

Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society  
Volume 3, Issue 2, Spring 2011, pp. 23-41

Kjetil Børhaug

**Justifying Citizen Political Participation in Norwegian  
Political Education**

Kjetil Børhaug. "Justifying Citizen Political Participation in Norwegian Political Education."  
*Eckert.Jemms* 2011/2. <http://edumeres.net/urn/urn:nbn:de:0220-2014-00069>.

*Post peer preview precopy edit*

Final printversion accessible from publisher Berghahn Journals under  
[berghahn.publisher.ingentaconnect.com/content/berghahn/emms](http://berghahn.publisher.ingentaconnect.com/content/berghahn/emms).

**edumeres.net**

## **Justifying Citizen Political Participation in Norwegian Political Education**

*Kjetil Børhaug, Associate Professor, Department of Administration and Organisational Science, University of Bergen, Norway*

---

**Abstract** • Political education is on the agenda in European countries because adolescent political participation has been in decline. A pressing issue therefore concerns the way in which political education offers meaningful reasons for individual political participation. Since textbooks play a key role in defining school subjects, critical textbook analysis may help us to understand how political education impinges upon participation. To what extent do textbooks explicitly present justifications for political participation? What kinds of justifications are offered? This article analyzes Norwegian social studies textbooks, and concludes that justifications of political participation for young citizens are prominent. The main justifications include the individual pursuit of preferences, individual duty in a “contract” with the state, and identities. However, these justifications are also questionable, for they are generally either individualistic or avoid real political movements.

**Keywords** • democracy, Norway, political education, political participation, social studies, textbooks

---

### **Introduction**

The political integration of new generations of citizens in the political order is not automatic, and cannot be taken for granted.<sup>1</sup> It depends on complex political socialization processes, and political education efforts are a part of these processes.<sup>2</sup> Traditional forms of political participation such as voting have declined, in particular among young people. In the last general elections in Norway, the turnout was only 57 percent for first time voters.<sup>3</sup> The total national turnout was 76 percent. In many European countries, the voting rates are even lower. The current social crisis in many European countries makes political participation more important for young people, whose lives are affected by how governments respond to the financial and economic problems. Even if non-conventional forms of political participation increase, there is a widespread understanding that adolescent political participation is too low and should be stimulated. In fact, political education has been revived in many European countries in recent years as a measure to promote the political participation of

youth as well. There are also initiatives in this area through the Council of Europe.<sup>4</sup> It is important to gain empirical insight in these political education activities, and to raise issues for further development.

An important theoretical point of departure is that political participation will most likely take place when the potential participants find such participation meaningful and justified on an individual level. Political cognition theory stresses that because humans act when action has meaning and makes sense to them, stimulating political participation by means of political education implies explaining to students what makes individual political participation worthwhile.<sup>5</sup> The claim that everyone ought to vote or otherwise be politically active has to be justified to students.<sup>6</sup> As pointed out by late modernity theories, a characteristic of contemporary society is reflexivity.<sup>7</sup> In terms of political participation, reflexivity entails that such participation is increasingly reflected upon, defined and chosen by ordinary citizens. As observed in classrooms in a recent study of Norwegian political education, students openly challenge their civics teachers as to why they should even bother to vote.<sup>8</sup> New generations of citizens will most likely reflect more thoroughly on why political participation might be worthwhile. Justifying political participation as meaningful action for the individual citizen is therefore a key task in political education.<sup>9</sup>

As will be outlined below, available research on political education does not have very much to say about whether justifications of political participation are made part of the educational efforts or not. Consequently, even less is known as to how political participation is justified. More knowledge is needed, not least as a basis to discuss how political motivation could be stimulated by means of political education. Citizen political participation may be justified to students – and other citizens – in different ways. Late modernity theory suggests individualistic notions of how political participation makes sense. On the other hand, it may be argued that political participation is basically collective action, and that it has to make sense as a collective endeavor. Thus, it is not self-evident how political participation makes sense for the individual citizen. Against this background, two research questions stand out as important. First, to what extent does political education elaborate on what makes political participation worthwhile for individual citizens? Second, how is such political participation made meaningful in political education?

Textbooks generally play an important role in defining the aim and content of educational efforts. Documents both in Norway and internationally show that teachers base their teaching largely on textbooks.<sup>10</sup> The role of textbooks is particularly important in school subjects in which the link to academic disciplines is complex and where social changes raise new issues that the school subject should be dealing with. This is clearly the case for social studies, as this school subject relates to the disciplines of economics, political science, sociology and social anthropology. This

implies that textbooks deal with crucial issues for social and political cohesion, and that their role should be further illuminated. For this reason textbooks will be analysed as a means to understand to what extent and how political participation is justified in Norwegian political education.

Norway is an interesting case as the country has offered uninterrupted political education in its educational system since the nineteenth century, while continuously reforming it. Norwegian political education went through a democratization in the 1970s.<sup>11</sup> In subsequent curricula, it has been argued that social studies should aim to stimulate political participation, and it is explicitly stated that a broad variety of participatory forms are to be encouraged.<sup>12</sup> Norway has recently reformed its educational system yet again, and introduced a new national curriculum in which these political education objectives are renewed.<sup>13</sup> Because of this emphasis on encouraging actual participation and the willingness to reform, Norway is a place where there is much interest in the search to justify political participation to increasingly reflexive adolescents. We will focus on a compulsory, upper secondary education social studies course, as this course is the final compulsory political education effort that most young citizens are required to attend.<sup>14</sup> In this course, “Political Education” is one of five main themes, with the others being “Individual and Society,” “The Labour Market and the Economy,” “Multi-cultural Society” and “International Relations.”

### **Justifying Political Activity in Political Education – an Unexplored Field**

François Audigier argues that political education in many western countries has familiarized students with citizen deeds, such as paying taxes, obeying the law and voting.<sup>15</sup> Audigier labels this moralism, thereby suggesting that deeds have been presented in a non-disputable and authoritarian fashion. Similarly, in a Norwegian historical curricular analysis, it is argued that political participation, most notably voting, has been defined as a duty to the nation and to society.<sup>16</sup> However, it is unclear how such a duty has been justified and legitimized to students.

Audigier also points out a more recent approach, which involves examining and debating current issues. This approach is also favored in educational theories that recommend the study of policy issues, such as the works of Hermann Giesecke.<sup>17</sup> Working with current issues may help students to see that politics concern them. But does this give them sufficient reason to participate politically? When teaching current issues, civics teachers may also elaborate on how one may influence the issues in

the current political system, although little research reveals if and how this takes place within this type of teaching.

Political education also traditionally prioritizes formal structures and procedures of governmental institutions. It is sometimes argued that such knowledge in itself stimulates political participation; Reingard Spanring argues that knowledge of democratic principles, structures and procedures will enable students to understand what is going on so that they can form their own opinions.<sup>18</sup> Even so, such knowledge alone will not students with reasons why they should spend time and resources on political activities.

Although the IEA studies about civic knowledge, attitudes and engagement examine political education provisions in various states, they do not examine how political education frames political participation as a meaningful activity for individual citizens.<sup>19</sup> The issue is ignored in the IEA analysis of how national curricula are implemented, as well as in the analysis of how students' competencies may be explained.<sup>20</sup>

### **Reasons for Political Participation**

In her book, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, Carole Pateman argues that liberal theory offers two different notions about why and how citizens accept their responsibility as active members of a polity.<sup>21</sup> First, the utilitarian notion explains political activity as a result of a cost-benefit analysis. That is, if the costs of political activity are smaller than the benefits of obtaining a better policy outcome, political activity will occur. David Held underscores that most writers in the liberal tradition see human action as that of a self-serving action aimed at realizing interests and preferences.<sup>22</sup> This justification applies to voting as well as to other forms of political activity. The pursuit of preferences can be understood as a pursuit of narrowly defined self-interest, or it may be defined more broadly to include interests, values and concerns important to the individual citizen. Second, Pateman points to a contract model, which suggests that citizens accept the costs of maintaining a state, such as voting, in return for the benefits of an organized state. This implies that political participation is a burden that citizens will accept as part of a contract. Being a burden, political participation will be minimized to the minimum required for the state to remain viable.

From the 1960s, participatory democracy partially introduced new justifications for political participation. The instrumental pursuit of interests and values was also regarded as important in participatory democracy. However, writers such as Carole Pateman and Hannah Arendt also emphasize that political participation has a potential for moral, intellectual,

and social development for all participants.<sup>23</sup> Self-development and learning become reasons for political participation. Such benefits from political participation do not depend on success in influencing policy outcomes.

Late modernity theory suggests that people increasingly relate themselves to politics in ways that they both design and control.<sup>24</sup> Political participation may be instrumental pursuit of interests and values. But from a late modernity perspective, political participation is above all related to the construction and display of identities. What defines and determines political participation are the identities that the individual wishes to develop and activate. Inventing oneself is a driving force for political activity. People participate politically in as far as the identity they wish to display demands it.

Instead of seeing political identities as constructed by the individual, identities may be conceived of as defined by the position that the individual occupies in the social structure.<sup>25</sup> Such political identities have traditionally been developed by political movements working towards common interests and values. Class-based voting is an expression of the importance of social position for political identification. This implies that political participation is a collective process and is made meaningful as such.<sup>26</sup> James March and Johan Olsen have discussed how national institutions offer and promote various political identities.<sup>27</sup> National political institutions, educational institutions, professions and the mass media all offer political identities that people may accept or reject. In a similar way, Dominique Schnapper argues that, in the case of voting, participation is grounded in a process in which the individual takes on the identity as member of “the people” for a short while, or “the electorate” or “citizen of the state,” and acts accordingly, that is, votes.<sup>28</sup> Here, political influence is seen as a collective phenomenon.<sup>29</sup> Political identities are important since they provide potential links between individuals and collective political entities. Alberto Melucci defines a political movement as a collective in terms of their key problems, strategies and opponents.<sup>30</sup> Political movements are involved in political struggles about issues that are important to them; the identities they offer are identities determined in terms of their participation in this fight for interests and values, such as being part of the environmental protection movement. On the other hand, Melucci points out a type of almost non-political collective that is consensual, status quo oriented and thus not related to political conflicts and adversaries. These collectives are not involved in political struggles. He labels this type of collective action as a collective ritual. The nation, adults and the electorate are of this type, and are not defined in terms of political issues and problems, thus reducing their empowering potential.

In sum, political participation may be founded on various justifications that make participation meaningful on an individual level. The main types are individual pursuit of preferences, individual duty in a “contract” with the state, and identities. Identities may be seen as being primarily con-

structed by the individual or as being primarily socially defined, that is, identity means belonging to a collective entity. Finally, political participation may be meaningful as self-development.<sup>31</sup>

## **Methods of Research**

The methodological approach is to examine how the meaning of political participation for the individual citizen is dealt with in textbooks. The Norwegian curricular reform of 2006 led to new textbooks for all courses, including the course studied here, for which the new books will be examined in detail.

A textbook analysis may focus on the process of developing textbooks, on the product (the book itself) or on its reception.<sup>32</sup> The present analysis is confined to an analysis of the product, having argued in the above section that the reception can be assumed to be marked by strong textbook influences on the teaching contents. Both Weinbrenner and other theorists argue that when analysing textbooks as products, one may focus on didactic and pedagogical aspects, as well as on subject matter contents.<sup>33</sup> The latter seems most relevant for the research questions at hand.

Analyses of textbook contents can be done in various ways. Falk Pingel makes a distinction between qualitative and quantitative measures.<sup>34</sup> In this article, both are relevant. We will roughly examine the importance of justification issues in the total text on politics. A qualitative analysis, however, will dominate the analytical section. From a discourse theoretical perspective, attention is directed towards how meaning is attributed to signs (concepts) and how concepts are related to each other in structures of meaning.<sup>35</sup> Discourses are systems of meaning that regulate what may be thought, stated and done. Discourses may manifest themselves in texts such as textbooks. Analysing textbooks as expressions of discourse implies searching for key concepts (signs), examining the meaning that is attached to them and how one concept is related to other concepts. A full-scale discourse analysis of a textbook is a very large task that is beyond the scope of one article. Hence, the present analysis will focus on concepts of political participation and what justification is attached to these concepts.

For this study, the seven most commonly used textbooks for this particular course are analyzed. In total, they comprise a 78 percent share of the market for textbooks for this course.<sup>36</sup> The textbooks are frequently revised, and sometimes come in different versions. Some of them are published in one of the two Norwegian language standards, others in both. Some are targeted at all students taking this course, while others come in different versions aimed at various types of upper secondary education,

notably academic or vocational secondary education. I have selected the most advanced version of each textbook, all of which were published in 2006, with the exception of one 2009 edition.

The titles of the books are: *Streif* (Strolling), *Fokus*, *Radar*, *Samfunnsfag* (Social Studies), *Standpunkt* (Standpoint), *Spektrum* and *Ny Agenda* (New Agenda).<sup>37</sup> The analysis was conducted in two steps. First, an assessment was made of whether and to what degree the issues of interest were covered and made explicit in the textbooks. It was hoped that a numerical expression could be used here, but the reasons for participation partially overlap with other issues, thus an exact quantification was not very meaningful. The second step was to read the relevant texts while identifying various notions in them of what political participation is. Further, to identify and categorize the reasons for participating which were linked to concepts of participation. It is not always clear what type of participation the books refer to when they argue that it is important to be politically active, though they most often refer to voting.

### **Reasons for Political Participation Given in the Textbooks**

In the reporting of findings, I will first briefly examine what type of political participation the textbooks refer to. Next, I will indicate how prominent elaborations on the meaning and justification of political participation for the individual are in the textbooks. Finally, I will apply the theoretical framework on what justifies political participation for the individual citizen as an organizing principle and report to what degree I have found each type in the books. I will not examine how each textbook links together all its notions into a coherent discourse, because they do not. They offer a mixture of ideas from various discourses on what makes political participation meaningful, and the analysis aims at distinguishing and categorizing the various ideas presented to young Norwegians.

### ***Notions of political participation***

The general term “political participation” is not systematically used in the textbooks. More often, textbooks refer to various types of participation, such as voting, joining street marches, party membership, interest in being members of organizations, contacting officials, contacting the mass media or writing open letters to the public in newspapers. All of this is in accordance with previous research on Norwegian political education concerning what types of political participation are being pointed out to students.<sup>38</sup> Some of the textbooks also argue that instead of joining existing groups, the young

may form their own. *Streif* points out that when people are affected, they join together and organize themselves. For example, the book states that “adolescents organize petitions or street marches in protest against plans to destroy natural habitats by building a road there.”<sup>39</sup> It is noteworthy that new forms of political participation by means of new communication technologies are hardly mentioned at all. At most, there are short references such as the following found in *Spektrum*:

The internet is a relatively new channel which gives us almost endless possibilities to exert influence. We may use it as a medium for telling anonymous people or specific politicians what we think about an issue or a party. We can also use the internet in [direct] action for an issue, against an enterprise or power holders. Then we use the internet as a tool to disseminate information and to mobilise as many as possible.<sup>40</sup>

There are few references to political participation on an international level through networks and organizations. However, the textbooks do offer a range of political participation beyond voting. To what extent and how is such participation justified as meaningful action for young people?

### ***The prominence of justification issues***

The reasons for citizen political participation are made explicit in all the textbooks, albeit to varying levels. In *Streif*, there are fifteen chapters, with one of them solely devoted to why political participation is worthwhile, which is entitled “Politics – something you should care about?”<sup>41</sup> The others do not have separate chapters only for this issue, but they elaborate the issue from various angles in several chapters and sections. For instance, *Radars* does not have a separate chapter, but in a chapter on politics we are introduced to a fictive young girl, Caroline, and her problems as a single mother. The section discusses what she can do politically to improve her situation.<sup>42</sup> *Ny Agenda* and *Fokus* have a similar approach, introducing us to fictive teenagers who relate to politics in various ways, for example, by trying to figure out what to do in an upcoming election.<sup>43</sup> In addition, these two books discuss why political participation, notably voting, has declined. *Samfunnsfag* and *Spektrum* offer a less extensive treatment of the issue than the others.<sup>44</sup> *Samfunnsfag* has a sixty-page long chapter on politics, which repeatedly discusses how one may participate politically, whereas *Spektrum* does so somewhat less often. In these books, the topic is also repeatedly on the agenda. An important finding is therefore that elaborations about the meaning of political participation for young citizens are on the agenda in all textbooks, although not to the same extent throughout all of them.

***Individual pursuit of preferences***

Political participation may be based on the desire to pursue one's interests and values on an individual basis. This meaning is made clear in the textbooks, first by stressing that political decisions concern issues that are important to young people. All the textbooks strive to show their readers that politics concern young people directly, pointing out "youth" issues such as alcohol regulations, educational policies, abortion policies and environmental issues, as well as specifying other policies.

Second, all the books emphasize that being politically active is a matter of trying to influence such issues. *Fokus* offers an example in which teenagers in a community were told that their school would be closed down. The teenagers in the example organize themselves and discuss how they may influence the outcome as a group.<sup>45</sup> *Streif* likewise argues that people engage in politics because political decisions influence their lives; hence they attempt to influence the outcomes. "When political decisions change our lives we react and wish to do something."<sup>46</sup> *Samfunnsfag* argues:

Most likely, you wish to decide over your own life. What are you discontent with? What do you think is wrong and unfair when you look around yourself? Are these problems you can solve on your own or is it something the government should deal with? And can you influence the government, for example, by using the right to vote?<sup>47</sup>

*Radar* also stresses that politics affect everyone and political participation is a matter of individual citizens trying to influence policies that affect them. Caroline, the young fictive woman in *Radar* realizes how public policy affects her and engages in a range of efforts to influence public policy to her own advantage. She writes letters to the local newspaper and talks on websites, and joins political parties and interest organizations. *Radar* even has Caroline appear on local television following her letter to the newspaper.<sup>48</sup> All this activity is motivated by her wish to influence public policy to her advantage.

Third, the textbooks anticipate questions about what difference an individual may make, and argue explicitly that, with political participation, one may actually influence outcomes. *Streif* insists that in elections, a single vote may make a difference. It says that in the 2005 elections that led to a new Norwegian government, a few votes made the difference between the winning and the losing side.<sup>49</sup> The text goes on to say that "if you do not vote, you let others decide for you. You do not use a right that you have, and you have less influence on how society will be." In a similar logic, *Streif* argues that if you join a party you may influence the party programme and who will be nominated for elections. Likewise, *Fokus* asserts that in elections, voters do exert an influence<sup>50</sup>, while *Samfunnsfag* asks:

You are upset because a plant in your neighborhood disposes poisonous chemicals in its surroundings. What can you do? You can vote for the political party most concerned with the environment and hope they get a majority. You can talk to your MP or your local councillor and ask him or her to raise the issue. You can join an environmental organization. Or you can climb to the top of the plant chimney and refuse to move before plant management has stopped disposing poisonous materials.<sup>51</sup>

*Ny Agenda* and *Spektrum* insist less on this point than other textbooks. Hence, there is a quite clearly pronounced idea that one can make a difference to policy outcomes, thus defending ones' interests by means of voting or other types of political participation.

#### *Contractual obligations*

Political participation can be motivated by the acceptance of an obligation to the democratic polity, as argued by Pateman. All the textbooks attach this meaning to political participation, and try to make students see that there is such an obligation for Norwegian citizens.

First, the textbooks argue in a rather factual way that a democratic polity depends on such participation. For instance, *Streif* starts by stating that democracy depends on active citizen engagement. Later on, it states that voting and party membership secure democracy.<sup>52</sup> *Fokus* refers to Vaclav Havel, and quotes him as he states that everyone is responsible for democracy, which depends on the contribution of all people.<sup>53</sup>

Second, some of the books support the claim for a citizen obligation by pointing out that if this obligation is not accepted, we risk a non-democratic society. *Radar* therefore rhetorically asks whether the reader would prefer to live in a country where one person decides everything.<sup>54</sup> In some of the books, democracy and dictatorship are systematically compared.<sup>55</sup>

Third, some of the books contain rather extensive analyses of what threatens democracy.<sup>56</sup> In these analyses, a lack of citizen involvement is a prominent point, and in one book, an entire chapter is devoted to this question.<sup>57</sup> In others, there are separate sections on the issue.<sup>58</sup> *Radar* argues that democracy is not self-evident and that we must all be concerned with what threatens democracy.<sup>59</sup> One important threat is that of citizens not voting. *Fokus* argues:

In Norway we take democracy for granted – and perhaps with good reason. Norwegian democracy is based on long and solid traditions and little suggests that it is directly threatened. The task today is perhaps not to protect democracy against obvious dangers, but rather to sustain and develop the rule of the people.<sup>60</sup>

*Fokus* goes on to point out problems that may weaken democracy. The first is that people expect too much from their government, the second is that groups in society do not actively participate. These points are found also in *Ny Agenda*, which also adds that contempt for politicians undermines democracy. *Ny Agenda* concludes by asking, “What can we do to maintain and develop democracy in Norway? Democracy builds on citizen participation in elections and engagement in current issues. As citizens, we ought to be engaged in current issues.”<sup>61</sup>

The third point is to explicitly reject arguments that political participation might not be worthwhile. Critical arguments, for instance, that voting is wasted, that politicians do not control developments and cannot be trusted are referred to – and then quickly dismissed. *Samfunnsfag* dismisses the criticism that politicians cannot be trusted with the following words:

Many speak of elected politicians with contempt. Sometimes there is reason to criticise politicians who only give vague statements and who make promises they do not keep. But what is the alternative? Winston Churchill said that democracy is a poor form of government, but it is the best we got. All systems have weaknesses, but in Norway we agree that the best for democracy is a parliamentary rule with the political parties as important actors. We have to tolerate that politicians are only human beings, like you and me.<sup>62</sup>

*Samfunnsfag* admits that elected officials sometimes do not perform as they should. At the same time, the book counters by arguing that a major threat to democracy is indifference among its citizens. *Radar* points out that people do not trust elected officials,<sup>63</sup> and also lists reasons why confidence in elected officials is on the decline, such as complexity and the power of experts in politics. Democracy is also threatened by the power of interest organizations and globalization. Still, *Radar* does not accept that it might not be worthwhile to vote. *Spektrum* presents a very long list of commonly heard arguments as to why it is not worthwhile to vote, but concludes by stating “Good reasons? Well, the result may be that a few make the decisions.”<sup>64</sup> This is less dismissive than what is found in the other books. In total, the books rather systematically dismiss critical perspectives on political participation, but do acknowledge that some discourses are critical.

### ***Self-development***

In general, there are very few references to this justification of political participation. *Streif* notes that when engaging in grassroots activism one may experience a sense of community with other participants.<sup>65</sup> *Streif* also says that joining party youth branches is a way of meeting other young-

sters, and that it is socially rewarding.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, the references to this reason for being politically active are few and brief.

### *Political identities*

We have already pointed out that the textbooks underscore obligations in a democracy, which indirectly is a message about what the identity of citizen entails. Also other identities are presented even more straightforwardly. The textbooks address students in their search for identities as adolescents. To put it differently, the textbooks offer ideas about what it might entail politically to be young, which is most elaborated on in *Ny Agenda*. In this textbook we are introduced to four adolescents who are members of the Youth Local Government Council in a municipality in Norway.<sup>67</sup> They are introduced with pictures, are interviewed about their engagement in the youth council, and stand out as quite clear identities of politically engaged youth.<sup>68</sup> In the same book, there are also some short interviews with three eighteen-year-olds who are members of the youth branches of some of the political parties in Norway. In addition, here the identity of a young party activist is directly presented in a positive way.<sup>69</sup> Finally, *Ny Agenda* presents interviews with four first-time voters. They are critical to the election campaign, which they perceive as superfluous, and they accuse the political parties of underestimating them.<sup>70</sup> We find political identities aimed at young people in other books as well. *Radar* indicates briefly that direct action is a type of participation that appeals to young people in particular.<sup>71</sup> *Samfunnsfag* illustrates direct action with a photo from a protest march with only very young participants, thereby suggesting that being a protester is an identity that is available for young people.<sup>72</sup> *Fokus* introduces us to Line and Truls, two fictive first-time voters. Truls is rather right-wing, but does not care much and ends up not voting. He is a bit embarrassed because about this but excuses himself because he does not know enough. For Line, it is hard to decide what party appeals most to her, but she makes a trade-off and votes for the socialists.<sup>73</sup> One could say that these are identities of young, uncertain first-time voters. *Fokus* introduces a chapter about representative democracy by a giving a portrait of the youngest Norwegian MP, a twenty-one-year-old girl who was elected in 2005 for the Labour Party.<sup>74</sup> She stresses that her political engagement started as an engagement in issues that were important for teenagers in her local community. She therefore stands out for her identity is that of someone who is young and politically active. *Samfunnsfag* also offers a portrait of her.<sup>75</sup>

However, identities of being young and politically passive are also presented. *Fokus* discusses youth and politics and points out that the majority of young Norwegians are content with democracy, though not very

interested in politics. It is also shown that 50 percent of young Norwegians do not believe that voting influences how the country is being run.<sup>76</sup> These are identities of being young and politically indifferent. When closing the chapter on why one should engage in politics, *Streif* presents a text which is supposed to be written by a young girl who despises political activism as something for losers. She contends that partying and career are more important. This text has a provocative form and is clearly meant to stimulate the pupils to reflect on whether they really want to be this type of adolescent.<sup>77</sup> *Fokus* introduces us to the “sitters at home,”<sup>78</sup> those who do not vote because of ignorance or as an act of political protest against the political establishment.<sup>79</sup> Such political identities of indifference are thus present, but the textbooks clearly dismiss them.

To a lesser extent, the textbooks also offer identities as defined by political institutions. *Fokus* and *Ny Agenda* mention life-long partisan identification, but add that this identity is becoming less important than it was some decades ago.<sup>80</sup> The new voter identity is to decide on the basis of decisive issues, according to these books. *Radar* introduces Rune, a young electrician who is being met at his first job by the local trade union official who argues that he should join the union, which he does.<sup>81</sup> The textbook thus suggests that being a skilled worker implies union membership as a matter of course. Political identities are therefore made available to students in very concrete and personalized ways. In particular, the textbooks focus on how being young may imply relating to politics in various ways.

### **Various Justifications**

To what degree does Norwegian political education elaborate on what makes political participation worthwhile for individual citizens? How is such political participation made meaningful for individual citizens in political education? As such, political participation is primarily understood in terms of pluralism and participatory democracy in a national context. That is, political participation includes voting, interest group activism, interest organization membership and direct contact with officials, and there are few constraints on these democratic influences. Young people’s ability to organize themselves in politically effective ways is stressed. New forms of political participation by means of new communication technology are largely omitted, as are notions of participation as deliberation and public debate about the common good. Arenas for participation with an international reach are not included. Even so, the textbooks refer to a broad variety of participatory forms.

The question of what makes political participation meaningful is clearly made an issue in the textbooks. It is interesting to note the prominence of this topic in the new textbooks. The question of what justifies political participation

for the individual citizen is treated repeatedly and from different angles. In his historical account of Norwegian textbooks, Lorentzen does not consider this to be problematic.<sup>82</sup> This fact suggests that textbooks develop in response to perceived social changes, and that they have attempted to meet new challenges.

A common approach in the textbooks is that an individual citizen can make a difference and affect policy issues that affect the individual, which may make participation worthwhile. This instrumental view of political participation is related to both liberal perspectives, as well as to participatory democracy.

A different approach found in the textbooks is the deliberate identification of identities. A broad variety of political identities are presented, in particular various identities related to being young and politically active. We could label such an identity as “young with a social and political engagement.” In contrast, identities of politically indifferent youth are also made visible. Such identities of passivity, however, are dismissed. Identities related to actual political movements and groups are not made very visible, although there are some examples of young activists who belong to identified political parties. When the textbooks argue that we all have a responsibility to make sure the democratic process is sustained, an appeal is made to the students as responsible citizens and coming adults.

Not all the textbooks articulate all these meanings of political participation with the same emphasis, but all textbooks present a variety of such ideas and there are no distinguishable alternative profiles among the different textbooks. It is likely that the textbooks resemble each other because they are influenced by the same Norwegian political culture in general, and curricular context and didactical tradition in particular.

As argued above, the question of how political education may convince students that it is worthwhile for them to be politically active will probably become more important as young people are less bound by traditional authority and as their educational level and reflective capacity increase, which is a challenge to political education. The responses to this challenge that can be found in Norwegian civics textbooks are not unproblematic. Most obviously, the argument that one may influence policy outcomes as an individual is problematic because in most cases, individuals and smaller groups are not in a position to do so. Furthermore, there is a risk that this attempt at justification will backfire as the students realize that it is not simple.

As pointed out above, political influence may be seen as a collective phenomenon, and we may distinguish between participation in political movements and collective rituals.<sup>83</sup> These collectives are involved in political struggles. On the other hand, Melucci points out a type of non-political collective that is consensual, status quo oriented and thus not related to political conflicts and adversaries. He labels this type of collective action a collective ritual. In so far as the textbooks introduce identities, these identities are not clearly linked to political movements. They are closer to collective rituals, such as being a good citizen or voter who takes on the responsibility to maintain the democratic system,

and votes for this reason. Another notion is to define political participation as part of being young with a social and political engagement. This is not a way of linking political participation to a political movement either, because young people in Norway are not a political movement. On the other hand, in countries where the financial crisis has hit young people particularly hard, the idea of the young as a political category takes on a different meaning. In the textbooks there is a tendency to distinguish between the passive – the disinterested youth, the “sitters at home,” those who prefer parties and their career – on the one side, and engaged and active adolescents on the other. Making political participation a part of being young like this could be a mobilizing factor, as it appeals to young people, although it is not empowering because it does not link political participation to political movements that deal with real political issues.

The picture, however, is mixed, as when the activism of the young is linked to environmental protests. In some books, we meet a young MP who is also a Labour Party MP, we meet young activists in the political parties and meet a newly unionized electrician linked to the Norwegian trade unions, which is a very powerful political force in Norwegian politics. These are examples of linking young activism to political movements and issues.

Critical perspectives on political participation are referred to in the textbooks, but very clearly dismissed. The reason for this is most likely that the textbook writers aim at stimulating political participation, and then these objections must be put down. If criticism that the students are aware of from other sources is dismissed, it may weaken the credibility of political education efforts. It should be kept in mind that a critical citizenry is an integral and necessary part of a living democracy, so critical discussions must therefore play a role in political education.

## **Conclusion**

This article has enquired if and how justifications for citizen political participation are presented to adolescents in social studies textbook treatments of political participation in Norway. If political participation is seen as meaningful by the individual citizen, it is more likely that such participation will take place. It can be concluded that the justification of political participation has become an important issue in the textbooks. Substantial parts of the textbooks deal with this issue. This is a timely development, as young people must be assumed to require such justifications. The textbooks thus seem to adapt to changing social circumstances. The justifications vary, and the following justifications have been identified in most textbooks. First, political participation is meaningful as attempts at exerting an individual influence on policy outcomes.

This is a notion based in liberal theory, and it has an individualistic bias. Second, political participation is linked to various identities that young people may find attractive, such as being young with a social and political engagement, or as responsible citizen, voter or adult. These identities may lead to political participation as a collective ritual that is not linked to actual political issues. Third, the textbooks introduce identities that are related to real political movements such as the environmental movement or identified political parties.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Notes**

James March and Johan P. Olsen, *Democratic Governance* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: The Free Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> The term political education is used to mean any systematic education that is concerned with how citizens relate to governmental authority.

<sup>3</sup> Statistisk Sentralbyrå, *Samfunnsspeilet*. <http://www.ssb.no/samfunnsspeilet/utg/201002/04/> (accessed on August 6, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Reingard Spannring, "Young People's Multidimensional Relationship with Politics: Qualitative and Quantitative Findings," in *Youth and Political Participation in Europe*, Reingard Spannring, Gunther Ogris and Wolfgang Gaiser, eds. (Leverkusen, Ridgebrook: Barbara Budrich - Opladen & Farmington Hills, 2008); Cecar Birzea, "Edc Policies in Europe - a Synthesis," in *All European Study on Education for Democratic Citizenship Policies* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Helen Haste and Judith Torney-Purta, *The Development of Political Understanding: A New Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1992); Kathleen McGraw, "Contributions of the Cognitive Approach to Political Psychology," *Political Psychology* 21 (2000): 805-824.

<sup>6</sup> Justification may mean that democracy as an ideal must be legitimized on theoretical grounds. In this article, however, we are concerned with what justifies the individual citizen to engage politically.

<sup>7</sup> Adrienne Sørbom, *Vart tar politiken vegen? Om individualisering, reflexivitet og gjørbarhet i det politiska engagementet* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Kjetil Børhaug, "Voter Education. The Political Education of Norwegian Lower Secondary Schools," *Utbildning & Demokrati* 14, no. 3 (2005): 51-73.

<sup>9</sup> There are major debates on what justifies democracy which go beyond the scope of this paper. Here we refer to justifications as a matter of making political participation worthwhile for individual citizens.

<sup>10</sup> Jonas Christophersen, Dag Ø. Lotsberg, Kjetil Børhaug, Ketil Knutsen and Knut Dolve, *Evaluering av Samfunnsfag i Reform 97* (Bergen: Høgskolen i Bergen, 2003); Staffan Selander and Dagrunn Skjelbred, *Pedagogiske Tekster for Kommunikasjon Og Læring* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Halvdan Eikeland, *Fortid, nåtid, framtid. En fagdidaktisk innføring om undervisning i O-fag og Samfunnsfag* (Oslo: TANO, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Kjetil Børhaug, "Norwegian Civic Education – Beyond Formalism?" *Journal of Social Science Education* 9, no. 1 (2010): 66-77.

<sup>13</sup> The Norwegian education system is dominated by governmental schools. Private schools are marginal. Norwegian children start compulsory schooling at the age of six and all fulfill a ten-year compulsory program which is relatively standardized. Norwegians also have a legal right to upper secondary education and most young Norwegians start upper secondary education. Every year in compulsory education, students follow a course in social studies, which also includes political education. In upper secondary education there is a one-year compulsory course in social studies, which represents the final stage in the political education for all in Norwegian schools. It is this course which is focused in this study.

<sup>14</sup> All Norwegians have a legal right to a three-year upper secondary education, and this course is compulsory in all forms of such education. However, upper secondary education itself is not compulsory. Even if the proportion of young people who start upper secondary education has increased, some do not attend and some drop out before completing. Nevertheless, the majority of young Norwegians attend this course in their late teens.

<sup>15</sup> François Audigier, *L'éducation à la citoyenneté* (Lyon: Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique, 1999); François Audigier, "L'éducation civique dans l'enseignement secondaire," *IREHG. Revue Nationale du Réseau CNDP-CRDP pour l'enseignement de l'histoire et de la géographie* no. 7 (1999): 11-27.

<sup>16</sup> Eikeland, *Fortid, nåtid, framtid*.

<sup>17</sup> Rolf Tønnesen, *Demokratisk dannelse i tysk perspektiv. 20 års diskusjon om Herman Gieseckes syn på den politiske oppdragelsen* (Trondheim: University of Trondheim. Den allmennvitenskapelige høgskolen, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> Spanning, "Young People's Multidimensional Relationship with Politics: Qualitative and Quantitative Findings," 47.

<sup>19</sup> Wolfram Schultz, John Ainley, Julian Fraillon, David Kerr and Bruno Losito, *ICSS 2009, International Report. Civic Knowledge, Attitudes and Engagement among Lower Secondary School Students in 38 Countries* (IEA, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 178, 219.

<sup>21</sup> Carole Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation. A Critical Analysis of Liberal Theory* (Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Tokyo: John Wiley & Sons, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> David Held. *Models of Democracy*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> William Lafferty, "Deltagelse og demokrati," in *Deltagerdemokratiet*, Trond Bergh, ed. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1983), 30-50.

<sup>24</sup> Sørbom, "Vart Tar Politiken Vegen?"

<sup>25</sup> Stein Rokkan, *Stat, Nasjon, Klasse* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1987).

<sup>26</sup> Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes. Collective Action in the Information Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> March and Olsen, *Democratic Governance*.

<sup>28</sup> Dominique Schnapper, *Qu'est-ce que la citoyenneté?* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> Melucci, *Challenging Codes. Collective Action in the Information Age*.

<sup>30</sup> Melucci, *Challenging Codes. Collective Action in the Information Age*.

<sup>31</sup> The notion of constructing identities and the notion of identities being offered by institutions and political movements intermix because the raw material for individual construction of identity is always social. There is, however, a difference between the *bricolage* that young people make which mixes various elements, and the acceptance of ready-made identities as a devout environmental activist or respectable citizen.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Weinbrenner, "Methodologies of Textbook Analysis Used to Date," in *History and*

---

*Social Studies - Methodologies of Textbook Analysis*, Hilary Bourdillon, ed. (Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger), 1992, 23-36.

<sup>33</sup> Weinbrenner, "Methodologies of Textbook Analysis"; Egil Børre Johnsen, *Lærebokkunnskap* (Oslo: Tano, Aschehoug, 1999); Falk Pingel, *Unesco Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision* (Hanover: Verlag Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*.

<sup>35</sup> Marianne Winther Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, *Diskursanalyse som teori og metode* (Fredriksberg: Roskilde Universitetsforlag, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> The publishing houses exchange sales information and make their own statistics. One of them, *Samlaget*, was contacted and they sent the latest numbers they had (by February 2010). They stressed that the figures must be read as approximations. The markets shares referred to reflect sales in 2006-2008.

<sup>37</sup> Egil Andresen and Rune Henningsen, *Radar* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2006); Ellen Arnesen, Marianne Heir and Pia Skøien, *Streif* (Oslo: Samlaget 2006); Mette Haraldsen and Jostein Ryssevik, *Fokus. Samfunnsfag* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2006); Henry Notaker and Johs Totland, *Samfunnsfag* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2006); Erik Sølvsberg, Nils Petter Johnsrud and Sølvi Lillejord, *Spektrum* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2006); Martin Westersjø, Åse Lauritzen and Jorunn Berg, *Standpunkt* (Oslo: Cappelen, Damm, 2009); Trond Borge, Berit Lundberg and Ole Aass, *Ny Agenda* (Oslo: Cappelen, Damm, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Kjetil Børhaug, "Voter Education"; Kjetil Børhaug, "Educating Voters. Political Education in Norwegian Upper Secondary Schools," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 40, no. 5 (2008): 79-600.

<sup>39</sup> Arnesen, Heir and Skøien, *Streif*, 120.

<sup>40</sup> Sølvsberg, Johnsrud and Lillejord, *Spektrum*, 134.

<sup>41</sup> Arnesen, Heir and Skøien, *Streif*, 120.

<sup>42</sup> Andresen and Henningsen, *Radar*, 76.

<sup>43</sup> Haraldsen and Ryssevik, *Fokus. Samfunnsfag*; Borge, Lundberg and Aass, *Ny Agenda*.

<sup>44</sup> Notaker and Totland, *Samfunnsfag*; Sølvsberg, Johnsrud and Lillejord, *Spektrum*.

<sup>45</sup> Haraldsen and Ryssevik, *Fokus. Samfunnsfag*, 115.

<sup>46</sup> Arnesen, Heir and Skøien, *Streif*, 120.

<sup>47</sup> Notaker and Totland, *Samfunnsfag*, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Andresen and Henningsen, *Radar*, 76-77.

<sup>49</sup> Arnesen, Heir and Skøien, *Streif*, 122.

<sup>50</sup> Haraldsen and Ryssevik, *Fokus. Samfunnsfag*, 94, 102.

---

<sup>51</sup> Notaker and Totland, *Samfunnsfag*, 48.

<sup>52</sup> Arnesen, Heir and Skøien, *Streif*, 120.

<sup>53</sup> Haraldsen and Ryssevik, *Fokus. Samfunnsfag*, 90.

<sup>54</sup> Andresen and Henningsen, *Radar*, 84.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85; Sølberg, Johnsrud and Lillejord, *Spektrum*, 83-84.

<sup>56</sup> The issue of threats to democracy is found in the national curriculum, and is most likely included to cover all key issues in the curriculum.

<sup>57</sup> Borge, Lundberg and Aass, *Ny Agenda*, 159-164.

<sup>58</sup> Andresen and Henningsen, *Radar*, 88-89; Notaker and Totland, *Samfunnsfag*, 54-56; Haraldsen and Ryssevik, *Fokus. Samfunnsfag*, 98-101.

<sup>59</sup> Andresen and Henningsen, *Radar*, 88.

<sup>60</sup> Haraldsen and Ryssevik, *Fokus. Samfunnsfag*, 98.

<sup>61</sup> Borge, Lundberg and Aass, *Ny Agenda*, 163.

<sup>62</sup> Notaker and Totland, *Samfunnsfag*, 40.

<sup>63</sup> Andresen and Henningsen, *Radar*.

<sup>64</sup> Sølberg, Johnsrud and Lillejord, *Spektrum*, 140.

<sup>65</sup> Arnesen, Heir and Skøien, *Streif*, 120.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>67</sup> Over the last ten to fifteen years, most Norwegian local governments established channels for participation in local government affairs for adolescents. The forms vary, in some cases a council is established, while in other cases there are more or less regular hearings where young people meet local government councillors.

<sup>68</sup> Borge, Lundberg and Aass, *Ny Agenda*, 127.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>71</sup> Andresen and Henningsen, *Radar*, 79.

<sup>72</sup> Notaker and Totland, *Samfunnsfag*, 55.

<sup>73</sup> Haraldsen and Ryssevik, *Fokus. Samfunnsfag*, 103.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-124.

---

<sup>75</sup> Notaker and Totland, *Samfunnsfag*, 28.

<sup>76</sup> Haraldsen and Ryssevik, *Fokus. Samfunnsfag*, 98.

<sup>77</sup> Arnesen, Heir and Skøien, *Streif*, 125.

<sup>78</sup> Literally translated from the Norwegian.

<sup>79</sup> Haraldsen and Ryssevik, *Fokus. Samfunnsfag*, 106.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 108; Borge, Lundberg and Aass, *Ny Agenda*, 138.

<sup>81</sup> Andresen and Henningsen, *Radar*, 80.

<sup>82</sup> Svein Lorentzen, *Ja, vil elsker...Skolebøker i den norske nasjonsbyggingsprosessen, 1814-2000* (Volda: Høgskulen i Volda, 2003).

<sup>83</sup> Melucci, *Challenging Codes. Collective Action in the Information Age*.