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1 SOU: En uthållig demokrati. Politik för folkstyre på 2000-talet (A persevering democracy. Politics for people's governance in the twenty-first century). Stockholm: Fritzes 2000, p. 242; Svensson, Gunnel: Elevinflytande i gymnasieskolan (Pupil's influence in upper secondary school). Stockholm: Länskolnämnden i Stockholmslän 1990, p.25.

2 Berggren, Inger: Identitet, kön och klass. Hur arbetarflickor formar sin identitet (Identity, gender and class. How working-class girls shape their identity). Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis 2001, p. 35; Skolverket: Fem gymnasieprogram under omvandlingstryck (Five upper secondary school programmes under transformation pressure). Stockholm: Skolverket 1998, p. 185; SOU: Den nya gymnasieskolan. Problem och möjligheter (The new upper secondary school. Problems and possibilities). Stockholm: Fritzes 1997, p.9; Wallin, Erik: Gymnasieskola i stöpsleven - då nu alltid. Perspektiv på en skolform (Upper secondary school in the melting-pot - then, now, always). Stockholm: Skolverket 1997, p.55.

3 Statistiska Centralbyrån: Befolkningsstatistik. Del 3 - folkmängd efter kön, ålder och medborgarskap m.m. (Population statistics. Part 3 - population regarding gender, age and citizenship etc.). Stockholm: Statistiska centralbyrån 2003, p.72.

4 Gustavsson, Sven/Svanberg, Ingvar: Bosnierna i Sverige och dess bakgrund (Bosnians in Sweden and their background). In: Gustavsson, Sven/Svanberg, Ingvar (Eds.) Bosnier. En flyktinggrupp i Sverige och dess bakgrund (Bosnians: An refugee group in Sweden and their background). Uppsala: Centrum för multietnisk forskning 1995, pp.9-14.

1. Introduction

A great number of official documents emphasize the school's responsibility for preparing children and young people for democratic participation in society. The school, within its work frame, must provide a good model of a democratic environment that allows and encourages diversity of viewpoints. The school's task is not only to provide students with the knowledge about democratic moral and critical thinking, but it also has to be a democratic arena where children and young people can experience democracy in practice according to the »learning by doing principle«.¹ The figures revealing that nowadays almost all students progress from compulsory school to upper secondary school is a fact that renders the school of even greater importance.² The qualitative and quantitative conditions have changed in a post-modern society placing new demands on the school as an organization whose purpose is not only to convey knowledge but also to nurture certain social values.

The purpose of this article is to understand, describe and explain the experience of Bosnian young people of the Swedish school as a place where a significant part of their democratic upbringing should take place. From this perspective, and taking as a starting-point the deliberative democracy model, the policy instruments that control the school's democratic actions will be presented. In this introduction, it is important to observe that the information presented in this paper is fundamentally based on the experiences of a group of Bosnian students attending Swedish upper secondary school. This does not necessarily mean that their views and perceptions are shared by other (Bosnian) students or the staff at their school.

2. Bosnians in Sweden

In this section, I will give some basic statistics about Bosnians in Sweden and in Gothenburg. Before the 1990's, immigration from Bosnia to Sweden was not considerable. Available statistics show that out of circa 40,000 labour market immigrants from ex-Yugoslavia, only a couple of thousand were Bosnian. As refugees, Bosnians came into the country in the beginning of 1990's, most of them between 1992 and 1993. Today there are roughly 65,000 Bosnians in Sweden³. With this experience some people have come to the conclusion that Bosnians are the group of immigrants who are going to dominate the »refugee and immigration field for several years ahead«⁴. Some researchers also think that Bosnian will be »one of largest immigrant languages in Sweden«⁵.

According to available statistics from Gothenburg city, approximately 6,000 people from Bosnia and Herzegovina currently live in the municipality⁶. Most of them live in so-called immigrant suburbs. Since the end of the war and up to now »only« a few per cent of Sweden-Bosnians have returned to their homeland. Reverting to a homeland is a complex phenomenon and there is not enough space in this article to discuss this situation. A »low« returning tendency coupled with the Bosnians' comparatively good adaptation is a sign that they are an immigrant group who are going to stay in Sweden for a long time.

3. Deliberative Democracy

The aim of this section is to serve as an introduction to a discussion about deliberative democracy in connection with a school's day-to-day running. The emphasis on deliberation is not new and goes back to the ancient Greeks. Since then, deliberation has been seen as a way to form volition that precedes decision-making⁷. The term deliberative democracy was coined by Joseph M. Bessette⁸ when he discussed the democratic principles of the American constitution. The core of democratic legitimacy, according to deliberative democracy, lies in an individual's ability to engage in authentic deliberations that lead to collective decisions. During the deliberation process the participants can modify their original preferences, which are based on the power of the arguments and not on coercion, manipulation or deceit.

Let us look at some of the perceptions of the characteristics of deliberative democracy. The first condition for democratic deliberation is that participants feel and are regarded by

5 Sander, Åke: Bosnier i Göteborg. Enkätresultaten – en kort sammanfattning (Bosnians in Gothenburg: Results from a questionnaire – a short summary). Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet 1998, p.8.

6 Göteborgs stad/Stadskansliet: Tabeller från Statistikgruppen (Tables from the Statistics group). Göteborg: Göteborgs stad 2003.

7 Manin, Bernard: On Legitimacy and Political Deliberation. In: Political Theory 3 (1987), pp. 338-368.

8 Bessette, Joseph. M.: Deliberative Democracy. The Majority Principle in Republican Government. In: Goldwin, Robert/Schambra, William (Ed.): How Democratic is the Constitution. Washington: American Enterprise Institute 1980, pp. 102-116.

9 Benhabib, Seyla: Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy. In: Benhabib, Seyla (Ed.): Democracy and Difference Contesting the Boundaries of the Political. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1996, pp. 66-94; Cohen, Joshua: Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy. In: Benhabib, 1996, pp. 95-119.

10 Fearon, James: Deliberation as Discussion. In: Elster, Jon (Ed.) Deliberative Democracy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, pp. 44-68.

11 Cooke, Maeve: Five Arguments for Deliberative Democracy. In: Political Studies 48 (2000), pp. 947-969.

12 Cf. Elster, Jon: Introduction, In: Elster, 1998, pp. 1-18.

13 Gambetta, Diego: »Claro!« An Essay on Discursive Machismo. In: Elster 1998, pp. 19-43.

14 Przeworski, Adam: Deliberation and Ideological Domination. In: Elster 1998, pp. 140-160.

15 Rothstein, Bo/Esaiasson, Peter/Hermansson, J. J./Micheletti, Michele/ Petersson, Olof (Eds.): Demokrati som dialog (Democracy as a dialogue). Stockholm: SNS 1995, p. 36f.

16 Ibid., p. 52; SOU 2000, p. 196.

17 Rothenstein et al. 1995, p. 124-135.

other discussion participants as free and equal individuals⁹. James D. Fearon¹⁰ believes that deliberations create the prerequisite for individuals and groups to present their perceptions about »how things look« from their point of view. Maeve Cooke¹¹ characterizes deliberation as a voluntary exchange of arguments based on rational debate, which might imply a reconsideration of their original preferences. Jon Elster¹² is of the opinion that decisions made in a spirit of deliberation are founded on fair and impartial argumentation. Diego Gambetta¹³ considers deliberation something between negotiation and debate where the participants listen to each other before a collective decision is made. To Adam Przeworski,¹⁴ deliberation is a mode of discussion aimed at shaping the preferences of the participants.

A working democracy is based on public debate and the non-restricted creation of opinions. Discussion as well as action and change ought to come out of a consideration of the merits of the arguments. It is, however, well known that individuals and groups of persons have different access to power and resources in society. Some are partially or entirely excluded from the democratic process¹⁵. For this reason, public meeting places (such as associations, known as »schools in democracy and public spirit« in Sweden) play an important role in promoting the democratic dialogue and the development of democratic thinking¹⁶. If the dialogue is kept within »thought ghettos«, the conditions for democracy are in danger. A functioning public space is one of the most important prerequisites for the steering committee of citizens. However, today there are some problems with the functioning of public dialogue in Sweden. The only way to improve and broaden the Swedish democracy is to renew the public debate¹⁷.

Deliberative democracy is founded on trust, honesty and co-operation. This means that only these conditions have to be fostered in Swedish schools and associations so that they can serve as a nursery for democracy¹⁸. It is possible to make democracy more substantial and efficient by making greater efforts to include marginalised individuals and groups of people to whom the formal promises about democratic equality only conceal their exclusion or repression¹⁹.

Such deliberations might in some situations generate negative effects, e.g. in a situation of crisis when a drastic deterioration in the quality of decision-making can be observed. More eloquent individuals can overwhelm the participants in the debate. Deliberation can also cause conformism when weaker individuals uncritically yield to stronger individuals' wishes. Another problem with deliberations is that there always exists a space for manipulation of important information, as well as the opportunity for lobbying, which can undermine good dialogue.²⁰ There is no democracy that is immune to political manipulation where powerful interests groups exert a power over the democratic process. Ethnic minorities and women are usually underrepresented in decision-making institutions, which very rarely favour these groups of people²¹.

4. The Fundamental Values in Swedish Schools

Policy instruments, syllabi and other laws state that it is the school's obligation to improve the democratic values of children and young people. It is clearly stated that all students, regardless of gender, ethnic group, socio-economic background and form of education, shall be embraced by the school's democratic education. This means that all students, regardless of their individual potential, are guaranteed the same rights as the others in the school. For example, students have a right to gain knowledge about democratic values as well as the right to influence the method of study that is used in the school. They also have the right to enter into a dialogue with concerned teachers in order to influence the content of their education. This exposure to democratic debate in the forum of the school must have a positive impact on society as a whole when the students leave this environment. Fundamental values as a concept, were raised in the 1990's in the curriculum committee report *Skola för bildning*²².

The curriculum for the non-compulsory school system emphasizes the schools' obligation to »transfer such values to students, mediate knowledge and prepare the students to work and act in society«. Students shall receive the necessary knowledge to be able to cope with the demands of an ever-changing society, which provides a huge flow of diverse information. The students' own potential »to find, to dedicate and to use new knowledge« shall be promoted and further developed. »The students shall learn to think critically, to examine facts and conditions as well as to realize the consequences of different alternatives.«²³

18 Levine, Peter: *The New Progressive Era. Toward a Fair and Deliberative Democracy*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield 2000, p. 242.

19 Dryzek, John: *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations*. Oxford: Oxford UP 2000, p. 86.

20 Gambetta 1998, p. 21f.

21 Miller, David: *Deliberative Democracy and Social Choice*. In: Held, David (Ed.): *Political Studies*, Volume XL Special Issue 1992, p. 56.

22 SOU: *Skola för bildning (School for education)*. Stockholm: Allmänna förlaget 1992, p. 94; *Ibid.*, p. 52; SOU 2000, p. 196.

23 Utbildningsdepartementet: *Läroplan för de frivilliga skolformerna – LPF 94 (Curriculum for the voluntary school forms)*, 1994, p. 5.

24 Egidius, Henry: *Skola och utbildning. I historiskt och internationellt perspektiv (School and education. In an historic and international perspective)*. Stockholm: Natur och Kultur 2001, p. 182f.; Skolverket: *Med demokrati som uppdrag. En temabild om värdegrunden (With democracy as a mission. About fundamental values)*, 2000a, p. 13; Skolverket: *Nationella kvalitetsgranskningar 1999 (National check of quality 1999)*. In: *Rapport Nr. 180*, 2000b, p. 30f.; Skolverket: *Samtala, gör eleverna delaktiga, tro på mångfalden och bygg broar, var oense, minns, avstå inte makten, håll koll, håll ut. Dokumentation av Skolverkets nationella konferens om värdegrunden den 25 april 2001 (Discuss, lead pupils to participate, believe in diversity and build bridges, disagree, remember, do not resign from power, double-check, hold out: Documentation from the Swedish Board of Educations, conference about fundamental values from April 25, 2001)*, 2001, p. 11f.

25 Englund, Tomas: *Den svenska skolan och demokratin: Möjligheter och begränsningar (The Swedish school and democracy. Prospects and restrictions)*. In: SOU: *Det unga folkstyret*. Stockholm: Fakta Info Direkt 1993:93, pp. 13-50; Skolverket: *En fördjupad studie om värdegrunden – om möten, relationer och*

Generally, the school's democratic tasks imply two things. On the one hand the school shall mediate knowledge about democracy as a form of government and on the other hand it shall try to embed notions of democracy deep within the soil of a democratic way of living. One of the key roles in the school's democratic function is to ensure that children and young people develop democratic competence. This vaguely defined concept embraces their ability to reflect upon, develop and act in harmony with fundamental democratic values. Such democratic competence develops in interaction between people with different backgrounds and experiences, between and within the groups of people. Democratic tasks can only be realized when the school acts as an important social forum, which provides possibilities for the practices of democracy²⁴.

Fundamentally, all work in school with democratic issues proceeds from reasoning developed within the model of deliberative democracy. The emphasis on deliberations as a form of conversation can be traced back to the early post-war period. Proceeding from the assumption that conversation and dialogue constitute the guiding democratic principle, one can come to the conclusion that the school's task is to develop children and young people in order to be able to communicate in a spirit of democracy. This is one of the fundamental prerequisites for participation in democratic processes, both in school and in society. This can occur if the school acts as a meeting place where reflections upon deliberative conversations concerning moral issues and ethics can embrace adults as well as children and young people. Segregated educational environments and segregated informal school environments (school break, school cafeteria) make it impossible to carry out this task and to realize the idea about the deliberative conversation in practice. In this kind of conversation, people with different points of view, born of different knowledge and experiences, must be able to argue for their viewpoint. Children and young people develop their democratic competence through such conversation. They develop a competence that goes beyond mere dry theory into a concrete experience of democracy²⁵.

An explicit aim of deliberative conversation in school is to strengthen Swedish democracy. Deliberations founded on active listening, consideration and argumentation can provide the prerequisites that can be used when shaping the conclusions accepted by people²⁶. There is a need to provide a significantly larger space for such deliberative argumentation, both in formal and informal situations. In fact, one of the school's traditional functions, that of knowledge intermediary, that transforms into two-way communication, which can be considered meaningful by both students and teachers²⁷.

The influence of students usually occurs through the formalized structures of class and pupil councils. The former operate in accordance with a direct principle of democracy, while the latter are founded on a representative democracy where every class elects a number of representatives. The aim of this is to make it possible for students to gain practical experience in both of these principles in order to exercise democracy. Research has suggested that there is a substantial gulf between the values these democratic institutions are supposed to have and the rather negative view of them held by the students involved. One possible explanation, which Eva Forsberg²⁸ highlights, could be that the class council is not considered an influential body. It is rather seen as a forum to socialize and as an opportunity to express one's opinions in a relaxed environment without the performance pressure that usually characterises the school day.

The work with the fundamental values in the upper secondary school has been made difficult because the teachers do not have enough time to form a functioning relationship with the students. The school day is fragmented into many courses, which are under the responsibility of many different members of staff. Many teachers in compulsory schools and in upper secondary schools experience a lack of time to develop a personal relationship with the students. Hence, there is no space for conversations about the issues of fundamental values²⁹. The teachers mention some other obstacles for students' influence: teaching tools, schedule and the disintegration of courses, students' performance anxiety and a development of the society, which contribute to a weaker sense of democratic values³⁰. The differences between the teachers' and the students' perception of the same situation result from different »ways of interpretation«. Teachers compare the current situation with the situation when they were students. Considering student participation in this way, it is easy to conclude that the situation certainly has improved. However, students compare the current situation with their own conception of how the students' influence should be in reality³¹.

samtal som förutsättningar för arbetet med de grundläggande värdena (A deeper study on fundamental values – about meetings, connections and conversation as prerequisites for work with fundamental values). Stockholm: Skolverket Dnr 2000:1613, p.9f.

26 Englund, Tomas: Deliberativa samtal som värdegrund – historiska perspektiv och aktuella förutsättningar (Deliberative talks as fundamental values – historical perspectives on current conditions). Stockholm: Skolverket 2000, p. 5f.

27 Englund 1993, p.43.

28 Forsberg, Eva: Verksamhetsideal och skolverklighet. En processutvärdering av projektet Skola 2000. En rapport från SLAV-projektet (Ideal picture and reality in school: A process evaluation for the project School 2000). Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet 1993, p. 105f.

29 Skolverket 2000a, p. 23f; Skolverket 2000 (Dnr), p. 51.

30 Forsberg 1993, p. 108ff.

31 Mattsson, Ingrid/ Svensson, Gunnel: Elever och lärare om elevinflytande i gymnasieskola. En rapport från SLAV-projektet (Pupils and teachers about pupil's influence in upper secondary school: A report from the SLAV-project). Uppsala: Uppsala universitet 1994, p. 48.

32 Tursunović, Mirzet: Fokusgruppsintervjuer i teori och praktik (Focus groups interviews in theory and practice). In: Sociologisk Forskning 1 (2002), pp. 62-89.

33 Ahrne, Göran/Franzé, Mats/Roman, Christine: Det sociala landskapet. En sociologisk beskrivning av Sverige från 50-tal till 90-tal (The social landscape. A sociological description of Sweden from the 1950's to the 1990's). Göteborg: Korpen 2000, p. 161.

34 SOU 1997, p. 27.

35 Cf. Persson, Anders: Maktutövningens interna dynamik. Samspel och motsättningar i skolan och lönearbete (The internal dynamics of exercise of power: Interplay and antagonisms in school and labour working). Lund: Lunds universitet 1991; Persson, Anders: Skola och

5. Empirical Results

I have used focus groups interviews as the method of collecting data. Focus groups are widely used today within many different research fields. Basically, they are a form of group interview where data is produced through participants' discussion led by a moderator on the topic determined by the researcher. However, there is no single method of conducting such focus groups³². Their features, size, composition, purpose, as well as the areas where they are practiced vary. Like other research methods, focus groups have strengths and weaknesses, which make them more or less appropriate as a data gathering method for a particular study. With these interviews, it was possible for me to dig deeper and have a conversation with the interviewees about their view on a number of questions I had prepared.

The empirical evidence is based on five interviews with a total of 18 Bosnian upper secondary school students (ten males and eight females). In this article they appear by name. The seven males are: *Mirsad, Samid, Asim, Mirel, Emin, Suad* and *Sead* and the five females are: *Esma, Samira, Nihada, Selma* and *Adisa*. The average interview lasted approximately an hour and a half. Some results from the focus group discussions are presented in this article.

6. Socially Determined Compulsory Attendance at School

A number of the participants regarded school as a necessary evil. Many of them claimed that they were forced to attend school. Others considered the school as their chance to »get a good job« and to »become someone«. The students were aware of the fact that upper secondary school is not compulsory. However, despite the fact that their attendance ought to be a matter of free choice, it was perceived by many as a »socially coerced« activity³³. The concluding report by the *Committee for the Development of the Upper Secondary School*³⁴ also points out that young people realize that the upper secondary school is, if not a guarantee, then a precondition for getting employment. The report concludes that in the future »one can consider the upper secondary school to be compulsory«.

Anders Persson³⁵ is of the opinion that some students experience a »subjective coercion« to go to school despite considering school irrelevant and of little interest. The students not only feel forced to go to school, but also feel obliged to study at home³⁶. In the five groups of young people whom I met, some felt that they were forced to go to school, but others were able to state different motives for attending. On the question of why she was going to school, *Esma* answered: »There does not seem to be any other choice. Otherwise, how will you find a job?«

7. Conversation within the School

Conversation plays a prominent role within deliberative democracy, the way of thinking of which should – at least according to the policy instruments – characterise the school's work with democratic issues. The participants were of the opinion that discussions in school firstly depended on the teachers' attitude towards the students' influence. When *Mirsad* was asked whether he had the opportunity to discuss the method of teaching in school and other issues concerned with school work, he answered: »We usually complain most of the time.« *Samira*, one year older than *Mirsad*, replied that students in her class »usually come to an agreed way of proceeding«. The younger girls (first year students) replied that their opportunities to shape things strongly depend on the teachers' good will, while some of the boys (second year students) stated that they had succeeded in making some significant improvements at their school. By that the boys mean that they need the ability to organise and great determination.

Samid talked about segregated environments, which tend to arise during school breaks and which are based on ethnic groups, making it harder in turn to socialize with young people from other ethnic backgrounds. The students' statements in each of the groups concerning discussions about society and democracy in their schools were in agreement with each other. Discussions existed, according to most of them, almost exclusively in the social science classes and were rare in the Swedish language classes. Those discussions were perceived as interesting but infrequent. The students experienced a lack of time both when it came to formulating their own questions and to participating in conversations³⁷.

makt. Om viljan till kunskap, beroendet av utbildning och tvång att gå i skola (School and power. About the will for knowledge, dependence of education and compulsion to go to school). Stockholm: Carlsson Bokförlag 1994.

36 Berggren 2001, p. 278.

37 Cf. Roth, Klas: Democracy, education and citizenship. Towards a theory on the education of deliberative democratic citizens. Stockholm: HLS Förlag 2000, p. 4ff.

38 Cf. Ferm, Christer: Demokrati i praktiken. Handbok för lärare om samverkan med elever och föräldrar (Democracy in practice. A handbook for teachers about co-operation with pupils and their parents). Stockholm: Runa Förlag 1993, p. 42.

39 Berggren 2001, p. 324.

8. Class Council and Pupil Council

In schools both direct democracy (in the form of the class council) and representative democracy (in the form of the pupil council) exist. Christer Ferm³⁸ points out that the representative model of democracy is not suitable for children and young people. They are more negative than adults are towards decisions made on their behalf by deputies. All the participants of the focus group were familiar with the fact that every class has a class council as well as a pupil council (representing the whole school) in almost every school (except the Polhem's upper secondary school that abolished this body in 2001). Most of them did not have a clear picture of the sort of questions that could be raised in those councils. They did not know whether their representatives were sufficiently briefed to be able to do their job. Many of them believed that it would be better if they had some kind of introduction to the workings of the council. An overwhelming majority believed that involvement in those councils is not necessary. The reasons for this are many for these students. Democratic missions have low status, they demand too much time from other school obligations and the students thought that the councils failed to debate matters of real importance to them.

The interviewed groups talked about the difficulties in recruiting volunteers to the councils. In Samira's class it was »little bit hard« because the »one part of the students are swots and the other part do not care at all«. Usually what happens is that in the end some of the »swots« or some of the »model students« are persuaded to be volunteers. Usually, they are perceived as spoiled brats and they do not have a working class background, which alienates them from those who do ³⁹.

Participants in another group confirm that the work of the pupil council is not taken that seriously. It is possible to identify three distinct groups of students. Firstly, those who have chosen to take part simply because they think it might be fun. *Samid* stated: »Four of them who have chosen to be volunteers are totally not interested and one of them did it just for fun.« The second group consists of those »good« students who find them selves participating as a result of peer pressure. *Samira* referred to members of her class who have either chosen to do it by themselves or other students have persuaded them to do it. They just say: »You are so good, you know all that.« The same thing occurred in *Asim's* class: »We sort of put pressure on someone to do that and finally they give in.« Finally there is the third group who participate in these democratic forums only in order to avoid attending classes. Their motivation is entirely negative. *Nihada* and *Esma* stated: »They just do it in order to get out of classes.«

9. The Student Unions

In most of the schools there are student unions, e.g. cultural associations, sports associations, and in some of them there are also youth political associations. However, some of these did not seem to attract the students in my study. It was felt that they did not have enough time for such activities and also lacked interest because they were connected to school and the students did not want to spend any more time there than necessary. *Mirsad* commented: »I have no time and it is not interesting.« *Samira* supported the comment with: »It is usually in my spare time, not in the school day. The school is sort of just a school, I have classes then, and at least for me because I am engaged in other outside associations, there was nothing interesting in school.«

Emin, talking about a political youth association (SSU – the Social Democratic youth political association) at Angered upper secondary school, did not see any reason for joining. When he asked members: »What do you do in this association?« they said: »Absolutely nothing, but you should just be a member of the association anyway. But why should I be a member then? There is no reason for being a member? The thing is that you should do something, try to fix something, make something right.« At this time, none of the participants were a member of a school association. Some of the young people had discovered other direct and more efficient ways of influencing things in the school. *Mirel* related his experiences: »I think that I can have an influence because my mate is the president of an association, so I do not have to be a member of any association. I do not have to go to meetings and I get what I want anyway. That is an advantage.« Negative experiences of membership in political associations in their home country are also factors that make them suspicious about this kind of association. In spite of this, *Mirel* has been thinking of joining a political youth association:



I was thinking of joining the MUF (the Conservative youth political association), but I changed my mind, well, I am still thinking of that, but... It is not good to be a member of some political associations; I really do not think so. You should not ..., at least what I have learned from back home, you should not get marked, if you can call it that. It should be a private thing and it is not good to be a member of some political associations. For a while I was interested, but I will have to mull it over.

10. Student's Influence in Upper Secondary School

The older students become, the more their teachers control the form of tuition. All of the respondents stated about that it was easier to have an influence in the compulsory school. Some of them explained this by saying that the relationship with the teachers was better developed and that they felt that the teachers had more time to develop this relationship with their students. Besides this, they had one teacher over a longer time-span than was the case in upper secondary school and this made it possible to form a closer and more personal bond between the students and the teachers. The time at upper secondary school was experienced by the students as being divided between many courses of short duration, which had a negative effect on the solidarity of the class. To engage in the democratic life of the school or associations takes too long a time, especially when students know that they are only going to attend the school for a limited period of time. Their satisfaction with any of these processes depended on receiving instant gratification. It is possible that the school does not try to explain its democratic structure in the right way, which creates an unwillingness among the students to become involved in formalized forms of democracy. What happens right now is what counts. *Mirel* mentioned a case where he was engaged in an association when he was studying at the compulsory school:

It all takes too long. I remember, when I was in seventh grade in my old school, I wanted a new basket. I was nagging about it for two years, and then when I finished the ninth grade (the last year in compulsory school) they bought a new basket. So, after that I thought why fight when it won't be any use to me anyway? This was just one example of how long everything takes.

11. Democracy in the School

Many students are of the opinion that the school ought to be a democratic organisation, but that does not conform to their experience of real life. They believe that the democratic system existing in most schools is not an example of a good democratic system. According to these students, using the word democracy in the context of the school is a way for the adults to »brag« about how good and democratic Swedish schools are (as opposed to the schools in the refugee students' home countries - implicitly stated by the students). *Samid* brought up a case which he related to school democracy and wondered whether democracy implies believing that Muslims should not get access to a room where they can pray. He proclaimed that this is not democratic:

They claim and believe it is a democratic system, but I don't think that it is true democracy. One has to realize what democracy really is as well..., in order to tell whether there is any or not. Once there were some people in our class, Iranians or something like that I believe, who wanted a room where they could pray. And I don't believe they got what they wanted. I think they brought it up in the student council, but it was rather difficult. I do not know whether such things are part of democracy or not, but if so then they said having such a place was not part of the school's function.

12. Knowledge About the Concept of Democracy

Some academics have pointed to the fact that »many of the definitions of democracy in our school literature are not specific enough.«⁴⁰ The more or less commonly accepted definition of democracy as »the rule of the people« and »respecting majority decisions« does not appear to be particularly problematic to these young people. The vast majority have, without further reflection, replicated this formulation in their discussions regarding the meaning

40 Blomqvist, Paula/Rothstein, Bo: Vår välfärdsstatens nya ansikte: Demokrati och marknadsreformer inom den offentliga sektorn. Stockholm: Agora 2000, p.28.



of democracy. It is something they have had direct experience of. »The rule of the people« and »majority decisions« have brought these young people here as refugees of war when large areas in their previous home country were cleansed of people defined as minorities. The school ought to bring up and get students to question their notions of what constitutes democracy to a larger degree, so that the young people can make connections between their theoretical knowledge and personal experiences, from both their home country and Sweden. The young people's sometimes uncritical attitude towards the democratic concept shows that there are not enough occasions in the school where it is possible to discuss those problematic aspects of the definition. Such a discussion could, for instance, be about drawing attention to the so-called democratic paradox, which implies that democracy can be abolished in a democratic way.

Some participants associated the word democracy with freedom and the right to free speech. Selma linked democracy to politics and started by pointing out that she was not »really interested in political matters. To say what you think is very important to me«. Other students again link democracy to politics and stated once more that is something they do not consider themselves interested in. A right to hold personal opinions, freedom of speech, and have equal opportunities are considered to be the ingredients of a proper democracy. Many participants emphasised that participation in democratic processes demands knowledge on the part of the participants. *Mirel* thought that:

Everybody ought to be able to express what they think, but they have to know something about the topic. So, for instance, one shouldn't ask a homeless person for his opinion of the Swedish tax policy, as he might not know very much about it. But if he knows about it then he should be able to express what he thinks, but if he doesn't...

Suad believed that participation and democracy are time-consuming activities when everybody's opinion has to be considered: »It is difficult to make decisions in a democracy, because everybody ought to be given the opportunity to express their opinion.«

13. Other Concepts Related to the Concept of Democracy

Concepts such as influence, participation, tolerance and so forth, which are commonly held to be characteristics of Swedish democracy by its citizens, are not taken for granted by these young people. In order to consider the concepts as meaningful they need to encounter them in a form easily recognisable by the young people from their everyday (school) life. When they were invited to give an account of their perceptions of these concepts it was obvious that it was difficult for them to understand the meaning of the terms. *Seid* even »dared« to ask: »What does influence imply? We have to know that before we can discuss it.« I did not give an unambiguous answer (if such a thing exists). *Seid* continued: »You hear the word but you still don't know what it means!« *Mirel* tried to define the concept of influence and said it is »almost the same as democracy, not a synonym but related to it. Influence is when you have something to say. Not everybody has influence. Influence has more to do with power. One can affect things through one's vote but one has influence if one has money and knows about lobbying«. In my interviews, few students made this connection between influence and democracy. Generally speaking the participants discussed their relationships with friends and very few connections were made to activities in the school and out in the wider society as a whole.

Many considered that they have difficulties understanding the language of the politicians as it contains a number of obscure concepts. *Seid* thought: »There are also words that the politicians are using that you don't understand. Politicians often simply say things because they feel they will appeal to the majority of the population. Frequently they don't mean or believe in what they are saying.«

14. Social Intercourse with Swedes

In the report of the School Committee it is stated that »at least in school, children and young people should meet across class-, gender- and ethnic divisions«⁴¹. Most of those interviewed felt that the nature of their social contact with peers of the native population had changed

41 SOU 1996, p. 17.

over the years, becoming more strained and less intimate. Many considered that if they talked to Swedes of the same age the conversations were mainly trivial. Serious or intimate discussions were saved for either Bosnian friends or other immigrants, as *Seid* said: »One speaks with Bosnians or other immigrants about the important things.« He continued that it is »more difficult to socialise with Swedes. They are a bit different«. *Samira* thought that Bosnian and Swedish youngsters do not have »that many interests in common in their spare time«.

Next to the different free time activities, the youngsters also acknowledged other factors that made socialising with Swedes more difficult. Several students brought up the fact that it is only in school, and then to a very small extent, that there is any social intercourse with Swedes, and then rarely in the free time. »In school maybe a little, in my spare time never«: said *Nihada*. According to her and many others, the primary reason for this was the extensive residential segregation: »There are no Swedes where I live!« *Emin* picked up the same problem of residential segregation: »I don't have a chance to socialize with them. I never get the chance and that goes for my life in school and my free time. Most of those living around me are immigrants, most of my friends – they are immigrants.« *Samid* considers cultural differences: »We have our own culture and they have theirs. There are lots of us, where we live there are plenty of Bosnians so we don't need any Swedes so to speak. Mixing and so on is a bit difficult.« *Adisa*, who lives in a more mixed neighbourhood, has developed her social interaction with Swedish friends over a long time period. These days she socializes more with Swedes than with Bosnians, »maybe because there aren't so many Bosnians living nearby«.

Many of the boys said that, nowadays, they socialize more with Bosnians and other immigrant youths. *Suad* expressed himself in this way:

It is mixed. I socialize with everybody, but you still have your origin and roots. You socialize mostly with Bosnians, or with Bosnian people. You are from there, and you are drawn to them more and more the older you get. Sort of, when you are young you socialize with everybody possible. Then when you get older, you start to think of your country and people more and you are drawn more to them.

Mirel, speaking of his experiences stated:

For me it was different. When I couldn't speak Swedish then it was only Bosnians I had contact with. And even now when I have moved to another place, I still have some of my old Bosnian mates, but we do not live near each other, we don't go to same school so we can't hang out together. Now I have only few good Bosnian mates.

15. Concluding Remarks

The aim of involving students in the practical day-to-day running of the the school democracy does not always work. Apparently, this strikes no one as a »revolutionary« discovery. Most people are familiar with this fact: decisions makers, the scientific community, people in general, parents, students and school staff. In principle, we can agree on the fact that this represents a problem in a many different ways, with consequences that can be difficult to foresee for today's society. What we can say is that school democracy is a significant problem in our society. My sociological task, in this paper, is to understand, describe and explain the experiences of a cross-section of young Bosnian people in school, regarding their view of school as a place where an important part of their democratic education should occur, as mentioned in the introduction. My empirical findings, as well as findings from other reports and evaluations over the last years, indicate that the development of schools in this regard has not been satisfactorily conducted, even though student influence has increased in the course of the 1990's. It is appropriate, both from the juridical and scientific perspective, to try to explain the large discrepancy between political visions and their implementation in the school's day-to-day operations. However this is outside the framework of this article.

A working democracy requires that the participants in the debate share sufficient background information to come to a reasoned decision about the matter under consideration. Moreover, for them to participate fully in the process, they will probably need to feel that the decisions they are arriving at are likely to benefit them. Unfortunately, a large range of studies, covering different areas, including the school, has shown that is rarely the case. Several reasons for the

42 Rothstein et al. 1995, p. 112f.

43 Roth 2000, p. 1.

44 Ibid., p. 141.

failure of the school to attain its democratic ideals can be suggested. Firstly, the organization that is responsible for implementation might not be suitable when the staff cannot, will not or do not understand how the decisions should be implemented. Another reason can be said to lie in the policy, which can be incompatible, incomprehensible and unsuitable for achieving a particular improvement. That is not to exclude the practice of politicians raising an issue for political gain when they have no intention of actually implementing any changes in society⁴².

Where do the schools go »wrong« when approaching democratic issues? Could it simply be that they are being tasked with too radical a mission for the resources at their disposal? Klas Roth⁴³ writes that it is a formidable challenge to find a suitable way of finishing the education of the deliberative democratic citizen. How does today's Swedish school manage the very important mission of teaching young people how to have a critical attitude towards the society around them? Roth states⁴⁴ that it is impossible to educate deliberative democratic citizens fully. To do this, he continues, requires that children and young people are spared the constant interruptions brought about by changing classes and that they are allowed time for authentic deliberation. Moreover, he further points out that teachers need to adopt a less domineering posture.

A brief recapitulation of the central aspects of deliberative democracy is needed here. The first condition for democratic deliberations is the approximate equality in status of participants. Those individuals aware of the context of the debate will always be at an advantage. Mutual trust and respect must exist between the participants, which is best created in an open and honest discussion where they feel free to express their point of view. Serious deliberations require a sensible audience with good theoretical as well as practical knowledge. Which of the above elements can be said to exist in today's Swedish schools?

Deliberative democracy is, among other things, about conversation and dialogue. A necessary prerequisite for this, as mentioned above, is that the participants of the conversation feel that they are free and equal. Today's Swedish school is far from the ideal model of the deliberative conversation. Many of students, whom I met expressed a desire to develop some kind of closer and less formal relationship with their teachers and felt that it would be interesting to talk to their teachers in such circumstances. However, the students' experiences show that there are few teachers interested in taking their students' opinions seriously.

My empirical material indicates that schools teach the fundamentals of democratic theory relatively successfully, but deal less well with the task of providing their students with the necessary resources to question the concept of democracy and other related concepts. Bosnian young people's contacts with their Swedish peers are rather limited; occurring, apart from in a few exceptional circumstances, almost entirely in class. They are therefore quite superficial in their nature. With such dwindling common frames of reference, the different groups intensify their images of themselves, further contributing to the development of prejudice about others. Only when young immigrants believe that the majority population has truly grasped their situation (and vice versa) will it be possible to maintain a »social reliance«, which is seen as an important prerequisite for the functioning of society in a democratic spirit.

The school, as an institution of the society, does not act in a vacuum, but is affected and influenced by the structures of the society that exist outside the school's walls (e.g. segregation, unequal political resources etc.). The school has the potential to act as a social arena where people with a variety of cultural backgrounds and ethnic standpoints are brought together in ways that would be difficult in the world outside. This aspect is of particular importance, especially considering the present segregation of housing that students have raised. However, there are also some aspects of the school's handling of democratic education that can be viewed in a more positive light. Unfortunately the opportunity to have such an influence varies a great deal from school to school. Some of the teachers allow their students to shape their studies by forming study groups, which is appreciated by the students. Some of the students have been members of the class council in spite of the fact that they are not satisfied with the operations of that body. Finally, the conclusion can be drawn that the Swedish school does not live up to the expectations that society has of it stated in the forms of laws and policy instruments.



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