 2014, p. 62).

In Germany, political youth education is legally incorporated in 'youth work' and is named according to §11 of the Children- and Youth Welfare Act (KJHG 2014) as its first central theme. This results in the specific history to the act prior to its first reading in 1990, when youth work was mainly regarded as youth education. While during the 1970s and 1980s nearly all youth work was centered around demands on political education and was thus politicized completely, nowadays we have to deal with the contrary effect. Political education has been drawn into the wake of professional applicability. This tendency reveals the neo-liberal aspects of nowadays education. Staff has turned to everyday pragmatism and no longer takes part in local youth political debates (Scherr/Sturzenhecker 2014, p. 374). In the following part the contemporary concept of political youth education well be displayed.

1.2 Knowledge, judgement, action as the triad in political youth education

The so-called triad of political youth education can be seen as a basic consent. It contains these sub goals: to impart knowledge, to enable judgement and to encourage participation. This triad can be found in relevant theoretical literature and is also prominently placed in the Children- and Youth plan of the German government (BMFSFJ 2012) thus indicating the encouraged practice: „Political education shall impart young people’s knowledge about society, state, European and international politics including politically and socially important developments in the fields of economy, culture, technology and science. It shall enable forming judgement on social and political events and conflicts, enable to claim one´s rights as well as to discharge one´s tasks, assume responsibility towards fellow citizens, society and nature and encourage participation in the creation of free and democratic social and state order (BMFSFJ 2012, p. 141).[[2]](#endnote-2) Political education only takes full effect when opinions and judgements are developed or changed, supported by the newly gained insight and on the basis of already existing competences. This kind of positioning to selected political questions intends to encourage the participants to action and to intervene in political thus public space. This does not only refer to political committees or forums but to any kind of public expression of opinion.

Admittedly this triad is claimed to be consensus but at least the order has to be looked upon as out dated. The current approach in seminars and projects puts action orientation at the beginning accompanied by acquisition of knowledge and judgement. Particularly action oriented media relations show ways to encourage youths to address a topic, line out their position and put it forward to a limited public via their interest in media and technology. Biographically acquired opinions and judgements often form the initial point or fish hook for seminars if firm attitudes and prejudices are questioned and screened.

At the same time three more aspects need to be emphasized which are not conveyed in the wording of the triad. To start with judgement is still often reduced to a cognitive process even if the *inclusion of emotions* is inevitable – as well in its collective dimension. Judgement is accompanied and interspersed by emotions. Secondly former parting lines between *personal development* or social education and political education cannot be maintained as personality has to be strengthened in order to encourage the political. Thirdly dynamics of the phases of youth and results of research into *adolescence* have to be taken into account in a professional political youth education. Their drive for positioning is infiltrated by identification with and distinction from persons who are important to them and who introduce them to political positions.[[3]](#endnote-3)

*Concluding* political youth education can be characterized as following:

Political youth education means supporting and encouraging independent thinking and acting via pedagogically reflected offers aiming at the engagement with matters of democratic communities and finding one´s position in the political. Successful political youth education builds on the lifeworld of the subjects and always includes emotional influences on the formation of positions and attitudes. This applies as well to the status of adolescence and transition and the specific needs for identification and distinction. The relationship between the self and the world can only be understood and reflected if it has been penetrated in a cognitive, emotional and social way.

1. **Initial situation and case history of the impact study**

The question on the effects of educational processes represents a very important task of pedagogical debates (Ahlheim 2003, p. 5). Not only supporters and organizers but mainly pedagogues are primarily interested in how and in which way pedagogical arrangements and personal intervention during arrangements are effective. That is how they stimulate and motivate participants for action regarding the aims of the event. Reassurance and legitimization of political education is broadly supported in professional discourse although exact measurement of effect and success of educational processes is not possible (ib). Faulstich (2007, p. 100) sees dangers of an empiric reductionism already in the idea of being able to ‘command’ participants, to 'achieve' a desired political perspective and to 'measure' this process. Impact research in the humanities oscillates in this area of tensions and should be aware of its opportunities as well as the challenges and limits. Bourdieu emphasized this contradiction:

“If you want to see the world a bit like it is and want to talk about it like it is one has to accept that one will always be in the complicated, vague, impure, diffuse etc., thus in opposition to ordinary concepts of strict scholarliness“ (Bourdieu 2013, p. 34).

During the past two decades, government funding in Germany was increasingly connected to evaluations. They were supposed to prove effectiveness and effects of the funding as well as analyzing innovative concepts. The support program 'Political Education' of the Children- and Youth plan (Kinder- und Jugendplan (KJP)) of the Federal Ministry of Youth was evaluated too. In this way, the ministry funds personnel and administrative expenses of extra-curricular political education of adolescents and young adults up to the age of 27 (Schröder, Balzter, & Schroedter 2004). The quantitative survey about the whole program and supplementary interviews of the referents in German professional literature are looked upon as the first survey of the actual target groups, of methods and content, of the role and the impact of staff as well as of the achieved process of learning form their perspective (Schillo 2011, p. 13). The participants though were not questioned in this survey.

Helle Beckers work (2011) can be seen as the next important step towards a substantial impact research. All available evaluations of the German-speaking countries dealing with empirical research on political education during the years 2000 to 2010 were systemized and allocated. For the first-time Becker offers a synoptic view and an assessment of the current state of research on political education covering a decade. She concludes that the state of research regarding extra-curricular political education can be described as desolate. The few existing studies stand out due to a fragmentation on several levels: research is carried out from the perspective of different scientific disciplines and in the context of different professional discourse. The evaluated periods and subject areas depend largely on the various conditions for funding. Therefore, long term and coherent studies are scarce (ib., p. 161).

Becker claims in her conclusion longer-term and systematic funding of research and of concepts for research funding. She states referring to the effects of political education: „Many questions concerning the logic and methodology of research are still to be dealt with. Up till now there is no convincing and transferable research design for extra-curricular political education“ (ib., p. 165). Furthermore, she claims the lack of differentiated and necessarily complex considerations on possible methods reconstructing educational processes and results (ib.).

Hedtke, Zimenkova, and Hippe (2007) write up a similarly critical assessment concerning the situation of survey data on the education for democracy in Europe. Research should be organized as an interactive process, not only using indicators for the popularity of European politics with the youths. In order to achieve this, thorough case studies have to be designed including local diversity and resulting in a dense description. Key people shall get a chance to contribute. The authors mainly address teachers and pupils here. Enlarging the viewpoint to institutions of extra-curricular education would also mean including youth workers and referents in order to address youths not only at school but in all aspects of their adolescence.

1. **Research design of the impact study**

Some of these expectations can be found accordingly in the methodical design of the study on the effects of biographical sustainability of political youth education, which will be presented in the following chapter (Balzter, Ristau, & Schröder 2014). Firstly, the youths or young adults get a chance to speak up thus enabling the reconstruction of educational processes and the preparation of case studies. Secondly the study is designed nationwide including young adults from various social and with various educational experiences. Finally, the project examines the long-term effect of educational impulses and thus the sustainability of experiences with attended educational events.

Due to the statement of seminars of political youth education being evaluated straight after the seminar and thus leaving little room for complex educational processes and furthermore giving no opportunity for statements on the effect of educational experiences on biographies, the idea was born to conduct interviews, where the interviewees look back to the seminars. This approach creates the possibility of giving room to the process character of education which often takes a while to take full effect.

Furthermore, it has to be taken into account that adolescence is exposed to age characteristic contradictory dynamics causing great variation. Being strongly present oriented, adolescents during their development time do not pose themselves the question of biographical benefit of their educational activities. Their attitudes are rather more influenced by changing mental states and behavioral patterns. Compared to it the phase of young adulthood seems more suitable to embody and unclose educational effects from adolescence which were not linked to development and survived adolescence.

On this basis, an interview design was developed aiming at young adults at the age of 18 to 27 who took part in an event of political youth education about five years ago, at the age of 14 to 18.

At this point the question arises by which method past educational experiences can be decoded reconstructively. The adequate method for investigating biographical sustainability seemed to be biographical-narrative interviews. They activate the structures of processes of memory, placing and cross-linking and create relatedness. Adolescents were asked to tell their whole life story, thus opening up the opportunity to advance towards biographical sustainability of political youth education and to discover possible links between political educational impulses and previous educational authorities, i.e. family, school, peer-group or clubs. Life stories were then interpreted in the course of research workshops and reconstructed according to Rosenthal (2011) as individual studies.

Access to former participants was gained through educational institutions and former youth educational teamers. The selection of interview partners was guided, apart from research methodical criteria, by the aim to reach the biggest possible heterogeneity in terms of a sample of theoretically relevant categories (Rosenthal, Köttig, Witte, & Blezinger 2006, p. 20). Gender, regional placing, social status, cultural reference as well as the range of providers who offered educational events were part of it. Contrary to the presumption, that it will become difficult to find interviewees – especially in the light of access through institutions of political youth education, the attendance 5 years ago, and the mobility of young adults at this age – we fortunately found many interested persons. On the whole 23 interviews and four group debates took place. About 50 young people took part in the study. The analysis of the data followed the interpretive paradigm and the six steps of the interpretative procedure according to Rosenthal (2011, p. 187): “The aim of the reconstruction is, to analyse the biographical meaning of the experience of the past as well as the meaning of the self-presentation in the present”.[[4]](#endnote-4) Important for this kind of analysis is the preliminary postponement of the key question and initially to work out the structure of the case. A typology of biographical sustainability of political education processes could be worked out from these biographical constructions . They will be outlined below. The typology gives some indication on long term effectiveness of extra-curricular political youth education.

The biographical-narrative Interview as a very open and explorative approach seems to be the right way to make out the meaning of the political education for young adults. The researchers got a very deep insight into biographical life stories und the complex coherences of political youth education and other educational authorities as well as the function of political education. The research workshops with students, educators and other scientists as a circle of intersubjectivity were very important for the qualitative research process and helped to control blind spots.

1. **Typology of the long-term effectiveness of political youth education**

A typecast of the various cases deducted from individual interviews is used to organize the material according to specific characteristics. Furthermore, allocating cases to typecasts plays a role in depicting the context and the relationship to the research question. Therefore „similarity relations in surface characteristics“ are irrelevant compared to „similarities in deep structure” (Kreitz 2010, p. 99). Which social cases are structurally similar or belong to the same typecast is determined by the configuration of the components and their functionality for the whole (Rosenthal 2011, p. 24). Thus, four typecasts for biographical sustainability of political education and three functional differentiations of effective directions have been identified in the empirical material. The key question was:

In what way the impulses beginning with seminars and projects of political youth education find expression in further life?

Moreover, the following questions were of peculiar interest:

How the suggestions of seminars of political youth education relate to former knowledge and attitudes, which are affected by family or other biographical influences?

And how they deal with the contradictions and conflicts between different spheres of influence?

The first type *political commitment* includes adolescents who became politically active by the impulse they received in a seminar. Based on the targets of extra-curricular political youth education to impart knowledge, enable judgement and encourage participation the subject has politicized to a high degree. The process of politicization which has been triggered by extra-curricular political youth education is obvious and to be expected as it is its purpose and its target.

Far more surprising is the discovery of the second type *occupational orientation* by extra-curricular political youth education. Occupational orientation is neither amongst the core targets of political education nor obvious on first sight. It can be counted as so far mostly unnoticed side effect. This type is characterized by being led to take up employment in the political field due to political education.

The third type *politically enlightened attitude* can be ascribed to the immanent political impact as such. In this case, political education stimulates to joint critical dispute in the tension field of society and individual. The primary effect is that previous thinking and acting are challenged and a development towards a politically enlightened and in parts acting accordingly citizen is enhanced. This includes i.e. gathering information on political events and developments, their critical consideration and discussion in the social environment and last but not least the making use of the personal right to vote.

The fourth type, *acquisition of basic activatable political skills,* is characterized by the development of specific abilities which form the basis for political action. Amongst them are empowerment of self-confidence, the experience of self-efficacy, the acquisition of social skills i.e. communication, interaction, ability for conflict and consent as well as skills in presentation and rhetoric. These abilities which are trained in political education are so far mainly used for private purposes and in the field of work.

A great affinity between the first two typecasts of political education and occupational orientation can be stated. In many stories of the adolescents these two effective directions play a biographically major role or are collateral. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the politically active as well as the one working in the political field have acquired respective basic activatable political skills and a politically enlightened attitude.

While outlining the four effective directions the question comes up whether responsibility for these effects lies only with political youth education or how far they interact with other socializing factors. During further analysis of the interviews it was extracted that the four different typecasts are specified in three different ways referring to the function of political education. The so called functional differentiation gives some indication of whether and how political education is linked to former political experience or whether the adolescents were faced with an entirely new perspective. In any case, political education can support already initiated developments, give significant impulses or open up the political field for the first time at all. The functional differentiation of effective directions can be conceptualized in three categories:

First: The interviews indicate that events of extra-curricular political education can *instigate* further engagement with politics. Political education is often described as being a key event contrasting past experiences.

Second: On the other hand, the *strengthening or supporting function* is built on former biographical experiences outside of political youth education. They could either have led to a decision for action or a change of attitude or could have awakened interest and motivation for further examination. In this case, political education is often used deliberately and the already existing competences are intensified and differentiated by attending an event.

Third: The functional differentiation – *showing the other* – focusses more on domestic socialization showing contradictions. It refers to a discontinuity during biographical development. Events of political youth education allow adolescents a basic enlargement of their horizon of experience so far. Unlike to their social environment and background they come into contact with political questions and critical perspectives during seminars. They can enlarge their knowledge on political context, brighten their judgement and gain insight into possible (political) fields of occupation and participation. Adolescents are offered a realm of experience where they can try themselves out and gain access to the political field.

Comparing these results with other studies, there are some interesting parallels. The type *political commitment* resembles the type *participatory citizen* developed in the US American study “What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy” by Westheimer and Kahne (2004), nevertheless the methodical approach as well as the target group (practitioners and scholars) are very different and therefore only contingently comparable. The authors detail three conceptions of the “good” citizen – personally responsible, participatory, and justice oriented. Therefore they asked “What kind of citizen do we need to support an effective democratic society?” (Westheimer & Kahne 2004, p. 239) The first type *participatory citizen* means an active member of community organizations and/or improvement efforts (ib., p. 240). Certainly, the term of political commitment in our study is defined much closer to the political field.

Another German study focusing long-term effects in international youth work came to a quite similar result concerning the functional differentiation. Thomas et al. (2007) worked out four different processes to integrate the experience biographically. First: *nice to have – t*he exchange experience did not leave any noteworthy traces in the biography. Second: *mosaic –* the exchange experience contributes to a certain development to get her with other events. It fits in as a ‘tesserae’ into one’s entire biography. Third: *domino* – the exchange experience is a trigger for a string of follow-up events and activities. Fourth: *turning point* – the exchange experience initiates a turning point in one’s biography (Thomas et al. 2007, p. 7, English Summary).

The typology will be illustrated in the form of a compact case study in the following chapter, exposing its in-depth structure by way of example. For this purpose, the case study of Mareike will be introduced representing the third type of development of an enlightened political attitude.

1. **Summary of Mareike´s case reconstruction: „To be able to shape one´s own life even concerning computers”**

The case Mareike shows exemplarily – against the backdrop of the reconstruction of her biography – how the impulses of a political youth education seminar further the development of an enlightened political attitude (type three) and its transfer to other areas of society.

Mareike, aged 23 during the interview, grew up with her two younger brothers in socio-economically difficult circumstances which are notably due to frequent unemployment periods of the father. Thus, the family can only dispose of a limited economic capital. The mother – key power of the family – cares particularly about the best possible support and schooling for her children. She sends her three children to a primary school with an entry level and then to grammar school. Mareike being the first-born takes on responsibility for herself and her two brothers to whom she is very close. After her parents have separated, the situation escalates, especially because the father does not pay any alimony. The single mother is living with her three children in a 3-bedroom flat where she will also take in a foster child later on. Accompanied by the strong mother, Mareike develops a pragmatic way of dealing with limited economic resources and at the same time achieves high responsibility for family solidarity.

At the age of 17 Mareike gets to know the open youth work (called info-café) through information at school and also political youth education through individual address of a teamer. The pleasure of playing computer games, the personal atmosphere and attractive terms entice her to take part in her first seminar.

*Against the backdrop to make a film, I still remember it was about media addiction, a topic which was not yet popular in 2005. Whether that is something one has to be aware of or an illness which has not been noticed by society so far* (Lines 69-73).

Methodical implementation skillfully weaves the interests of adolescents with a critical acquisition of the topic. As a result, Mareike experiences a strong public reaction by taking part in a youth-media-festival where her seminar group shows their film about the computer-game-fair. More seminars and projects follow and even lead to a prize. Mareike gets fresh impetus by political youth education encouraging a different self-determined point of view and a critical attitude. She can transfer that to other social areas which her biography will show at various stages.

*And to know and to watch advertisements on TV more consciously, or to watch films more consciously, as you have already learnt something about it* (Lines 1795-1797).

The transfer achievement is shown by Mareike in another example during the interview. She talks about an advertisement on child and youth protection which ran as a trailer in cinemas. Mareike proves with this trailer the importance of parents for their children. They have to take an interest in their children and start talking with them at an early age about the internet and computer games. In this context, she points out a counselling for parents as a further offer of the info-cafe.

The fact that she took over responsibility from an early age, her skillful pragmatism and her experience in political education enable her at her first job to have the courage to run for the election of youth representative a couple of years later. She is convincing from the start and becomes politically and unionized active after having been addressed personally. The solidary strive for better working conditions give Mareike furthermore the important feeling of belonging. Besides she becomes active 'against right-wing'.

Personally, addressing her is the crucial moment for her decision to take part in the seminar of political youth education as well as running for the election of youth representative. The personal relationship between political education teamer and participant is central for gaining access to political education and to the political field via union commitment. The importance of a personal relationship exponentiates with adolescents who have not had such input at home from the start. This address obviously leads to feeling entitled to be concerned with politics (Bourdieu 1979).

Mareike stands for the type of politically enlightened attitude as the experiences she gained during seminars of political youth education helped her to a critical perspective. Her later activity in the union has no clear connection to the seminar, neither in her own contemplation nor in the analysis of the case study. In fact, Mareike could build on experiences (of self-efficacy) and on acquired skills made during the seminars.

1. **Significance of pedagogical persons and learning venues – Selected comprehensive topics**

The empirical material showed topics with a more general importance beyond the individual case studies. Below two topics will be introduced by way of example, learning venues and pedagogical persons, both being central factors of extra-curricular political youth education.

6.1 Pedagogical persons

The personal dimension in educational processes in extra-curricular political youth education is particularly important for at least two reasons. On the one hand, under non-formal conditions of learning 'learning from others' can be used in a wider range than in formal conditions of learning at school – thus meeting adolescent needs for the most part. Furthermore, new and sometimes unfamiliar worlds of experience can be facilitated by learning venues and methods. Pedagogical staff accompanies participants on this way and often seem to be *key persons*. In general adolescents are susceptible to find access to new things via extra-familial persons. These other adults offer them the chance to get to know and experience a critical attitude. Thus, they are encouraged to question second-hand opinions and gradually develop their own attitude. This idea leads to the core of political education: power of judgement. Interaction with others is a necessity for its development. Therefore, you can speak about *related judgement* in political education (Schröder 2005).

The importance of pedagogical persons is perceivable manifold in the interviews. Aspects which are mentioned repeatedly are their expertise and the confrontation with their attitudes.

Sandra confirms *that particularly the people who ran the seminars* (Line 1518), shaped her a lot, *as they are in a good mood, … absolutely involved in the topic* (Line 1529). She is particularly impressed by their expertise and their structure in debating and forming arguments. The pedagogues succeed to encourage her to contemplate, precisely because her opinion differs. Chafing at different opinions is an essential learning experience for Sandra and influences her access to the political field significantly.

Likewise, for those with a big distance between parental home and politics persona working in political education loom large. It often seems to be the referents who discover the interest and the potential of adolescents and support them to gain access to the political field. This often leads to an educational success of adolescents, sometimes an occupational orientation towards political education respectively political sciences or a political commitment. At the same time, it gets clear in biographies in fields afar from political education that especially in circumstances with little economic and/or socio-cultural capital supportive persons play an important part. To this group belong i.e. school teachers, private music teachers or staff in open youth work.

6.2 Learning venues, distant and close

Learning venues have come into focus as a dimension of education processes during the last years. Political education has numerous and very divers venues. In the following we will draw the line between 'distant' and 'close'. In distant learning venues, the distance from the living environment offers in particular new realms of experience and learning for adolescents. Close learning venues offer good links with their familiarity and simplify the transfer of the new knowledge to the familiar environment.

6.2.1 Distant: educational institutions, memorials, journeys, excursions

“Distant“ and unknown learning venues simplify by their distance from everyday life access to new topics and contents, to the extension of present attitudes and to the reduction of prejudices. Esthetical experiences as well as group dynamic processes outside the adolescents´ environment can contribute to it. Educational institutions can turn into places of exceptional and sensual experience by spatial charm, joint meals and playful adventures. At places with a direct connection to the topic – i.e. memorials and museums – access basically is via the emotions of the participants. Therefore, this type of arrangement proves successful. During educational journeys and excursions participants profit furthermore by their 'dynamic' character: being on the way and having to adapt continually to new situations stimulates learning processes as one is lead out of current patterns of behavior and thought.

The empirical material proves that in the experience of the interviewees with seminars of political education this effect of distant learning venues plays an important role. Statements on educational institutions, memorials, excursions and journeys are to be found in many of the interviews. Mona emphasizes *that the educational institution was something special, thus making everybody present feel to be part of something special* (Lines 154-155).

Members of a project group of adolescent migrants, who were interviewed during a group discussion, visit a concentration camp in Eastern Europe in analysis of the Holocaust. They describe this visit as an impressive and formative experience. The group goes on further journeys to other memorials and on an educational journey to the Middle East. The participants describe these excursions and journeys due to their high information content as *highlights* (Line 271). *Particularly in this country (in the Middle East) we met with a group of adolescents, there was communication and … this exchange of information... is something really great* (Lines 281-284).

Paul notes mainly social contrasts from his journalistic exchange seminar to Eastern Europe. Important to him are the encounters and the communicating with the people by which he learns new and unknown things about the country. Experiencing directly the cultural difference and social imbalance impresses him a lot. It is more formative for him than the theoretical debate during the seminar. This impressive experience is crucial to his later decision to take up sociology at university. He wants to research into the differences in order to be able to understand them better.

6.2.2 Close: on site, in the living environment

“Close“ learning venues show their advantages if the barriers for taking part in an event want to be kept low. The familiar setting offers possibilities to connect. Fears and worries concerning distant, unknown and foreign places can be excluded. This way events of political youth education are easily included in the living environment of the adolescents. Thus one can reach especially those young people, who generally or at that specific moment don´t have the resources to tolerate feelings of “foreignness“ outside their familiar living environment. “Close“venues are also favorable concerning the transfer of new knowledge and experience into everyday life.

These aspects of “close“ venues also come up in the interviews repeatedly. Thus Ann-Kathrin and Alexander are both active in Children and Youth Parliament. Ann-Kathrin mainly sees it as *a good opportunity to do something locally* (Lines 37-38), that means to affect changes in her own environment. Alexander points out that he can establish relationships and build up local networks by his activities in the Parliament. He also gets to know more about his home town and can thus identify more easily. In addition, belonging to the Children and Youth Parliament is of vital importance to him for getting in contact with politics on a local level. Local issues and initiatives appeal to him as they are closely connected to his living environment. He can thus experience the effects and consequences of political action immediately.

Marianne, Susanne, Manuela and Esra are taking part as guides in a travelling exhibition on the prosecution of Jews during the Third Reich in their home town or its close surroundings. In their statements appears their fascination in participating lies in being able to pass an understanding of a so far unknown and difficult topic to other adolescents in their own environment. With this alienation effect, they can as well reflect on themselves and learn.

Marie, Cem and Mario take part as “ambassadors“ in a program for voluntary work, recruiting pupils locally for volunteer projects during the Day of Volunteer work. The program´s local reference makes it easier for them to gain access to their commitment and to link it to their own sphere of everyday life. They highly identify themselves with their position as ambassadors. The political education seminars they attend to in this context are on the other hand taking place in a distant educational institution. Marie enjoys attending the seminars *as they form a highlight amongst the ambassadors. You can learn a lot and above all you get to know a lot of people* (Lines 1306-1308). Getting in contact with like-minded people and group dynamics during seminars are facets, which are pointed out by Mario, too. In this case, we find a combination of close learning venue and distant educational institution correlating favorably: on the one hand the access to living environment and everyday life by the local establishment of the volunteer program, on the other hand possibilities for learning and reflecting with like-minded people at a distant learning venue as juxtaposition to everyday life.

1. **Quintessence of the impact study**

Political youth education in extra-curricular settings has been state-funded in Germany since 1945 and has been evaluated also in a nationwide survey in the last decade (Schröder, Balzter, & Schroedter 2004). In the present article, a new impact analysis is presented, which explores the biographically long-term effect of political youth education (Balzter, Ristau, & Schröder 2014). In the framework of this impact study, former participants have been asked to retell and to reflect on their own education and life-stories about five years after their participation in political youth education. The impact analysis based on such biographical-narrative interviews was able to generate valid results regarding the biographical sustainability of extra-curricular political youth education. The qualitative research methods established access to young adults (age of 18 to 27) and their reflections on the biographical benefit of their previous educational activities at the age of 15 to 18. Based on the interpretation of these life-stories, the direct and indirect effects of seminars and projects of political youth education on the formation of social and political identity of the interviewees could be documented. The impact study of Balzter, Ristau, &Schröder (2014) generates a typology of biographical sustainability and shows the effects of political youth education both by means of single case analysis and case comprehensive topics. The main findings of this study are summarized in the following nine statements.

1. The impact study shows again clearly that there is no *simple cause-effect-scheme* concerning educational and maturity processes. The presented impact study clearly shows that one cannot predict in a general way which learning methods would be mostly effective for which participants. Thus, only beneficial factors can be named, particularly regarding politically distant target groups.
2. The *variety of teaching methods* is important as they can take various effects depending on situation and context. But they have to be activating and stimulating for action above all. Furthermore, it is important to reconsider and change methods – commonly practiced by the middle-class shaped civil society – self-reflexively and in cooperation with the target group.
3. *Pedagogically active people* working in political education have to fulfill the task to help translating and understanding that life conflicts which are perceived as being private and individual are political. They act supporting and encouraging, as counterparts and models, in order that adolescents feel entitled to interfere politically. The interviews have shown that often other *extra-familial adults* offered at the right time essential mediation and support (Hafeneger 2009, p. 269).
4. *Learning venues for political education* bear a special importance, too. Educational institutes are often experienced as places leading out of everyday life and familiar learning experiences, thus opening up for new experiences. This is true for sometimes very distant venues like memorials which can trigger a new controversy via their close contact on a foreign territory. Close learning venues on the other hand facilitate access and have a positive influence on transfer to the living environment of the adolescents. Nearly half of the interviewees took part more than once in offers. They often chose different offers in the same place, continued their intercultural encounters or entered a long-term project.
5. *To take part in experiences* of private, public or professional life must be the topmost maxim. In order to get to know, take up, be able to interpret dialogically one needs methods which are oriented biographically and environmentally (Negt 2010).
6. Part of these experiences and dispositions forms *adolescence*. Intertwined with it are changes, new chances and re-allocations, which are effective in all areas of life. This topic still leads a shadow existence in the discussion about political youth education. But adolescence is situated at the seam between continuity and discontinuity, between stability and change. Here we find connecting points for political education (Schröder 2012).
7. Regarding *the content of political education*, current questions or experiences in the living and working environment must be the starting point. It stays important to target connections starting from specific topics, because political education is primarily *joining the dots* (Eis, Lösch, Schröder, & Steffens 2015).
8. As interviews in our study proved, commitment and political awareness can only develop if the various areas of action are complimentary and augmented. From the viewpoint of providers and organizers special attention should be given to *working in networks or linking competence* between working in youth organizations, youth clubs, close to school institutions and youth educational centers (Schröder 2014).
9. Obviously, *social activities* are fields where young people with educationally distant backgrounds more easily enter and participate than in mainly political ones. These adolescents are particularly dependent on social approval as it was more or less denied to them by their origin. Political education must strive for and support *the bridging between the social to the political* again and again (Balzter & Schröder 2014).

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1. In this article, we use the expression “political education” because of the specific German history, which is explained in the first part. The expression is similar to “civic education” or “education for civic citizenship”, which are mostly used in European professional discussions. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This wording can be found in the directives of the KJP program in original terms since 1993 and endured several federal governments and revised versions of directives. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Regarding all three aspects see Balzter/Ristau/Schröder 2014, 23-27; for the relevance of emotions in political education see Schröder 2016; for theory of adolescence see Schröder 2012 and in English language see Schröder 2006. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Translation of the quote by the authors. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)