Recasting the Role of Youth in the MENA Region and Beyond:
Civic Engagement as a Tool for Learning, Empowerment and Social Change

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Abstract

The central argument of this paper is that dominant models of economic development and of public administration do not offer youth a significant role in development and in public life. It is argued that learning and participation are key processes for political inclusion, social integration of young people and development in Turkey, in the MENA region in general and elsewhere. The fact is lack of participation and informal learning opportunities in young people's lives marginalizes youth, weakens public institutions and renders them unsustainable. A key institution in this process is the school. Schools, with their problems (e.g., school violence) as well as purported functions (e.g., genuine learning), are first and foremost an institution and an issue for the students, who always outnumber professionals, and students should be involved in all school processes. Schools are bound to fail in their social and development functions so long as technical skills are given priority over real-life issues. To the extent that schools are distanced from communities, and students are alienated from issues in their own communities.

In the second part of the paper, a model of sustainable civic engagement (Public Achievement) is presented. Public Achievement (PA) is easy to understand and implement, and has been very successful in Turkey and Palestine, as well as USA, and N. Ireland. Most recently, it has been initiated in Eastern and Central Europe, and the Balkans.

?ntroduct?on

There is a growing tension between dominant approaches to public administration, which give a special privileged role to the administrator over the public, and the newer conceptions of governance, local government and community assets. The former identifies the administrator as the central figure in a system of complex government. The latter identifies the public as the central force in all major public processes.

This contrast is particularly relevant for youth in the MENA region. Youth constitute the majority in the region and the numbers of youth are very high. In Turkey, for instance, youth constitute about 30% of the population, translating into about 21 million people. To the extent that public processes are dominated by administrators, all adults by definition, youth are excluded from significant public roles. In fact, traditional approaches to public administration do not devote much consideration to minors, young people who are under 18. To put it more bluntly, old-style public administration does not have much to do with the vast majority of the population in developing countries.

This claim may be surprising and should be supported by evidence. In order to identify the extent of consideration given to children and youth in public administration, the literature could be examined. If the *Journal of Public Administration Research* a journal indexed by major sources with a mid-level ranking among public administration journals, is examined strong evidence can be found. In none of the journal abstracts available online, the terms "youth", "children", "adolescents" (or their

singular counterparts) are even mentioned. Further evidence comes from interviews conducted recently with faculty members in public administration departments. Faculty members note that minors are hardly covered in textbooks and in their courses.

Recasting the role of youth in public life

In 2001, the European Commission published the "White Paper" as a position statement to guide youth policies. This important document is a result of a series of meetings and consultations with stakeholders, and emphasizes specifically the linkage between the role of young people in public life and in democracies with participation and social inclusion. More specifically, it highlights the role of active citizenship, direct participation, experimentation and accessibility of institutional processes for youth. The White Paper, as with similar policy documents, does not shed light on the processes that could overcome barriers to participation and inclusion. In this paper, an easy to understand and versatile model of civic engagement (called Public Achievement) is outlined. This model has been successfully utilized in Turkey and in Palestine.

The central argument of this paper is that dominant models of economic development and of public administration do not offer youth a significant role in development and in public life. It is argued that learning and participation are key processes for political inclusion, social integration of young people and development in Turkey, in the MENA region and elsewhere. The fact is lack of participation and informal learning opportunities in young people's lives marginalizes youth, weakens public institutions and renders them unsustainable. A key institution in this process is the school. Schools, with their problems (e.g., school violence) as well as purported functions (e.g., genuine learning), are first and foremost an institution and an issue for the students, who always outnumber professionals, and students should be involved in all school processes. Schools are bound to fail in their social and development functions so long as technical skills are given priority over real-life issues.

Sustainability as a public goal

Until recently sustainability was often considered a technical issue and was not applied to public processes and communities. There is now an emerging consensus across many disciplines, institutions and agencies that development and institutions should be sustainable and particularly driven by the local resources. Sustainability has therefore become a key issue in the current debates on development, poverty, health, and more recently, on education. However, as Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, has noted this is not an easy task: "Our biggest challenge in this new century is to take an idea that sounds abstract –sustainable development – and turn it into reality for all the world's people."[1]. Turning abstract concepts into real processes and developing the capacities of individuals and societies to work for sustainability is a major challenge.

Education is often regarded as the key mechanism to effect change in developing countries and a key process of socialization. Education has also become a core concept in the sustainability literature. The United Nations declared January 2005 – December 2014 the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, following the recommendation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In the context of this effort, "Education for Sustainable Development" (ESD) is defined as "a dynamic concept that utilizes all aspects of public awareness, education and training to create or enhance an understanding of the linkages among the issues of sustainable development

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[1] D. de Rebello. The role for higher education institutions in the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Paper presented at the International Conference on Education for a Sustainable Future: Shaping the Practical Role of Higher Education for a Sustainable Development, Prague, Czech Republic, 2003.

and to develop the knowledge, skills, perspectives and values which will empower people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating and enjoying a sustainable future"[2]

The ESD framework has four major principles:

Promotion and improvement of high quality, relevant basic education;

The reorienting of existing education policies and programmes to address the social, environmental and economic knowledge, skills and values inherent to sustainability in a holistic and inter-disciplinary manner;

The development of public understanding and awareness of the principles;

The development of specialized training programmes to ensure that all sectors of society have the skills necessary to perform their work in a sustainable manner.

In this paper, it is argued that sustainable development and a sustainable future are only possible if the second principle, the "reorienting of existing educational policies", includes a re-thinking of the role of students at all levels of education and particularly in higher education. This process would require abandoning models of education that requires removal of real-life and community issues from the school context in favor of an emphasis on technical and passive learning. More specifically, there is a serious need to recast the role of students as active learners and problem-solvers in their schools and communities.

Sustainability as a global issue

Sustainability is often regarded as an issue for the developing countries and thereby largely neglected elsewhere. The fact, however, is that all public institutions and practices risk losing their existing functions, qualities and rigor once the public contributions that are essential to democracy (e.g., direct participation of citizens in public life) start declining. The Council of Europe, for instance, is engaged in various initiatives to tackle this very issue, which is the negative influence of exclusion of young people from public processes. The recent riots in France exemplify the serious consequences of exclusion and feelings of alienation on the part of young people at the heart of Europe.

To put it more bluntly, public institutions and practices become unsustainable when young people are excluded from important spheres of public life. Schools play a key role in exclusionary processes because young people are expected to be schooled for long years (on average, 12-16 years) to become "competent" citizens. The second principle of the ESD framework, the "reorienting of existing educational policies", therefore applies across the world.

Role of schools in community and democracy

The existing educational practices in the world have turned schools largely into de-contextualized institutions that enhance technical skills and minimize involvement in public life. The risks involving de-contextualized education were outlined more than a century ago by John Dewey. In 1897, Dewey argued that "all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness... This process begins unconsciously almost at birth, and is continually shaping the individual's powers… [The learner] becomes an inheritor of the funded capital of civilization. The most formal and technical education in the world cannot safely depart from this general process. It

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[2] D. de Rebello. (2003)

can only organize it or differentiate it in some particular direction." He continued to argue that "the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself. Through these demands he is stimulated to act as a member of a unity, to emerge from his original narrowness of action and feeling, and to conceive of himself from the standpoint of the welfare of the group to which he belongs. Through the responses which others make to his own activities he comes to know what these mean in social terms. The value which they have is reflected back into them."[3]

Dewey very strongly emphasized the fact that when school is divorced from real-life, education inevitably loses its value and its meaning, and most, if not all, students lose their motivation to learn: "[T]he individual who is to be educated is a social individual and that society is an organic union of individuals. If we eliminate the social factor from the child we are left only with an abstraction; if we eliminate the individual factor from society, we are left only with an inert and lifeless mass. Education, therefore, must begin with a psychological insight into the child's capacities, interests, and habits. These powers, interests, and habits must be continually interpreted--we must know what they mean. They must be translated into terms of their social equivalents--into terms of what they are capable of in the way of social service."

Dewey noted, even then, the evident failure of modern education in the distance it creates between life and community and democracy: "[M]uch of present education fails because it neglects this fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life. It conceives the school as a place where certain information is to be given, where certain lessons are to be learned, or where certain habits are to be formed. The value of these is conceived as lying largely in the remote future; the child must do these things for the sake of something else he is to do; they are mere preparation. As a result they do not become a part of the life experience of the child and so are not truly educative."
Dewey also noted how education can become unsustainable if it is rigid, technical and de-contextualized in the context of modern life where rapid change is the norm rather than the exception: "To prepare [the student] for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means to train him so that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities; that his eye and ear and hand may be tools ready to command, that his judgment may be capable of grasping the conditions under which it has to work, and the executive forces be trained to act economically and efficiently."

The history of educational practices in the last century confirmed the danger Dewey was describing[4]. Schools distanced students from the local agendas (i.e., the issues people have in the very settings students live) and this has increased the numbers of students staying away from the "mainstream" public life – the de-contextualized education drives students away from the very function schools are supposed to serve, which is learning.

Function of schools: Technocracy or democracy?

In the 1960s, an entirely practical line of experience – experiences of innovative labor and community organizers – led to a similar conclusion. Schools and common school-to-work transitions were increasing the distance between individuals and their communities, and eroding the very basis of democracy – community life and people's relationships. The emerging notion was that citizens in a modern society had to be active, and had to recast their citizenship role as civic organizers: "[T]he free-society organizer is loose, resilient, fluid, and on the move in a society which is in a state of extraordinary and constant change. He is not shackled with a dogma. In our

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[3] J. Dewey. My pedagogic creed. *The School Journal*, LIV, 3 (January 16, 1897), 77-80.
[4] H.C. Boyte. *Everyday Politics of Public Work*. (Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

world today rigidity is fatal. The free-society organizer is constantly growing and learning. He knows and accepts political relativity... he has ... a belief in people, a complete commitment to the belief that if people have power and the opportunity to act, they in the long run, most of the time, reach the right decisions. The alternatives to this would be rule by elite – either dictatorship or a political aristocracy of some form.[5]

The emerging notion came with the recognition that solutions were inherent to the society, and need not be sought in some technologically-sophisticated group, industry or elite. Alinsky was foreshadowing the core concepts of sustainability, in the full sense of the term: "Believing in people, the radical has the job of organizing people so that they will have the power and opportunity to best meet each unforeseeable future crisis as they move ahead to realize those values of equality, justice, freedom, the preciousness of human life, and all those rights and values propounded by [religion] and democratic tradition. Democracy is not an end but the best means toward achieving these values.

In the light of Dewey's writings and the work by Alinsky and other civic organizers, it is only reasonable to argue that exclusionary practices or social exclusion of young people can only be reversed if schools become open to local agendas (i.e., the issues people have in the very settings students live) or if alternative public spaces can be provided for young people where they can directly participate in dealing with their own problems and learn citizenship by experiencing it. In the ESD framework, this will fulfill the re-orienting of objective of education that is necessary for public practices to be sustainable.

Role of young people in learning and schools

A careful examination of educational and psychological studies of young people immediately reveals a clear gap in the conceptualization of human action in these fields. Researchers have rarely carefully studied how action, involvement and engagement play a role in human development and in education. Young people's actions are even less central in other disciplines. There is a parallel gap in social policy-making, particularly in welfare states with high standards of living, where there is an overemphasis on service and a neglect of the significance of action and engagement for human development.

The problematic status of action is particularly evident in research and policy on young people: Young people are not construed as contributors, collaborators and problem-solvers. Even in societies where democratic traditions are strong, young people are given very few chances of engaging in meaningful public action in the modern or the post-modern world. Young people are either implicitly or actively discouraged from participation in public life, including schools. This, in fact, is a serious violation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Children, which requires that children (i.e., young people under 18) be consulted on all matters concerning them.[6]

More importantly, lack of participation by young people weakens public institutions, including schools. A key argument of this paper is that public institutions and schools in particular are not solely the domain of trained adult professionals and cannot yield sustainable outcomes without student participation or engagement. Schools, with their problems (e.g., school violence) as well as purported functions (e.g., genuine learning), are first and foremost an issue for the students, who always outnumber professionals, and students should be involved in school processes.

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[5] S. D. Alinsky. *Reveille for Radicals*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1969) p. xiv.
[6] S. M. Degirmencioglu. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Encyclopedia of Applied Developmental Science*. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2004.)

Professionals vs. youth

This point becomes even more obvious when the number of trained adult professionals in developing countries are considered. Economic and service models based on developed countries often fail simply on the basis of the number of trained professionals: Simply put, there are not sufficient numbers of trained professionals (teachers, psychologists, physicians, and so on) and these numbers probably will never exist. That means, services that can only be delivered by these professionals cannot reach the public. Professional service delivery models are not models that developing countries can afford.

For welfare societies, on the other hand, service models often produce a distance between providers and the citizens, and often quickly reduce unpaid citizen contributions. Public practices that used to be sustained by the citizens have often become services that can only be sustained by the efforts of the state and the government. This is particularly obvious in the school context, where learning has become "education" and a service to be provided. Adults, other than teachers, have abandoned their roles in young people's lives as educators, supporters, advisors, whatever the local functions and names were, and young people have become passive subjects of a school, rather than young citizens adults spend time with. This model of schooling has stalled all around the world and it is now time to accept the fact that schools cannot be sustainable without student participation and action on the part of young people is integral to learning.

Social capital, civic engagement and youth-as-assets

The relatively recent literature on sustainability and social exclusion converges in many ways with recent arguments in various disciplines focused on social capital[7] [8] and civic engagement[9]. Researchers in developmental psychology[10], child care[11], education[12] and community development[13] have recently produced converging evidence that casts the role of young people as competent citizens and assets to their communities and institutions, such as schools and municipalities.

Researchers who use a rights-based framework (i.e., based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Children) have also highlighted the contributions of young people in various domains of life[14]. Relatively independent literatures on school reform[15], problem-based learning[16], experimental

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[7] G.A. Brewer, Building social capital: Civic attitudes and behavior of public servants. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 2003, 13(1), 5-26.

[8] Y. Li, , A. Pickles & M. Savage. Social capital and social trust in Britain. *European Sociological Review*, 2005, 21(2), 109-123.

[9] A. Moore McBride, M. Sherraden, C. Benitez, & E. Johnson. Civic service worldwide: Defining a field, building a knowledge base. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 2004, Supplement 33(4), 8S-21S.

[10] J. Youniss & D. Hart. Intersection of social institutions with civic development. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 2005, 109.

[11] C. Spencer & H. Woolley. Children and the city: A summary of recent environmental psychology research. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 2000, 26(3), 181-198.

[12] M. Crozier Kegler, R.F. Oman, S.K. Vesely, K.R. McLeroy, C.B. Aspy, S. Rodine & L. Marshall. Relationships among youth assets and neighborhood and community resources. *Health Education and Behavior*, 2005, 32(3), 380-397.

[13] B. Checkoway, K. Richards-Schuster, S. Abdullah, M. Aragon, E. Facio, L. Figueroa, E. Reddy, M. Welsh & A. White. Young people as competent citizens. *Community Development Journal*, 2003, 38(4), 298-309

[14] A.B. Smith, M. Gaffney, & K. Nairn. Health rights in secondary schools: Student and staff perspectives. *Health Education Research*, 2004, 19(1), 85-97.

[15] K. Riley & J. Jordan. 'It makes sense to me': Reforming classrooms from the bottom up: A case study in change. *Improving Schools*, 2004, 7(3), 227-242.

learning and learning-by-doing[17] are completely compatible with the aforementioned work that emphasizes action, civic engagement and community.

Therefore, there is sufficient evidence in the literature that supports two arguments related to sustainability of public practices: a) that participation and engagement are good for the young people and the society, and b) that when students' role in schools are altered, schools become easier to govern and various learning outcomes, including inclusion, democracy and sustainability-related learning, are improved.

What, then, is needed is a sustainable model that can help re-establish the ties between schools and daily life, real-life politics and action by young people and recast the role of young people as competent citizens. In the second part of this paper, such a model of sustainable civic engagement (Public Achievement) is presented. Public Achievement (PA) is an ongoing initiative and has been very successful in all of the schools it has been implemented in Turkey. It has also been very effective in USA, N. Ireland, Palestine and more recently in Eastern and Central Europe, and the Balkans.

Civic engagement as a tool for learning and empowerment

A sustainable model of civic engagement is particularly important in Turkey where the majority of the population are under 25. There are virtually no opportunities for young people for civic engagement and participation. Even university students are not very active. Many do not know how to get started, and some avoid participation fearing political repercussions and negative responses from their families. However, democracy is based on the principle of people engaging in public actions to rule themselves. Recent European Union policies are based on active citizenship and that has to start early. As Turkey becomes more democratic and prepares to enter the European Union, young people's civic engagement becomes more crucial and even critical.

Many parallels can be drawn between Turkey and other countries in the MENA region. The basic commonality, however, is that the young population is very large and has difficulty making a difference for themselves, for their communities, and for the society in general. PA offers a very useful tool for changing the role of young people in MENA countries.

The PA process

PA is a civic engagement initiative for young people. It gives young people a framework to learn citizenship skills by doing work of real importance in their own communities. PA is simple to understand and implement. The main idea behind PA is that young people have the potential to address society's problems and build a stronger community for everyone. PA takes place where young people congregate and in modern societies and that public space is often the school. PA provides students with a flexible tool to build community and democracy in their own schools.

With PA, students discover principles of democracy and recognize why pluralism is central to democracy. They discover that rules are for the public and are made by the public. Schools, they discover, benefit from students' work and that is why school governance, rather than what the teacher says, is very important. They learn that democracy is not just voting but real public work by

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[16] G. Coombs & M. Elden. Introduction to the Special Issue: Problem-Based Learning as social inquiry – PBL and management education. *Journal of Management Education*, 2004, 28(5), 523-535.
[17] M. Marquardt & D. Waddill. The power of learning in action learning: A conceptual analysis of how the five schools of adult learning theories are incorporated within the practice of action learning. *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, 2004, 1(2), 185-202

ordinary people. PA builds community, pluralism, belief in rule of law, and trust in common people as producers of democracy. PA is particularly needed now as schools in Turkey seek ways to increase democracy in schools.

Unlike other initiatives, PA is simple to initiate: Young people (6 to 25) in a school or community site identify real-life issues significant to them. Next, they form a **team** around each issue. Working in teams each week and with the help of a **coach** (a college student or a teacher), young people design action projects that have a real impact. The coach facilitates group work and helps the young people discover the public skills they need to implement their project. Teams comply with three principles: 1) The issue the team picks has to serve common good; 2) Team's actions to resolve their issue are non-violent, and 3) Team's actions are legal or lawful.

At its core, PA is engaging in real public issues. With the help of a **coach**, young people identify the public actors they should influence and engage in action projects to influence these actors to effect change. From the start to finish, all work is done by team members and every step they take in public life is considered a success; hence the name *Public Achievement*. Each team periodically presents its work to other students and asks for opinions. This is to discover accountability to the public when real public actions are undertaken. During this process, young people discover that democracy is real work and they can create democratic processes on their own. Coaches make sure that they are not didactic and treat the team as fellow citizens.

It is often the case that PA starts with an educator inviting PA to a school. Recently, for instance, a teacher heard about PA on the radio and called for more information. She believed that the model was what her school needed and introduced the idea at her school. There were coaches, all university students looking for a school and in about two weeks PA started at her school. In general, however, the process takes a little longer. Meetings are held with the administration, guidance counselors and teachers. If there is no opposition to PA, students in a classroom are told about PA and that they can make a difference in their own lives, in or outside of the school, using PA. They are told that participation is completely voluntary. If the students like the idea and want to do PA, a real public issue convention is held. Students identify issues and then they vote to choose the one they want to solve most. Teams of 6-10 students form around each issue. The team is paired with a coach and they start working in about a week. Most teams finish their work by the end of the term.

Who acts and who benefits?

The main beneficiary of PA are primary and high school students. The second beneficiary group is college students, who assume the role of coach. By facilitating group work and helping team members discover the public principles and skills, they learn how to work with young people and find creative ways to motivate civic engagement. There is often no single answer to the local problem the team has picked and the coach often does not know how the problem should be solved. Coaches meet every week and discuss each team's work. This Coach Meeting allows them to collectively reflect on the PA activities in the school and provide genuine learning of daily politics and democracy.

The third actor and beneficiary group is teachers. In PA, teachers may also assume the role of coach. Working with students in a non-didactive fashion helps teachers discover that a) students can learn without a curriculum, b) students' motivation is key to learning and fostering intrinsic motivation is key to teaching, c) "bad students" can be good students when they are working on their self-chosen topics, d) working with students in a challenging fashion invigorates teachers. Teachers often admit that they themselves learned from their team and discovered new public skills.

They also attend Coach Meetings. They benefit from interacting with college students and find genuine learning opportunities.

All three actor groups form a civic engagement community and begin to discover that democracy lies in their joint non-violent, legal actions to serve common good. The collective action and the inherent collaboration open doors to informal learning opportunites that schools or other public institutions are unable to provide.

PA vs. civic education

It is important to distinguish PA from other models. PA is not a civic education model where one person teaches a large number of pupils. As can be seen from Table 1, common civic education models frame democracy mainly as a representation issue and an intermittent activity on the part of the regular citizen. That is, other people (i.e., representatives) do democracy for the citizens. In contrast, PA emphasizes active participation, public work, and collective action. In this sense, PA is an action learning framework that can be used by multiple actors.

Table 1. Differences between Public Achievement and common civic education models

Common Civic Education Models	PA Model
Democracy is representative government, the rule of law	Democracy is work of the people; it is creating public process and results
Citizenship involves voting and choosing	Citizenship involves public work, creating and producing
Civic learning happens in programs that teach government and advocacy	Civic learning takes place in initiatives that teach the craft of public work
Advocacy, consistent use of a "rights" discourse; at best volunteering & service work	Public work for the benefit of the self and others; creating a "commonwealth" for all
Leadership is positional and involves mobilizing others	Leadership by all; it is never permanent; involves contact, coaching & co-creating
Accountability is achieved through government agencies & non-governmental bodies	Accountability can only be achieved by the involment of people through public process
Young people need to first learn theory & structure before they act	Young people can generate theory & structure through public action
Young people are not real citizens if they are legally underage	Young people are citizens at all ages & can be involved in public life
Young people do not have the skills, the patience, and the passion for politics	Young people have their own issues and motivation – adults coach them as they take action

It is also important to note that PA is a versatile model and does not have to be carried out in schools. Schools are regular sites of PA work because in most places around the world, young people do not have any other public space to work from. If, however, there are other public spaces for them to congregate and use freely (e.g., a community center, a youth center), PA work can be carried out in these settings as well. In principle, any person can serve as a coach and anyone can be a team member.
In Table 2, a coaching matrix is provided to outline a number of possibilities. The yellow boxes indicate most common forms of PA work. Various people can serve as a coach (e.g., professor, a college student, a community member) depending on the site. If the site is a university, PA work

will involve a professor as a coach, an older student as a coach, and students as a team. In a community setting, a community-based organization can provide coaches and local youth can be teams members. This is particularly useful in disadvantaged communities where the young adults who have "made it" despite the difficult circumstances would like to reach youth in the community and work with them to reduce social exclusion and improve their collective life.

Table 2. Coaching matrix

	Site where public work takes place (e.g., a team engages in action)			
	University	**School (primary or secondary)**	**Community Center**	**Another Community Site (e.g., firehouse, museum)**
Coach				
Professor	Professor coaches students	Professor coaches students	Professor coaches young people	Professor coaches professionals or young people
University student	Senior student coaches junior students	University student coaches students	University student coaches young people	-
Teacher	-	Teacher coaches students	Teacher coaches young people	-
Parent	-	Parent coaches students	-	-
High-school student	-	High school student coaches primary school students		
Alumnus	Alumnus coaches students in his/her alma mater	Alumnus coaches students in his/her school	-	-
Community association member	Community association member coaches students	Community association member coaches students	Community association member coaches young people	-
Adult community member (e.g., a retired individual)	Adult community member coaches students	Adult community member coaches students	Adult community member coaches young people	-
Professional community member (e.g., a firefighter, museum worker)	Adult community member coaches students	Adult community member coaches students	Adult community member coaches young people	A professional coaches young people

Coordination and support for PA work

PA in Turkey is coordinated by Serdar M. Degirmencioglu, a professor of psychology. Each city or area with multiple PA sites has a PA coordinator. More importantly, each school has a PA

coordinator. The school coordinator makes sure that coaches and teams are aware of other teams in the school and that PA work in the school has a firm communal grounding and adhere to principles, such as public accountability. Coaches often come from a given university and often a professor coordinates PA work at the university.

All PA schools and all coaches are linked with each other in an e-mail group and meet each other in general meetings. Student clubs, which needed a tool to make a difference, have provided coaches to different schools. Currently, a country-wide youth organization is considering the same option. Some members of the Ankara Chamber of Architects have been trained as coaches. Efforts are underway to collaborate with local governments to initiate PA at community centers.

Examples of PA from Moldova and Palestine

There are many parallels between countries in the Balkans or Eastern Europe and countries in the MENA region. The basic commonality, however, is that the young population is very large and yet has tremendous difficulty making a difference for themselves, for their communities, and for the society in general. PA is very new in this region but has already proved to be a very useful tool for changing the role of young people.

An example from a town in Moldova illustrates a child-driven process where students acquired a whole range of invaluable skills that one seldom gets in schools. The team knew that they were doing something important and was determined to succeed. Two coaches, both energetic teachers, were helping them develop skills and asking them probing questions, but the rest was up to the students.[18]

Fourteen 4th and 5th graders came together to solve a health problem: "A friend got sick one evening and needed some medicine, but all the pharmacies were closed…" This created the "**Sanatatea**" (meaning health) PA Team. After going through the steps of creating a working group, with name, logo, rules, consequences, etc. they created a strategy. The town has 50,000 inhabitants and several pharmacies, but not one is open past 5 pm. Students interviewed people in the community. They had carefully filled out forms with questions that they had chosen as a group. "*Have you ever needed to buy medicine in the evening? What did you do? What do you think about this problem?*" Most replied that either they had been in such a situation or knew someone who had. In most cases they asked neighbors for medicine. Everyone agreed that pharmacies should be open later. They decided that the next step was to go to the pharmacies and find out why they closed early, how many pharmacies there were and whether they were private or state-owned. They later planned to go to the mayor, but only after they had collected enough data and were prepared for such an important meeting.

An example from a town in Romania illustrates how marginalized young people can take up their own problems and empower themselves. Their issue is finding a place for themselves - a warm, safe and friendly learning environment. They are taking an active role in this endeavor and there is still a long way to go, but they are not waiting for someone else to help – they are helping themselves. The second group, "RoCalc" consists of 16 members ranging in age from 7-15 years old. They are all Roma and are not part of the wider school system and attend classes in a back room of another school. That school wants them gone and had recently built a wall that cut them off from access to the bathrooms. Their biggest problem was finding a place to continue their schooling. They chose the name "RoCalc" – meaning "**Roma Calculators or Roma Computers**" – since they have 10

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[18] The examples in this section are taken from a report prepared by the Education Society for Malopolska.

computers and need to set up the computer lab in a new place. This is part of their larger goal to create a new leaning environment.

Examples of PA from Turkey

PA works very well in various settings but often makes a bigger difference where resources are very limited or not well-used, and the numbers are staggering. Two examples from a very crowded school in Istanbul might illustrate the point. The school has about 1500 students, about 40 teachers and a guidance counselor. Every year more students enroll and the school does not have sufficient classrooms to keep up with the enrollment. School is located in the inner city, in the midst of a rough neighborhood. Most students are from families who migrated to Istanbul recently or from Roma families, and long-time residents of the area.

The school was chosen as a pilot school by the Ministry of Education for a World Bank Grant Program. The school received computers for student use but students never had much access to computers. The year PA started in the school, money was collected from students for a computer lab but the computer lab was never open to students. A team of 5th graders identified this as their main issue and surveyed the opinions of other students. They had difficulty keeping together and focused during the process but managed to obtain access to the lab for students.

Another team, eight 5th graders, focused on the issue of lack of green spaces in the schoolyard – a common issue across schools in Turkey. Their teacher did not have any confidence in these shy and silent girls, but their coach, a sociology student from the university across the street, did. The team clarified their goal, produced a power map – a tool which shows who they need to influence to reach their goal – and identified a plan of action. The plan involved influencing the municipality for help. The students did research to find out that the Parks and Gardens Department is the right address and paid a visit to the department with a teacher. The department had never received such a visit and was quickly convinced. In two weeks time, the schoolyard had some green spaces. The "shy and silent" girls were very proud with their public achievement.

Examples of PA from Palestine

PA was received very well in Palestine, particularly in places where young people had very little control over their lives. The coaches were mostly university students. The PA experience helped young people to reflect about social and political conditions. They were invited to identify imbalances in the power structures, injustices as they see it in their own eyes. These were not taken up as theoretical discussions – rather the discussions were focused on action and each team took practical steps to challenge those conditions. The outcomes in the examples below are all directly related to the daily needs of the young people and to the community. In most cases, the young people not only changed their role in the community but also obtained support from various actors in the community.[19]

In Gaza, a group of 12 young people in a housing development area focused on the issue of lack of green space for a large number of residents. One piece of land was allocated by the development project landlord who later changed his mind and was in a dispute with the residents. Years passed by and the dispute was not resolved. The PA team took up this challenge and developed a plan to discuss with all those involved in the process including the city council. They negotiated with the landlord and managed to win his side. They mobilised resources from the local community to get the needed materials, plants, tools, and mobilised the residents of the project to participate in

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[19] The examples in this section are narrated by the PA Coordinator in Palestine (personal correspondence).

planting new trees. It was a big success for them and the community. They also received big support from the landlord who donated t-shirts and caps for the whole team.

A team from a poor, neglected neighborhood in Bethlehem focused on a local issue. One of the community members turned a spare space in a building into a community center but the center remained poorly resourced. Young people from that neighbourhood identified their need: They wanted a small community library as a study environment. They did not have resources and neither did the local community. They visited officials and local NGOs who promised to give them books for the library but would not fund furnishing and book shelves. The group then decided to collect recycled wood from their neighborhood and nearby communities. One of the participants uncle was a carpenter, who offered his time and skills for free to help young people build their library. At the end of the PA cycle, they had bookshelves, with books and a library from re-cycled materials

In a village in the West Bank, the young people realised that their village has grown both in terms of population and area. The village also has frequent visitors from outside the village. But the streets of the village were not named. They took the initiative organising a plan to name the street villages in consultation with residents and local council. Their initiative was widely supported and they managed to put signs for street names.

In Gaza a team of young people managed to coordinate among a number of schools to draft a statement against violence in the schools and obtained the support of the teachers, principals and students. The statement was focused on preventing use of any weapons (knives etcç) in the schools and turning schools into violence-free settings.

Summary

In this paper, it is argued that sustainable development and a sustainable future are only possible if existing educational policies are re-considered and the role of students at all levels of education – particularly in higher education – is recast. This requires abandoning models of education that requires removal of real-life and community issues from the school context. Schools should move away from an exclusive emphasis on technical and passive learning. The fact is that technical mastery does not suffice for development and has very little to do with sustainability, participatory practices, public skills and action, and specifically with empowerment and democracy.

This shift involves recasting the role of students as active learners and problem-solvers in their schools and communities. Otherwise, public institutions and practices become unsustainable even in developed countries where resources are less of an issue.

The emphasis on the service market in service-focused economies and the accompanying model based on service delivery by professionals may work in developed countries but often fail in developing countries simply on the basis of the number of trained professionals. The public sector can employ few professionals and these professionals cannot meet the overwhelming demand.

This point is obvious when the number of trained adult professionals in developing countries are considered.: Simply put, there are not sufficient numbers of trained professionals (teachers, psychologists, social workers, physicians, and so on) and sufficient numbers will probably never exist. That means, services that can only be delivered by these professionals cannot reach the public. Professional service delivery models are not models that developing countries can afford.

On the other hand, service models often produce a distance between providers and the citizens, and often quickly reduce unpaid citizen contributions. Public practices that used to be sustained by the

citizens often become services that can only be sustained by the efforts of the state and the government. This is particularly obvious in the school context, where learning has become "education" and a service to be provided or purchased. Adults have abandoned their roles in young people's lives as educators, supporters, advisors and young people have become passive subjects of a school, rather than young citizens adults spend time with. Only adults paid to work with the young devote time to young. This model of schooling has stalled all around the world and it is now time to accept the fact that schools cannot be sustainable without student participation and action on the part of young people is integral to learning. Recent European Union policies acknowledge this fact and encourage governments and civil society to consider the concept of active citizenship as one that involves the youngest.

Recommendations for the MENA Region

Policy makers, NGOs, educators and the general public in MENA countries need to consider the challenge the young population is presenting. Youth constitute the majority in the region and the numbers of youth are very high, translating into millions.

Recent recommendations produced by the World Bank, UNDP, UNFPA and other international agencies emphasize the need to invest in young people. Research has strong evidence to support this claim and the need for a coherent youth policy.

Evidence also indicates that youth need: multiple opportunities to engage in performatory activities with adults and other youth encouragement to be active rather than passive, to work together and make decisions, and to relate to each other and adults in new ways.
support to take on a variety of roles and responsibilities. Young people today have the skills or the potential to become leaders, directors, board members, funders, researchers, evaluators, planners, etc. adults to treat them as competent individuals.

Public Achievement (PA) offers a model that can meet these needs. PA is a sustainable civic engagement model. It is easy to understand and implement, and has been very successful in Turkey and Palestine, as well in other parts of the world. In PA, young people choose their own agenda, engage their energy and will to solve the problem, and a coach devotes his/her time and skills to mainly facilitate problem-solving and partly to maintain engagement (see Figure 1).

PA has a community focus and emphasizes local resources and action. Unlike solutions that have to be imported from other places (e.g., the developed world), PA emphasizes local solutions and unleashes the energy and the creativity of the young people. PA fits very well with certain cultural practices focused on commonwealth in collectivistic cultures.