

Political learning in civic initiatives

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Abstract

This paper discusses the results of an empirical study on political participation and awareness-building processes within local citizens' initiatives in Germany. The rationale for researching this topic was that politicians often dismiss political participation outside established forms (elections, etc.), and that the political learning processes that take place informally in these settings receive little recognition as acquired expertise. To close the identified gap in learning theory, the analysis drew on the subject-scientific deliberations of Klaus Holzkamp (1995). As a result, a wide variety of learning actions were developed and placed in a learning action space.

Keywords

political participation, political learning, informal learning, adult education, subject-scientific

This paper discusses the results of an empirical study on political participation and awareness-building processes within local citizens' initiatives in Germany. The rationale for researching this topic was that politicians often dismiss political participation outside established forms (elections, etc.), and that the political learning processes that take place informally in these settings receive little recognition as acquired expertise. To close the identified gap in learning theory, the analysis drew on the subject-scientific deliberations of Klaus Holzkamp (1995). As a result, a wide variety of learning actions were developed and placed in a learning action space.

Many people are engaging in civic initiatives these days, with a view to questioning the status quo and introducing their own perspectives into the public discourse. The "reduction of democratic life to [the] management of local consequences resulting from global economic necessities" (Rancière 2003, p. 114) no longer seems to be a credible line of argument to a majority of people. One prominent example of people's 'revolt' against political decisions are the

Occupy protests that have taken place in numerous countries. In many cases, coverage of these events revived the debate on the meaning and nature of political participation. These at times quite controversial debates centred not only on whatever had caused the ‘outrage’, but also on the fundamental question of entitlement and active participation in shaping the world. The momentum of this ‘outrage’ (Hessel 2011) doesn’t always engender love in the established political system – as shown among other things by the frequent and massive police operations against protesters. What is behind this dissent?

To put it simply, two opposing viewpoints compete with each other in the discourse on political participation: One side assumes there are numerous opportunities for participation in the form of elections or cooperation in political parties, which, however, are not always very popular (e.g. low turnout, resignation from parties). This side quickly concludes that the problem is ‘disenchantment with politics’, and the reason behind it the citizens’ lack of political knowledge and awareness. Meanwhile, others dismiss the possibilities provided as unappealing, and feel that participating in clubs, other initiatives, or activities such as flash mobs are more appropriate and effective. In their view, people are fed up with the rules of the established political terrain and their representatives, rather than being ‘disenchanted with politics’ in general.

These opposing viewpoints indicate a difference in basic theoretical perspectives: an ‘instrumental’ understanding of participation versus a ‘normative’ understanding that aims at the participation of all citizens in as many areas as possible (cf. Hoecker 2006). This extensive participation of citizens is where opinions differ. Some feel the system would be jeopardized by an extensive participation of citizens (cf. e.g. Massing 2009, Patzelt 2009). Only those who possess the required knowledge – which is meant to be conveyed in institutional educational settings by means of curricula – should be allowed to participate. There is no room for informal political participation and educational processes in this view. Even if the conveyance of self-learning skills in schools and universities is becoming significantly more important, any autonomous acquisition of knowledge is rejected, often with the implication that there is a risk of learning the ‘wrong’ thing and thus endangering the system.

However, this assumes a very narrow definition of education, which focuses on the conveyance of pre-defined expert knowledge with the objective of having citizens conform to the system, and hardly considers a socio-critical perspective. This begs the question of what is ‘wrong’ or ‘right’ and who determines this? Representatives of the other position regard this self-guided, autonomous learning by individuals as a ‘politicization’ of political education and see democracy as an open project that needs to keep being renegotiated rather than being written in stone. Here, citizens are initially seen as politically

competent, and their active participation in political decision-making processes as extending their own political powers of judgement (cf. e.g. Bremer 2008; Lösch/Thimmel 2010).

Clearly, the question of legitimate political participation and education is highly controversial. Why is this so? The difficulty of the established political field – Bourdieu (2001) described this very well – is that it relies on the citizens' choices even for its legitimisation. And from the perspective of the established field, they should of course choose whatever does threaten its existence. Entitlement for participation is then engineered as a 'never-ending' story with a 'sophisticated/well thought-out' system of competences, step-by-step systems and associated roles for citizens – all within the framework of institutional educational settings.

This paper discusses the results of an empirical study that I conducted, which questioned these mechanisms of entitlement in their apparent immutability, through the example of municipal civic initiatives. The study took a closer look at the frequently frowned-upon political learning and action as practiced by individuals in informal settings (Trumann 2013).

Civic initiatives provide individuals with a place where they can participate in shaping society while bringing their own views to the table. They widen the field of possible forms of participation in the spirit of a participatory democracy and provide an opportunity to contemplate alternatives while experiencing the effectiveness of one's actions together with others. This makes possible a new definition of the established political field – one that does not distinguish between politics and pre-politics, experts and laypersons, right and wrong, etc. beforehand, but instead emerges from people's daily political practices (such as engaging in initiatives). With respect to the local level, urban development processes would then not be carried out exclusively from a top-down perspective by so-called experts, but rather from the perspective of the people living and acting in their respective social environment/community. As part of this engagement in initiatives, thematic knowledge (e.g. about air pollution, traffic management, emissions) is jointly gathered, generated and discussed. The initiative becomes a setting for learning, and "realizations about one's own living opportunities in the space – the city, countryside, suburb, district are generated. And the primary question becomes understanding the role of the local or regional contexts in the development of one's own biography through learning opportunities" (Faulstich 2015, p. 217).

In the following, the learning-theory starting points introduced here are explored, and the cornerstones of a subject-scientific perspective on learning in connection with the study's topic are discussed, in order to then take a closer

look at civic initiatives and their potential as a setting for learning and action, using empirical examples.

Learning theory considerations

The few existing studies about political education for adults (e.g. Fritz/Maier/Böhnisch 2006; Ahlheim/Heger 2006) focus on institutionalised educational work, its topics, formats, and settings, and discuss informal political educational processes only as a topic on which they would like to see more research. These studies often lack a distinct learning-theoretical discussion or a detailed consideration of how individuals go through political learning processes. My own study has dedicated itself to this research gap and researched practices of political learning and action in local civic initiatives (Trumann 2013). By abandoning the external perspective on learning and taking a subject-oriented view, “it studies learners as responsible individuals and subjects integrated/embedded in their living environment, who develop their own perspectives and interests, against the backdrop of their subjective horizons of meaning and to which pedagogical action should be aligned” (Weis 2005, p. 13).

The concept of subject-scientific learning by Klaus Holzkamp (1995) presented a suitable foundation for analysing these, as it centres on expansivity, i.e. the expansion of one’s own possible actions, and of learning processes. According to Holzkamp (2004, p. 29), learning takes place “when the subject has encountered obstacles or resistance to his normal course of action, and finds himself facing an ‘action problem’ that he cannot overcome with the presently available means or abilities but only through [...] the detour of adding a ‘learning loop’.” In the concept of subject-oriented learning, this subjectively experienced conflict between ‘wanting to’ and ‘being able to’ is the cause of a given individual’s decision to overcome an action problem with learning. In the moment the learning loop described by Holzkamp is triggered, the original ‘action problem’ becomes a ‘learning problem’. Expansive learning aims at enhancing the individual’s capacity for action regarding shaping the ‘world’ – and hence political participation.

Three aspects of Holzkamp’s learning-theoretical considerations appear especially interesting for the perspective taken here, and the field of study ‘civic initiative’. For one, Holzkamp’s (1995, p. 227) thoughts concerning the possibility of ‘*qualitative leaps in learning*’. These serve as an expression for an increasing differentiation of learning actions, “a progression from (relative) shallowness to increasing depth of understanding of the subject” (ibid., p. 221). The thematic and operational differentiation of the learning topic are seen as interwoven (cf. ibid., p. 250).

Because they give the individual a more differentiated understanding of the subject, expansive learning actions enable a more independent position. “You say this and you say that, but I myself have learned that things might possibly be like this or that” (ibid., p. 523). Qualitative leaps in learning do not follow any step logic, and are therefore not generalisable, but become clear only during individual reflection – by experiencing myself that I can learn much more about a certain object. The political knowledge of the individual generated in informal settings – such as citizens’ initiatives – becomes less quantifiable compared to formally planned learning - such as in schools through curricula, and the lack of recognition by the established political field mentioned earlier becomes perhaps more explicable (cf. ibid., p. 517).

For an analysis of learning in citizens’ initiatives, it is interesting to note that Holzkamp’s deliberations concentrated not only on individual learning actions, but also included, though not at their core, learning actions in *cooperative learning arrangements* – which are based on a commonly shared ‘learning problem’. During the cooperative learning process, a shared topic is worked on in a division of labour drawing on the various available means, and “overlapping zones of knowledge/skill” (ibid., p. 511) are produced. Cooperative learning actions can thus favour qualitative leaps in learning, since the confluence of divergent perspectives contributes to a more differentiated view of one’s own position.

Finally, Holzkamp uses the aspect of “*daily lifestyle*” (1996) to emphasise the embeddedness of actions into an individual’s daily contexts. The ‘radius of action’ an individual possesses here varies from person to person. For the analysis of learning in citizens’ initiatives, it is very helpful that Klaus Holzkamp emphasises not only the determinacy of actions, but in particular the individual’s scope of action. In analysing ‘unforeseen’ actions, or actions that are not considered appropriate by third parties – as is often the case in the context of citizens’ initiatives – individual options for political action can thus be identified. So, from a subject-scientific perspective, lifestyle is not just a response to the given circumstances, but also an active contributor to them. Individual world order is put into the context of shared world order. The following is thus an examination of what exactly constitutes learning actions in the context of civic initiatives.

Political learning and action in citizens’ initiatives

Briefly about the research design: The study is based on a participatory observation carried out over a period of two years in five initiatives in the fields

of nature and environmental conservancy as well as traffic planning and urban design. This made it possible to highlight the learning actions and activities, which often took place indirectly and were not designated as learning by the individuals (cf. Grell 2006; Girtler 2001), and to jointly reflect on them during group discussions. The research question was what action problems the members of the initiative encounter in their work and how they respond to them. In the end, very different forms of learning actions were articulated and situated in a space of learning and action characterized by the dimensions of ‘cooperative and individual’, ‘actional and reflective’, and ‘absorbing and transferring’ (Trumann 2013).

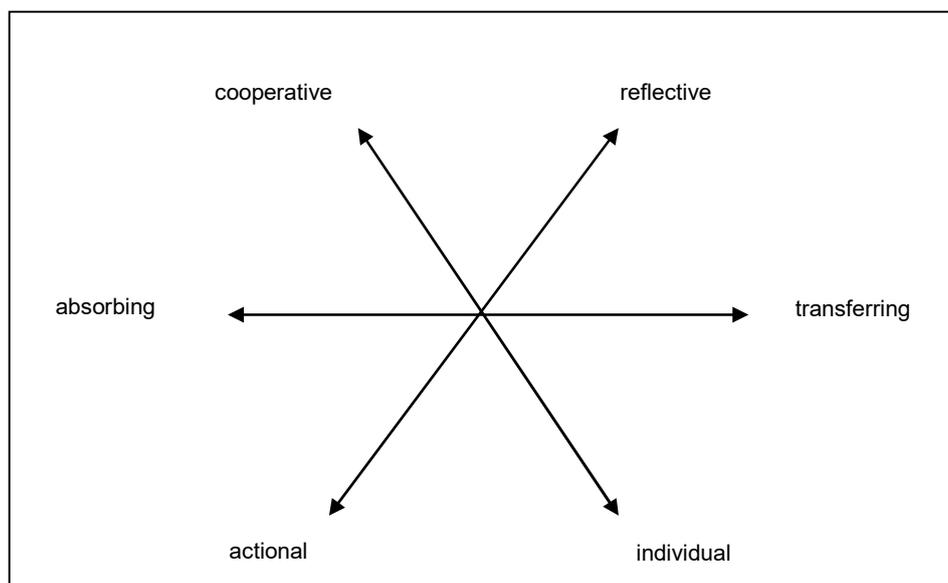


Fig.: learning-action-space civic initiative

cooperative – individual

The empirical material shows that the members of observed initiatives either rely on the existing knowledge of various members or, where this isn't possible, transfer the ‘action problem’ into a ‘learning problem’ and execute a learning loop. The organisation of these learning loops mainly results from the interplay of individual and cooperative learning actions. This means that learning problems are met collaboratively with the structure of “overlapping zones of knowledge and skill” as described by Holzkamp (1995).

This in itself is hardly surprising, but the following is interesting to note: This collaboration and interplay of individual and cooperative learning actions can be seen not only at the level of a given initiative, but also across initiatives. Two different ‘cooperation partners’ come into view here: other initiatives, and

‘third parties’ such as associations and federations. The respective problems are placed in relation to each other, and one’s own as well as joint possibilities of action are discussed. In the research under study, this process was ultimately intensified by the establishment of a network of initiatives and the founding of a voter initiative.

For the success of the cooperative learning actions, Klaus Holzkamp assumed the existence of a shared ‘action problem’ or ‘learning problem’. How can this be described for the initiatives under study here? A given individual initiative is already constituted on the basis of commonly shared problem. While it is certainly possible that there are conflicting interests within this framework, this was not the case for the field under observation here.

The shared learning problem and the resulting ‘subproblems’, which are individually segregated according to their subjective significance, are in a dialogical relationship and do not contradict each other. On the one hand, cooperative learning actions between various initiatives are generated through the overlapping of individual aspects of their respective ‘action problems’ and, on the other hand, through a meta-‘action problem’, which is transverse to the respective subject areas, but serves as a constitutively connecting element. This meta-‘action problem’ picks up the question of the operating principle of the established political field and the possibilities for political action by citizens it contains – which makes it the pivotal issue of the people’s ‘protest’ mentioned earlier.

This operative differentiation of cooperative learning actions can now be classified using Holzkamp’s construct of qualitative leaps in learning. The processing of a given initiative’s own subject from the different perspectives that become possible through cooperative learning actions helps in considering the respective subject in a more differentiated manner. This is likewise true for the meta-‘action problem’ described above, that is: over the course of the initiative’s work, the way the established political field works becomes evident in its various facets. The ‘actional – reflective’ dimension is a good way to show what this looks like in detail for the members of initiatives.

actional – reflective

Actional learning actions focus mainly on two aspects: one, building awareness for a given issue and two, inviting others to participate in one’s own augmentation of the world order. The spectrum of public activities carried out by the initiatives is very broad. On the one hand, they build awareness about their respective issues through various information events (information desks, lectures in district centres, bike tours, theatre plays etc.). Meanwhile, other types of

activities, such as hosting a series of lectures for the public about the subject of ‘inland dunes’, focus more on the technical exploration of a given subject area. The following excerpt from a group discussion with members of a civic initiative illustrates their intention:

Female dialogue partner (DP): ...and we noticed at that moment that too few citizens even know about the dune, they don't even know what it is. Everyone thought dunes are by the sea and we lie in the sun on them. [...] And then I said to myself, I say, the main thing for me that I built my house here 35 years ago, and over time I kept getting letters from the city's environmental office, every once in a while, that I live near a dune formed during the Ice Age dune, and it needs to be protected because it is a relic of the distant past, a very important one. And that's what fascinated me, and I thought to myself, what does dune even mean? And what I've learned since then about all this, well, bluntly put, no one knows about it.

Male DP: H-hm.

Female DP: So I said, well we'll just have to explain it to the people.

So *actional* learning actions involve passing along one's ‘acquired learning’, while also making it possible for others to participate in the process of one's own generation of knowledge – such as the series of lectures in this example.

Actional learning actions may also cause the initiative's issues to become issues for the municipal public. Extrapolating on Holzkamp's deliberations about cooperative learning actions, this makes possible cooperative learning actions that go beyond the initiatives themselves and may become accessible to each and every inhabitant of the city or the district. This illustrates a further component of the differentiation of cooperative learning actions described above, which, unlike the established political field, does not pursue strategies of exclusivity in knowledge generation, but instead is interested in the broadest possible dialogue. Actional learning actions become a place to meet and discuss alternative perspectives for a wide group of people. Non-binding and more informal events, such as the organisation of park festivals and bike tours, are chosen for this purpose. By providing a pleasant setting, processes of political education are not immediately blocked by negative associations, but guided back into the subjectively significant context of one's own life through a ‘*combination of awareness-building and fun*’ – as one of the study participants put it – making such processes possible in the first place. The accelerated opening of participation opportunities can be seen as a strategy to deal with the meta-‘action problem’ described above. At the same time, it further extends the context of qualitative leaps in learning, by providing a forum for bringing together the perspectives of very heterogeneous groups of people.

Reflective learning actions, meanwhile, centre on the aforementioned shared meta-‘action problem’, the way the established political field works, and each individual’s options for participation. Essentially, this is about the low level of recognition that is giving to unconventional forms of participation, and the resulting ‘struggle’/‘clash’ between the established political field and citizens, which is characterized by myriad prejudices and diverse mechanisms of exclusion. As demonstrated earlier, these relate to the agreement on participation requiring entitlement, and the imputation that ordinary citizens lack political competence. In this connection, Bourdieu (2001) spoke of ‘entitlement’ and ‘ability’. The following excerpt from a conversation exemplifies the lack of ‘entitlement’ encountered:

Male DP 2: There’s always that great example with Mr. L. There was that thing at some time, one I always like to tell people about, when I was at some meeting somewhere and he said Mr. DP 2, you live there, so this concerns you, so really you’re not even allowed to say anything about street A. And about a year later, we were at some other thing, was it about street L? I don’t know, anyway, he was there, too, and then he said, what are you doing here, you have nothing to do with this. (laughing) I just found that so typical and somehow that stuck with me. (laughing)

Me: That almost sounds like a good place to end.

Male DP 2 (laughing): Yeah, well no, [...]. As Mr. B. here said, about this matter at City Hall, where the environment committee and the council meeting and somehow everything came together. When Mr. C. [member of initiative 2 ‘city highway’ J.T.] asked the questions, Mr. B. said, what are they all doing here anyway? Then he actually said that amazing sentence, this rabble, they shouldn’t even have been let in. (chuckles) That made me laugh. And then someone said, what do you mean – we’re citizens. (chuckles)

During reflective learning actions, the members of the initiative become aware of the paradox of the political field’s line of argument for their supposedly justified exclusion. The exclusivity of the political authority to act demonstrated here particularly expresses itself in the second part of the excerpted conversation, when citizens attending the council meeting are degraded to “*rabble*” who “*shouldn’t even have been let in*”. This linguistic degradation from ‘citizens’ to ‘rabble’ indicates very clearly to the “limit of legitimate political articulation” described by Bremer and Kleemann-Göhring (2010, p. 21), as seen from the perspective of the established political field.

This lack of ‘entitlement’ is then often justified with a missing ‘ability’ – which the members of the initiatives observed here, however, reject roundly:

Female DP: [...] So ultimately, this initiative is better informed than any politician. Really, DP.

Male DP: Of course.

Female DP: We've realised that by now. When you're standing right there and you tell them certain facts, their jaw drops. Frankly, they all don't even know that; they have tunnel vision, they're just given certain things to vote on, and they're not really that informed – indeed, they can't possibly be...Mr. B. once told me that, he says Ms. DP, I can't do that, I'd have to have a head this size, how am I supposed to read all that. Yes, but in the end they pretend they know everything – that's a mistake, in fact that's the failing of politics in general. I'd love to see a politician say, I'm not familiar with that, I don't know that, err...I'm errr...stumped, or whatever.

During the course of their work, the members of the initiative experienced being able to go on the offense with their status as experts and are sometimes even confirmed in this by representatives of the established political field. And so, as far as the members of the initiative are concerned, the accusation of lack of competence made against the citizens is reversed - the political experts are outed as amateurs, while the laypersons emerge as political experts.

“absorbing – transferring”

In the above description of actional and reflective learning actions, it already became clear that members of initiatives don't just draw on external knowledge in myriad ways in their processing of the respective topics, but that the transferral of the acquired knowledge to others is of great importance.

In the acquisition of external knowledge, a *differentiation in terms of topics and actions* is especially noticeable: Initially, administrative documents and similar documents relating to the given case are processed, but in the further course of learning, technical literature or expert reports that appear relevant are also consulted, and aspects that are clearly distinct from the given case are addressed, e.g. by referencing a study on how navigation devices work, or the World Climate Report. The following female dialogue partner, for instance, states that she “[became] very well versed in a lot of specialist topics”:

Female DP: Even though some of us only have basic training or prior education, but just because we're interested and through years of reading and research, we've acquired, even compared to some “experts” at City Hall, solid specialist knowledge. That became very clear during the hearings and so on, that our way of arguing – really the question is how you define an expert. What are experts anyway?

Another way to acquire external knowledge is through *cooperation with other initiatives, clubs and associations*, such as the BUND (*Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland* – Germany's Federation for Nature Conservation

and the Environment) or VCD (*Verkehrsclub Deutschland*, a non-profit environmental association). Members of other initiatives are included especially when it comes to acquiring practical knowledge, such as how to proceed when lodging objections against planned projects, or how to successfully address political representatives. Drawing on the technical expertise of associations or federations, e.g. by organising lectures or participating in symposia, serves to deepen one's knowledge of interdisciplinary topics, such as the health effects of noise.

Thus, an increasing preoccupation with one's own subject leads to a deepening understanding of the subject. This means that one's own subject area is successively expanded, placed in a larger thematic context, and one is no longer only discussing and working on the initial underlying action problem. Using the topic of 'noise' as an example, the autonomously initiated thematic differentiation process went as follows: first the noise pollution in the urban district was of interest, then different definitions of noise were researched, later the general effects of noise on health were discussed, and finally the noise pollution of the entire city was examined and 'possible solutions' for a city-wide concept were sought.

Besides the acquisition of external knowledge, another special feature of learning activities in citizens' initiatives was observed: an *intensive transferral of the autonomously acquired knowledge*. The central feature here is the transfer of knowledge between individual initiatives; in particular, longer-standing initiatives function as contact persons or experts for the members of 'new' citizens' initiatives, and accordingly provide advice and support. With the founding of a network of initiatives and a voter community, this advisory role is then transferred to another, quasi-institutional form of organisation as well. The choice of such cross-initiatives and object-independent forms of organisation was interpreted by the initiative members as an expanded and non-regulated space for participation where a critical examination of topic areas and a discussion of the resulting alternative perspectives become possible.

By making the members of the initiatives available to the district's citizens as experts on specific issues concerning the district, the expertise leaves the 'inner circle' of the initiatives. The series of lectures on "inland dunes" referred to above can serve as an example here as well. During the course of their own technical examination of their subject area, the members of the initiative realise that the people of the city or district know just as little about the local existence of inland dunes and their significance and characteristics as they themselves did. This prompted the members to plan a series of public lectures that was very well received. The initiative members estimate that 30-50 people participated in each of the lectures. So, on the one hand the initiated expert lectures contributed to

creating publicity and awareness for the object at hand, the ‘dune’, among the people of the neighbourhood or the city, and on the other hand, it served to deepen the initiative members’ own understanding of the object at hand. In this example, the simultaneous acquisition and dissemination of knowledge illustrates the intertwining of one’s own learning as a search for ways to help shape society/the community, with the transferral of what has been learned as an invitation to others to help shape society. Hence, the cooperative teaching-learning arrangement can be understood here, with reference to Holzkamp (1995a), as a constructive ‘dialogical process’ in which each individual is simultaneously both ‘expert’ and ‘layman’, depending on the object at hand. The constructed division between supposed political experts and laypersons is temporarily suspended here due to the fluid alternation between expert and lay status.

Relevance of autonomously generated knowledge

The empirical example of citizens’ initiatives as a space/setting for learning and action shows how unfounded an across-the-board scepticism towards the knowledge generated in everyday contexts is. For the citizens’ initiatives under study, the widespread prejudice of a one-sided, simplistic discussion of topics can be countered with the high degree of thematic and organisational differentiation in their self-initiated learning. The analysis showed that cooperative learning actions in particular, through their contribution to a differentiated understanding of the subject, are an essential component of these qualitative leaps in learning. The constitutively connecting element here is the shared meta-action problem – the question of ‘authority or entitlement’ to shape society. In particular this problem is countered, in reflexive learning actions, by exposing the exclusion mechanisms inherent in the political field, and in actional learning actions, by generating one’s own spaces for learning and action. These are very diverse and in essence aimed at expanding Holzkamp’s ‘personal radius of action’ of as large a circle of people as possible, with a view to having a larger impact on the world order / increasing one’s own world order.

In his deliberations on Citizen Science, Peter Finke observes an essential difference in the acquisition of knowledge by experts and laypersons in the different “settings in which knowledge is generated and applied” (Finke 2014, p. 62). The knowledge generated within the framework of citizens’ initiatives is strongly tied to the respective everyday context and the problems found therein, and yet it goes beyond these. Meanwhile, the professionals’ knowledge comes from “the traditions of the various disciplines, which always follow special perspectives” (ibid.). This means that a given subject matter is viewed from a

disciplinary logic, which can lead to aspects that run counter to it not being taken into account. “Among laypersons, there is no obligation to work on certain abstract topics just because a given scientific system or the current competitive situation requires it” (ibid., p. 65). The study provides empirical confirmation of this, as the members of the citizens’ initiatives generate their learning topics, places and paths very autonomously and self-confidently. Their learning actions are not based on any previously defined and measurable output, but on a process whose result is initially open. By organising park festivals or bicycle tours, for example, citizens’ initiatives deliberately choose non-binding, low-threshold, and less ‘formal’ arrangements. Compared to established teaching-and-learning settings, they pursue a completely different practice of knowledge acquisition: They attach particular importance to “broad access to knowledge and the active participation of many people in its acquisition” (ibid., p. 7f.) and are interested in the broadest possible dialogue. Because of this approach, a given side is no longer the sole owner or constructor of knowledge, and instead the boundaries between experts and laypeople become blurred. The acquisition of knowledge in the context of the initiatives is strongly linked to the transfer of knowledge, which thus ties in with the idea of ‘knowledge commons’, or the collective use of knowledge bases. Power and domination structures start to be broken up here, permitting a democratisation and collaborative development of knowledge (ibid.; Terkissides 2015).

The results of the research show that the citizens’ initiatives under study, in contrast to the exclusion strategies practiced by the established political field, are concerned with the political participation of as many people as possible. The aim is not to adopt established practices, but to counter them by generating one’s own presumably effective practices. Choosing alternative practices makes it possible to break free from the continuous loop of ‘authorisation and qualification’. The identification of the exclusion mechanisms is followed by a self-inclusion in a newly defined political field – one that is characterised by mutual recognition among heterogeneous actors and the experience of resonance. Going back to the dissent on political participation and education described in the introduction, ‘revolt’ or ‘outrage’ are then an important initiator for individual political learning and action practices that don’t remain at the level of the oft-imputed mere ‘prevention’, but that contain important potential for social transformation.

Outlook – What comes next?

An ongoing research project focuses on the aforementioned transformation potential of civic initiatives. It takes a look at concepts for the future of life and

learning being developed in community projects such as community gardens, repair cafés, and barter exchanges. (Arens/Möllmann/Trumann 2018; Trumann 2016a; 2016b). Community projects are considered as an alternative space for learning and action that offers individuals a way to develop, in a collective setting, alternative perspectives based on a criticism of the status quo and to put them into action. The study asks how these active people imagine their lives – i.e. what their idea of a ‘new’ society is – why they engage in their chosen space for learning and action, and what implications this has for their own actions and learning. The study aims to identify ways in which social transformation processes can be initiated by people’s own activities. The ‘revolt’ mentioned in the introduction thus becomes more tangible in its nature and potential, through a gradually emerging picture of social futures seen from the perspective of the people taking action.

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