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# The Future is Today

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## Abstract

The film will present the results of an audiovisual research project at the University of Geneva, as part of the 25th anniversary of the Youth Session and its strategic reformulation. The project was conceived to allow the actors of the Youth Session, past, present and future, to know each other and to recognize in a common framework of belonging, to become aware of history, transformations, problems and potentialities of the Youth Session. The Youth Session is considered in Switzerland as the biggest project for youth political participation at national level, designed by and for young people. It was planned in 1991 as a unique project on the occasion of 700 years of Switzerland. Due to the success of the project, the young participants as well as the national parliamentarians have committed themselves to renew the project from year to year.

The event is organized every year on the basis of mandates by young volunteers and coordinated and supervised by the Swiss Council of Youth Activities (CSAJ). All interested young people living in Switzerland between the ages of 14 and 21 can register - regardless of language, nationality, level of education or party affiliation. The places are awarded according to a selection process which aims to obtain as wide a representation as possible of the youth in Switzerland.

In the context of the Federal Youth Session, for four days, 200 young people from all over Switzerland have the opportunity to actively participate in politics and represent their interests. With the support of experts and politicians, young people develop claims on topical issues and debate in the National Council Chamber. The demands adopted by the plenary assembly are then submitted to Parliament in the form of petitions. Since 1991, nearly 6,000 young people have participated in this project by formulating about 150 claims.

In 2015, the CSAJ published the results of a study on the political participation of children and youth (Wittwer, 2015). The study articulates distinctions between individual and collective participation and between political and social participation. The vision of participation adopted by the CSAJ is collective and political. Children and young people participate together on issues that concern them as a group (Graff et al., 2013, Zermatten and Stoecklin, 2009) and they propose to influence collective decisions, which are generally, but not necessarily, located or at least formalized in a political system. The study notes that political participation can also be "informal, accessible and without commitment" (Wittwer, 2015). However, the distinction between social and political is not always clear because other forms of social participation lead to forms of political participation and vice versa.

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The Youth Session can be defined as a place of political participation but where this participation is in complex relation with social participation (Mazzoleni and Masulin 2005, Zermatten and Stoecklin 2009, Breviglieri and Gaudet 2014), with unequal access participation (Gaudet, 2012), with the "backstage of participation" (Breviglieri and Gaudet 2014), with the determinants of gender (Cicognani et al., 2012), ethnicity (Andrews 2009), migration (Ursprung, 2015), education (Olson et al., 2015) and also forms of non-participation (Brechon, 2011). This participation experience is supposed to have individual and collective repercussions in the organizations and "militant careers" of the volunteers (Filleule, 2009).

Participation in the Youth Session is a youth citizenship experience (Hart, 1992, Lister, 2003 and 2007) and training, citizenship education in its polysemic and contradictory aspects (Audigier, 2007). A citizenship that "is more a process than a mere status", "constantly redefined and reformulated in the multiple interactions between states and civil societies, and within society itself. (Gagné and Neveu, 2009, p.15), and a function of political culture and historical context (Guy, 1996 and 1998, Ossipow and Felder, 2015). A citizenship which, in the case of Switzerland, refers to national-federal, cantonal and municipal communities of origin and a system of direct democracy that challenges the individual participatory dimension of the citizen (Gay, 1996 and 1998, Graff et al. 2013, Rothenb'uhler et al., 2012), his "injunction" to participate (Gaudet and Turcotte 2013).

The idea of making a film about the Youth Session meant that it was participatory. The culture of the Youth Session is first and foremost participation. It promotes the political participation of young people, but also the participation as a basic principle of the project organization by the volunteers and within the CSAJ. It allows young participants as well as volunteers to develop their skills and to be in constant process of exchange of ideas. It is in this sense that film was also conceived.

The film also had to be an opportunity for reflection and self-criticism. Thus, the method of realization in terms of action research that involves building the film WITH the people concerned has been particularly adapted. The idea of this participatory film was to put the goals and meaning of the project in image and its implementation with its actors and actresses, the volunteers built its content with the production team and the team at the CSAJ. The participatory method intended to thematize the meaning of the Youth Session during a strategic reflection. The video wanted to bring a mirror effect of collective self-reflection to allow to reformulate the identity of the project to actors and actresses who wears it. The camera by helping to make the interlocutors aware of what they say changes the dynamics of the group. The film is made up of elements that build the strategic vision of the Youth Session, as well as related actions (eg youth participation, non-formal training, accessibility). The theme of the past during the jubilee was a step that allowed to understand the images and values of the Youth Session since its creation. The film wanted to make a bridge for the people who have participated in the past and who will participate in the future, as well as for the actors and actresses whose recognition of the project is paramount, namely the political scene and potential partners.

**Keywords:** youth political participation, citizenship, participatory film