

## Human Securitability: A Participatory Action Research Study Involving Novice Teachers and Youngsters

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### Abstract

Civic participation, initiative and interest in current events can bridge the alienation felt towards national and municipal institutions, thereby enabling individuals to improve their quality of life and contribute to all-round sustainable development of their resident state. This paper reports on a participatory action research study into civic initiatives for securitability involving novice teachers and youngsters from the Latgale region of Latvia. Research participants evaluated national planning documents, enhanced their knowledge and devised civic initiatives to improve the quality of life. Focus group discussions and reasoned argumentative essays were employed to establish how novice teachers (n = 40) and youngsters (n = 58) make sense of the concept of ‘human securitability’. Data analysis was accomplished by qualitative content analysis. The action research exposed an initial understanding of novice teachers and youngsters regarding the human securitability and the possibilities of improving the quality of life. Moreover, this study provided an environment for the research participants to deepen their understanding of said phenomena and participate in educational events envisioning practical engagement with securitability and civic initiatives. The action research study created initiatives for the development of civic securitability and the participation in setting developmental goals.

*Keywords:* planning documents, human securitability, civic initiatives, novice teachers, youngsters

Every citizen is welcome to participate in the shaping of his/her country and select personally significant issues with a view to improve the quality of life for themselves and for others and to ensure sustainability in one’s own and others’ lives. Citizens of the world need to learn their way to sustainability since our current knowledge base does not provide solutions to contemporary global environmental, societal and economic problems. Today’s education is crucial to develop the ability of present and future leaders and citizens to create solutions and find new paths to a better future (UNESCO, 2015).

Education for sustainable development (ESD) promotes efforts to rethink educational programs and systems (both methods and contents) that currently support our

unsustainable societies and affects all components of education: legislation, policy, finance, curriculum, instruction, learning, assessment, etc.

Awareness of the importance of ESD inspired this action research study, which seeks to promote the participation of novice teachers and youngsters in planning our common futures with concern for themselves and initiatives designed to improve life in local communities.

The paper proposes an analysis of planning documents, discusses the concept of securitability, reports on the course of an action research study and highlights its key findings.

## Theoretical Background

### National Planning Documents for Latvia's Sustainable Future

In Latvia, many national planning documents have an informative function. They outline prioritized areas of the country's development. Hierarchically, the *Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030* (Latvia 2030) is the country's basic long-term planning document. Drafting of the strategy was under the aegis of the Cabinet of Ministers and was subsequently ratified by the parliament. Latvia 2030 (Saeima of Republic of Latvia, 2010) outlines the country's long-term development priorities and lays down its spatial development perspective.

Other legally-binding planning documents include the *National Development Plan (NDP) 2014–2020* (Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre, 2012), *Educational Development Framework 2014–2020* (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, 2014), several conceptual reports, etc. These planning documents are fairly diverse in terms of content, which confounds their implementation. Regulations by the Cabinet of Ministers "On Public Participation Procedure in Development Planning" (2009) stipulate opportunities for public participation in the process of drafting national planning documents, but this option is unknown to many and tends to remain unused.

Although NDP for 2014–2020 was ratified in 2012, in December, 2014, the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre referred to new regulations by the Cabinet of Ministers (2014) "On Drafting Development Planning Documents and their Impact Assessment". These regulations stipulate the creation of shared planning documents in related areas, reduce the number of guidelines from approximately 50 to 20 and emphasize cooperation of different departments to create coordinated development planning documents (Krūzkopa, 2014).

Thus, authors of planning documents acknowledge the need to reduce their overlap and fragmentation. The importance of public participation in the drafting of planning documents is acknowledged, but the argument refers to the general public, without singling out the most relevant and ready-to-be-involved target groups.

In view of the need to improve the quality of education, an action research study was envisioned to create opportunities to reflect on national planning documents and support civic initiatives among novice teachers and youngsters – the bedrock of future societies. Due to the critical role of youth in shaping the future, the present study involves novice teachers and youngsters in action research aimed at enriching and transforming their daily habits and understanding of their own securitability. This aim is compatible with action research design, because, in its social context, the latter is construed as democratic, equitable, emancipatory inquiry with the power to enrich the lives of individuals and communities (Stringer, 1996).

*Youth Law* (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, 2008) in Latvia aims to improve the quality of life of young people. The mere existence of the rule of law, however, does not actually improve the quality of life of young people, if youngsters and novice teachers are not assisted in making sense of normative and planning documents.

An analysis of just a few normative documents exposes their importance in shaping the environment for planning the future. By helping youngsters and novice teachers make sense of normative documents, we provide them with opportunity to become involved in planning the future.

### Securability in Latvia's National Planning Documents

National planning documents like the *Latvian Sustainable Development Strategy for 2030* or NDP 2020 feature concepts that are rare in day-to-day discourse and vague in terms of their meaning. For instance, NDP 2020 has the meta-aim of “economic breakthrough” (see Figure 1). Although national economic development is, undoubtedly, important, its feasibility is debatable, because growth of new businesses requires active civic participation and secure governmental support to promote business initiatives.

The document specifies the meta-aim with three priorities: human securability, growth of the national economy and growth for regions. Regrettably, it ignores the fundamental factors of sustainable development – development, not only in economics, but also in the cultural, social and environmental domains. Economic growth is not contextualized by integrating it with other aspects of sustainability.

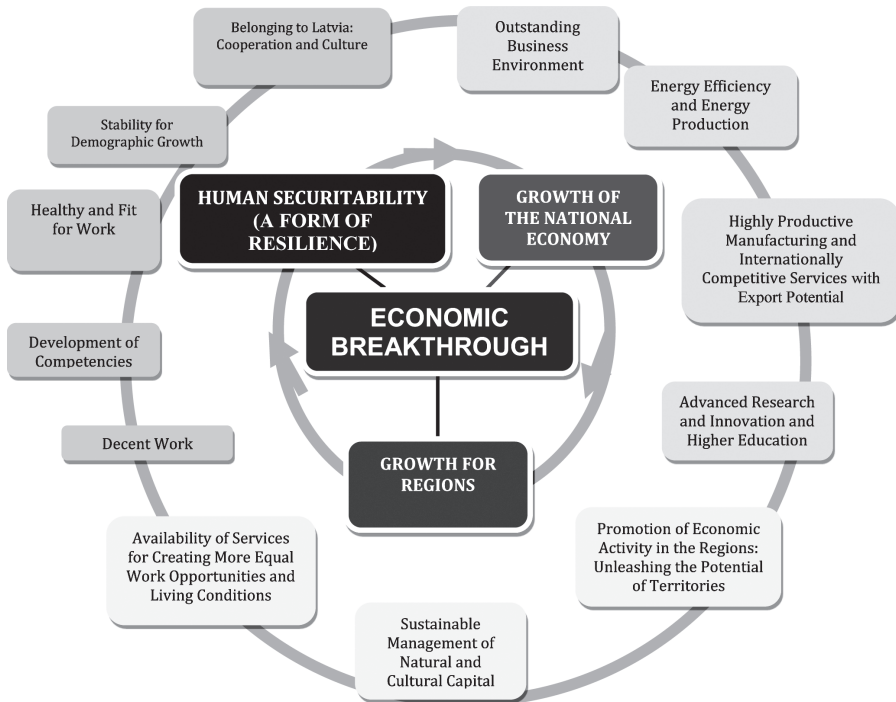


Figure 1. NDP 2020: Priorities and action areas (Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre, 2012, p.15)

In their model of the fundamentals of integral economics, Gerber and Steppacher (2014) argue that integral economics are inconceivable without components such as inner world, institutional structure and social metabolism. These concepts are rooted in sustainability, existential fulfillment, equity and democracy. Integral economics include integrated knowledge from different areas. Arguably, such a holistic perspective on economics should be a much more reasonable and effective platform for national development.

Often, national planning documents (guidelines and frameworks, plans and conceptual reports) formally endorse sustainable development, but feature unsustainable concepts. The above-mentioned “economic breakthrough” is an inherently unsustainable meta-aim for a national development plan, because it connotes conflict, a power struggle and survival of the fittest. The exclusive focus on “pure” economics to the detriment of social, cultural and environmental factors is unsustainable in the long term as a strategy of caring for the coming generations. Nations that seek to improve the lives of local communities require national planning documents with a holistic perspective on political, cultural, economic, environmental and social processes. Therefore, the making of planning documents should include discussions with the general public, especially with the young, who need to be made aware of the importance of their participation as early as possible.

An analysis of the above-discussed planning documents and involvement with teacher education and non-formal youth education spurred the need to explore the views of novice teachers and youngsters on national planning documents. In a sense, present-day youngsters are future policy-makers and novice teachers – strategic planners. These groups need informed understanding of the process of drafting normative documents and awareness of ways in which they can improve their quality of life.

### Contextualizing the Concept of Human Securitability

Human securitability is a widely discussed concept, which resists reduction to the classical interpretation of freedom from fear and want. It is debated both in Latvia (Ozoliņa, 2012) and abroad (e.g., Eldering, 2010; Hastings, 2011; Lonergan, Gustavson, & Carter, 2009). The general view among scholars is that no universal definition of securitability can be agreed upon, which means that a fair degree of diversity is permissible in the way it is conceptualized and researched.

According to NDP 2020, human securitability as a form of resilience is a well-known concept in international circles, which denotes human adaptability to rapidly changing environments. Individuals with high securitability are confident, creative, able to take care of themselves and others and adapt to different circumstances (Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre, n.d.)

In Latvia, concepts such as ‘human security’ and ‘securitability’ are discussed by the Latvian Platform for Development Society (LPDS) – an NGO that serves as an umbrella association for organizations presently or potentially involved with development cooperation and development education. Grounded on research, LPDS has created a *Practical Guide to Improving Human Security at Community Level* (Ozoliņa, Reinholde, & Rudzīte, 2014). Traditionally, the concept of securitability is applied to individuals in the face of threats that significantly impede satisfaction of their material needs, or to consequences of different conflicts. According to Ozoliņa (2012), the concept of securitability is especially relevant in situations that can be described as crises. In these

circumstances, human securitability has two aspects. The first is the crisis-stricken sector (economy, politics, security, social sphere). The second is an individual's perception, knowledge and action potential to decrease prospective or actual consequences of the crisis.

In addition, Ozoliņa (2014) suggests that securitability is affected by several factors: (1) knowledge; (2) motivation to participate in different processes; (3) responsibility for adopted strategies; (4) civic participation in social and governmental processes; (5) attitude to risk-taking.

As a rule, securitability tends to be associated with economics, food security, health, ecological security, personal security, community security and political security (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1994).

Often securitability is contrasted to fear or insecurity. For instance, The Global Environmental Change and Human Security Project uses the Index of Human Insecurity, which is based on the inherent interrelationship between the environment and society and suggests that security is achieved if individuals are capable of terminating environmental, social and human rights-related threats or adapting to them (Lonergan, Gustavson, & Carter, 2009).

Eldering (2010) points to six general approaches (United Nations Development Report, UNDP; Generalized Poverty Index; Human Security Audit; Global Environmental Change and Human Security Project; Human Security Report Index; Human Security Mapping) to measure human security. Each of these approaches yields a different assessment. Eldering (2010) explains that security is a social construct whose definitions are geographically constrained to include different categories of threats.

David Hastings' global Human Security Index compares human security across 232 countries (Hastings, 2011). The methodology features three axes – economic, environmental and social. These axes have several categories with a number of indicators each (34 indicators in total). The densest of all is the social axis, which includes the indicators regarding education, inequality, food security, agency, health and governance (Hastings, 2011).

The above analysis of different aspects of securitability confirms that the aim of the study is not to measure the objective dimensions of human securitability, but to use action research in order to promote subjective securitability and expand its understanding.

Subjective human security is construed as the perceived insecurity by residents in a specific geographical location, which involves their ability to adapt to or overcome actual or potential threats across seven dimensions of security – politics, economics, environment, health, food, communal security and personal security (Bambals, 2012).

### **Involving Youth in Creating a Sustainable Future**

Admittedly, sustainable development is not a technical issue of preserving natural values; it is primarily a political and cultural issue, which involves responsibility on practical and institutional levels (Scerri, 2012). Building awareness of sustainability requires individual participation and agency, which can be supported through action research.

According to Cammarota and Fine (2008), participatory action research enables youngsters to become major change agents and revolutionaries in the field of education. Age 16 to 21 is the time for personal and professional self-determination. At this age

youngsters choose their perspective in life and create their identity – choose a social orientation, develop a worldview, seek meaning in life. Age 22 to 30 is the time for building families and developing competences (Kaļva, 2007). All of the above makes this a crucial time for educational youth work. Schools, universities and NGOs have a shared challenge – attracting youngsters to local community by analyzing local and global problems and therefore helping them make sense of different social, political and economic processes, as well as relevant normative documents. Since youngsters are the bedrock of the next generation, joint planning and evaluation of political documents and processes help clarify a shared vision for a future where each youngster is responsible for his or her actions and capable of changing global or local processes. Pitting generations against each other is to be avoided at all costs; the way forward is cooperation (Robertson, 2007) and civic agency as well as concern for our shared sustainable future.

Concern for a better future rests on civic initiatives – community endeavors that bring together different institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and individuals in pursuit of a better day-to-day existence. Civic initiative is construed as

a process of a participatory democracy that empowers the people to propose legislation and to enact or reject the laws at the polls independent of the lawmaking power of the governing body. The purpose of an initiative, which is a type of election commenced and carried out by the people, is to permit the electorate to resolve questions where their elected representatives fail to do so or refuse to proceed with a change that the public desires (Citizen Initiative, n.d.).

When planning civic initiatives, novice teachers must bear in mind their essential aspects:

- reinforcing opportunities and strengthening public capacity to participate in social processes, as well as building awareness of the role of individuals in shaping their community, region and state;
- increasing participation among socially inactive segments of population;
- promoting cooperation between stakeholders and national and municipal institutions as well as the private sector;
- creating an innovative approach to promote civic participation.

For novice teachers, leading or supporting the civic initiatives at school can be challenging, but they are the surest way to raise awareness of the opportunities of democracy and of the teachers' role, both in school and beyond (Healy, Dobson, Kyser, Herczog, & Genzer, 2014).

The United Nations Environment Programme “Environment for Development” and Agenda 21 underscore the crucial role of children in fostering sustainable development (United Nations Environment Programme Environment for Development, n.d.). Some big NGOs set fine examples of youth agency to bring sustainability into the daily lives of youngsters. For instance, The Youth for Sustainable Development Foundation (YSDF) (n.d.) has a dual mission to educate young people (5–35 years) on current environmental issues and futures and conduct sustainable projects in developing countries.

In Latvia, *Youth Law* (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, 2008) aims to improve the quality of life of young people (that is, persons from 13 to 25 years of age) by fostering youth initiative, agency and patriotism, participation in decision-making processes and

involvement in social life, as well as supporting youth work. Thus, civic initiatives can be implemented only by youngsters concerned with the future and community wellbeing, notably, the quality of life on personal and societal levels.

Youngsters are malleable and open to life's many challenges. Their practical participation and initiative create experiences that foster securitability and flexibility. The latter is also an important attribute for teachers – it helps in teaching, management and learning life skills (Day & Gu, 2014). Flexibility is improved through learning together (Gu & Day, 2013).

The present study involves youngsters and novice teachers and seeks to discover how joint learning and participation in action research can deepen participants' understanding of securitability and promote initiatives to improve quality of life.

### **Design and Methods**

This chapter will start with a brief description of approach to action research used in the study, continue with essential information about research participants and conclude with discussion of findings from key action research stages.

In Latvia, action research is an emergent approach to inquiry in educational settings. For the purpose of the present study, it is important to refer to action research implemented in the contexts of teacher education and sustainability. These include studies by Salīte regarding the pre-service teachers' perception of the aim of education for a sustainable future (Salīte, 2008; Salīte, Gedžūne, & Gedžūne, 2009) and pre-service teachers' research skills (Salīte, Mičule, Kravale, Iliško, & Stakle, 2007). Others have used action research to explore and promote ecological consciousness in the setting of teacher education (Gedžūne & Gedžūne, 2011) and initiate discourse on inclusion in an e-learning environment in teacher education (Gedžūne & Gedžūne, 2013).

Action research is also a way of creating new knowledge (Dick, 2009; Kapenieks & Salīte, 2012). The present study uses participatory action research, viewed as a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview...[and bringing] together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and communities (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). According to Bostock and Freeman (2003), participatory action research is especially suited to youth work, since it raises youngsters' awareness of the types of support available to them and enables them to discuss individual participation.

The aim of the present action research study was to enrich novice teachers/youngsters' understanding of planning documents, securitability, and civic initiatives as well as to build initiatives to improve the quality of life. The study began with four research questions:

- 1) Are novice teachers/youngsters aware of national planning documents?
- 2) How do novice teachers/youngsters make sense of planning documents and the concept of securitability?
- 3) How can the novice teacher and youngsters' understanding of the planning documents be enhanced?
- 4) How can initiatives to improve the quality of life and securitability of individuals and communities be supported?

The present study relies on an approach to action research and data analysis discussed by Pipere (2011a, pp. 220–242; 2011b, pp.188–198). The action research was conducted in three stages, featuring a series of steps. Due to spatial limitations, the paper will only focus on key steps and highlight essential findings. Thus, the paper will outline two stages of action research – university teachers and researchers’ work with novice teachers, and novice teachers’ engagement with youngsters. Discussion of the findings will focus on civic initiatives proposed by youngsters and novice teachers. The aim of the 3rd stage of action research was to support the participation of young people in civic initiatives to improve quality of life.

### **Researcher Process and Participants**

The study was conducted over the course of the academic year 2014/2015 and involved a cohort of 40 students who were enrolled in a professional Master’s programme in Education at the Daugavpils University. The course “Securitability and Occupational Safety in Education” became the environment for the present study. Course implementation involved such forms of teacher-learner and learner-learner interaction as lectures, seminars and focus groups. Stage 1 of the study involved 28 females and 12 males, with representatives from all four regions of Latvia. The majority of the students (85%) had some pedagogical experience.

In addition, the action research study involved a number of youngsters. Stage 2 of the study was conducted over the course of the second semester of 2014/2015 (from January to April). It involved youngsters from three municipalities of Latvia (Daugavpils, Rēzekne, Dagda) – small, medium and large municipalities, respectively, with populations of up to 10 thousand, 30 thousand and 90 thousand. In all, 58 youngsters, all voluntary recruits in the study, joined the inquiry and improved their knowledge; of these recruits, 42 participants were females and 16 were males, although gender differences will not play a part in the subsequent data analysis. The youngsters’ age ranged from 14 to 23. All of them were students in general or vocational education schools.

Stage 1 of the study was conducted in three consecutive steps:

- Step 1** consisted of a focus-group interview to appraise novice teachers’ common notion of normative planning documents. A focus group interview was used to elicit research participants’ views on planning documents and identify the meaning attributed to them. The focus group was conducted and analyzed by academic and research staff from Daugavpils University.
- Step 2** included the appraisal of the novice teachers’ understanding of planning documents (NDP 2020) and the concept of ‘securitability’ through lectures and seminars (on national planning documents; educational security; food and health; social security and civic initiatives) as well as focus-group interviews and argumentative essays. The focus-group interview was conducted by academic and research staff from Daugavpils University who also transcribed the interview and analyzed the transcript. The present paper will outline findings only from argumentative essays. Novice teachers were invited to write an argumentative essay “Evaluation of My Living Space” and answer the following questions: How safe do you feel in the environment you study/live/work in? What factors affect your safety? What is the cause of your greatest insecurity? How could it be removed? In your opinion, what are the sources



of securitability? How can securitability be defined? No restrictions were placed on student essays regarding their length and contents.

Argumentative essays were subjected to thematic analysis, performed by drawing on the insights of Howitt (Howitt & Cramer, 2008) – looking for themes and subthemes. Thematic analysis of argumentative essays yielded the following themes discussed by research participants as the pillars of securitability: 1) personal convictions; 2) flexibility; 3) financial security; 4) environment-building. The paper contains a more detailed analysis of these patterns, buttressing the argument made for each pillar with relevant quotes from student essays.

**Step 3** included data analysis and civic initiatives. The data obtained during the action research from the novice teachers were analyzed by researchers using thematic analysis. The goal of the activities related to civic initiatives was to summarize diverse definitions of securitability, evaluate their contents and plan initiatives to foster securitability and civic participation in setting developmental goals. Novice teachers were asked to create the plan of their initiatives in a free form (to be submitted in paper) and to implement the initiatives, afterwards submitting their description in a paper form or as video clips.

### **Novice Teachers' Understanding of Normative Planning Documents**

The data from the Stage 1 obtained through the focus-group interviews suggest that novice teachers have little awareness of national and international planning documents. Novice teachers admit to perusing such documents infrequently and casually due to their perceived irrelevance to novice teachers' day-to-day work. Research participants fail to relate normative documents to their personal lives, because their drafting and implementation is considered a political initiative, which novice teachers are unmotivated to join. The majority (80%) of novice teachers involved in the study report no prior knowledge of NDP 2020, while 20% claim they had heard of it before but deny having a clear idea of its contents.

The findings suggest that novice teachers have little to no interest in national planning documents; the study also exposes a wide gap between authors of said planning documents and the realities of life. During focus-group interviews, novice teachers mentioned several examples of their disillusionment in policy-makers, which accounts for their failure to perceive the need to participate in national planning. Some participants were unaware of the existence of many national planning documents and failed to perceive the need to know and implement them in day-to-day practice. The further discussion was structured around NDP 2020 – participants were invited to evaluate its priorities and directions. Next, the novice teachers cooperated with their university teacher to develop topics for seminars and lectures, which were targeted at helping novice teachers make better sense of planning documents and the concept of securitability.

### **Novice Teachers' Understanding of Securitability**

Since planning documents prioritize securitability, the present action research study focused on research participants' understanding of this concept and sought to analyze diversity of meanings attributed to it. These findings informed the decision to help novice teachers improve their understanding of 'securitability' as a concept. The discussion

exposed vagueness of the concept of ‘human securitability’ – research participants regarded it as difficult to understand. This resonates with the argument by Ozoliņa (2014) about knowledge as one of the many aspects of human securitability.

The deeper understanding of securitability was elicited from novice teachers’ argumentative essays. The essays exposed a subjective understanding of human securitability – novice teachers’ personal perception of security. Although the present paper thinned out seven dimensions of securitability (politics, economics, environment, health, food, communal security and personal security), novice teachers’ argumentative essays featured merely four factors of securitability: 1) personal convictions; 2) flexibility; 3) financial security; and 4) environment-building. It is evident that these factors only partially overlap with the theoretically proposed dimensions of securitability. Following paragraphs will outline key insights gleaned from novice teachers’ writings. Direct quotes will be used to support the line of argument.

Analysis of the essays exposed **personal convictions and capacities** as a key factor of securitability. Also, securitability is believed to rest on informed and rational decisions, personal contribution to one’s safety and fine communication skills. Faith is an important contributor to securitability. To quote from an essay: *“I feel secure that my employer understands me; as to the rest, I try not to worry and trust in Providence. I also try to act wisely, reasonably and calmly so as not to provoke people who might threaten me.”*

Another important factor of securitability to emerge from the study is **flexibility**. *“Securitability is willingness and readiness to change along with changing circumstances and situations; successful adaptation to new situations and circumstances.”* Also, *“I am flexible and adaptable, I do well in new situations and accept them as normal occurrences rather than insurmountable challenges.”* In some essays flexibility is discussed not as an aptitude, but as a consciously cultivated trait: *“Adapting to given circumstances, awareness of one’s role in society, transforming failure into a springboard for further action and making use of all available potential to move forward.”* *“My teachers’ securitability depends on me. [It depends] on the teacher or educator’s personal characteristics, on [his or her] depth and breadth of understanding, which is used to navigate pedagogical challenges. [It implies] maintaining a sense of security; ability to regain it, if lost, without fear of others.”*

The third factor of securitability deduced from novice teachers’ essays is **financial security**. Novice teachers consider financial resources an important contributor to securitability: *“I hope for sufficient funds, financially accessible medical care of adequate quality and no holes in the family budget.”*

Finally, novice teachers relate securitability to **creating safe environments**, with individuals contributing to their formation: *“Safety in numbers (belonging to a group); safety regarding one’s wages; safety regarding one’s health; safety in development, improvement and growth.”* Others explain security through the prism of insecurity: *“People inhabiting the Earth are like fish in a tank – if someone starts siphoning off the water, you jump into another full tank, not waiting for the last precious drops to disappear.”*

The data suggest that novice teachers appreciate opportunities to engage in co-evaluation of planning documents in terms of their relevance to their day-to-day professional lives. The concept of securitability, although defined in planning documents, has made sense of through the prism of subjective experience. Research participants acknowledge the need for active involvement in the study process and admit that joint evaluation

and analysis of relevant concepts improves their understanding of social processes. Data from thematic analysis indicate that novice teachers' securitability is related to personal factors, flexibility, employee-employer relationship, financial affairs and safe physical environment.

### **Civic Initiatives Proposed by Novice Teachers**

In Step 3, in keeping with the spirit of action research, novice teachers were given full responsibility for planning civic initiatives for their community, region or country. Action research was integrated in the study process, so the teaching staff was on hand to give advice and offer ongoing support. As pointed out by Brezicha, Bergmark and Mitra (2015), providing teachers with differentiated support improves teachers' understanding of the reform and supplies teachers with necessary tools to implement the new idea, facilitates teacher voice and participation in the process. In total, 40 novice teachers proposed 43 educational initiatives to boost youngsters and teachers' interest in planning documents, securitability and improving quality of life. Researchers categorized these initiatives in three thematic groups:

- 1) by-laws of educational institutions;
- 2) educational security: trust and violence;
- 3) ambition, initiative and participation.

Novice teachers planned initiatives to increase agency among themselves and others. Thus, in the first thematic group novice teachers intended to bring together youngsters, teachers and school principals as co-creators of school by-laws. This initiative sought to avoid formalism and ensure that the by-laws are worded in a comprehensible manner, which should increase the likelihood of their implementation in the day-to-day practice of the given school.

The second thematic group suggests that teachers would plan meetings with professionals who are responsible for human safety and anti-violence initiatives. Also, they would summarize life stories that illuminate the importance of teamwork in times of crises, teach how to cope with violence and highlight the essential role of trust in an educational setting.

The third thematic group features initiatives to diminish indifference among youngsters and boost their willingness to participate in social processes. Key to these initiatives is the teacher's personality in that the teacher ceases to be a mere instructor and becomes a motivational leader who awakens and inspires youngsters to plan and achieve new goals. These initiatives suggest that teachers' initiatives are intended for their communities, as they have a better understanding of local needs and environmental problems.

Novice teachers backed prospective initiatives with detailed plans for the future or gave presentations of already completed initiatives. No restrictions were imposed on the form and contents of these plans and presentations.

### **Youngsters' Civic Initiatives: Creation of Video Clips**

The second stage of an action research describes the civic initiatives carried out by youth. Although, there exist the manifold forms of civil initiatives, however, young people, together with the researchers, decided to create video clips to better address their peers in the community.

As suggested above, upon completing their participation in a study at the Daugavpils University, novice teachers were invited to work with youth according to a similar plan and answer the questions originally set for the first stage of the action research study: 1) explore the contents of planning documents, 2) build understanding of planning documents and attempt to make sense of the concept of securitability, 3) improve understanding of planning documents, and 4) promote civic initiatives to improve quality of life. Work with youth was undertaken by academic and research staff of Daugavpils University in cooperation with novice teachers, but only eight teachers consented to their work being analyzed in the present paper. Novice teachers worked at the school both as the class teachers and persons responsible for out-of-school work. Therefore, this stage of action research was oriented toward out-of-school educational environment for youngsters who would like to improve their knowledge and to be engaged in practical activities of civil initiatives via creating video clips in order to improve their own and peers' quality of life.

Altogether, 58 youngsters volunteered to participate and created short video clips about securitability in their communities. These youngsters were students in educational institutions where the novice teachers were employed. Video clips were analyzed implementing the method of thematic analysis of qualitative data.

Analysis of these clips suggests that observation of different situations and analyzing other people's behaviors, thoughts and feelings gave research participants new ideas to be implemented in their local communities. Youngsters created their video clips in groups of 5 to 8; it was a way of inviting youngsters to reflect on opportunities to improve their own and others' quality of life. Admittedly, youngsters' civic initiatives were inspired by personal concerns and responded to local needs. Youngsters chose topics for their video clips with a view to best addressing their peers. The video clips highlighted issues such as healthy lifestyle, community involvement, support to socially excluded individuals and groups, etc. Despite the multiple challenges accompanying the creation of video clips, youngsters found the ambitious task interesting and stepped up admirably to the challenge of improving quality of life with minimum resources as well as showing others the way forward. Youngsters gave snappy titles to their video clips, which illustrate their commitment. They also annotated their video clips. All in all, their work suggests pride in their achievement and ability to find inspiration for the future in the day-to-day realities of life.

The video clips focused on change (*"Grandpa, today I took a step towards who I want to become"*); emphasized opportunities to make others happy (*"Only YOU can change the life of someone less fortunate. Our lives are what we make of them. We enjoy living a world populated by kind, smiling people; in a world where everyone seeks safety. To change something, we need to act, because ultimately you get what you give, so it is important to do good, if you want others to treat you well"*); and advocated participation (*"I say "Yes" to opportunities and dreams"*).

Thus, comparison of novice teachers and youngsters' civic initiatives suggests that they differ in terms of form. Although youngsters were free to choose the way of presenting their initiatives, most opted for interactivity and made use of technological advances. Youngsters admitted to being positively excited by the process, which involved participating, creating, constructing and evaluating different documents, events and realities of life.

The study suggests that action research enables its participants to create and construct new knowledge and seek ways to achieve their goals.

Novice teachers evaluated their experience of involvement in action research along the following lines: “*What matters is work and progress. A spade is a universal agricultural implement that reduces stress, allows for physical activity, helps clear the mind and keep fit, gives immediate and obvious results, and improves material wellbeing with the fruits of one’s labor. One just needs to keep digging. I don’t pine for what I can’t have but rejoice in what I do possess.*” With this extended metaphor, the research participant points to an important feature of action research – responsible participation in inquiry.

Thus, research participants acknowledge that action research is an excellent approach to self-inquiry – appraising one’s opportunities and creating new personally relevant knowledge. In addition, they recognize that participation and cooperation are important success factors for reaching action research goals.

Also, the study suggests that action research is a valuable challenge to novice teachers, because communication with youngsters helps them evaluate their own communicative skills and ability to relate concepts from formal planning documents to everyday life.

### Discussion and Conclusions

The present action research study was fraught with multiple challenges inherent for this type of inquiry. Series of steps were taken to answer relevant questions. The findings suggest that novice teachers/youngsters are poorly informed of national planning documents. Creation of planning documents and participation in this process are insufficiently understood. Too often, creation of such documents is related to political change and intrigue.

Joint examination of planning documents and their priorities exposes a narrow understanding of securitability, which is grounded in personal experience. However, active involvement in the study helped research participants to uncover new aspects of securitability. Youngsters and teachers admit that joint practical engagement with securitability deepens their understanding of relevant processes, events and facts, illuminates previously hidden aspects of day-to-day existence and contextualizes securitability.

The present action research study concluded with civic initiatives that responded to local needs and were tailored to local communities. Action research emerged as a time-consuming yet worthwhile endeavor that involves raising awareness of local and global processes and highlights the importance of support to efforts which seek to improve quality of life.

Although civic initiative and interest are keys to continued existence of states, formalistic top-bottom regulations do not welcome public participation. Education is the path towards individual quality of life and emergence of knowledge society as well as economic growth and wellbeing of nations. The *Latvian Educational Development Framework for 2014–2020* (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, 2014) stipulates that investment in education and lifelong education is fundamental precondition for national economic development, increased competitiveness, higher standard of living and wellbeing. Nevertheless, day-to-day educational practice is fraught with various problems, which suggests that education as a process should be much more active and meaningful.

The present paper focuses on one priority in national planning documents – human securitability. An action research study exposed multiple nuances in novice teachers and youngsters' perception of planning documents as well as their views on the viability of these documents in the day-to-day practice. The study suggests that novice teachers and youngsters tend to feel alienated from the state because they fail to comprehend the process of drafting national planning documents and see no opportunities to participate in strategic planning. Youngsters are often regarded as the revolutionaries of education (Cammarota & Fine, 2008), but they need teachers capable of acting as leaders – help youngsters make sense of their opportunities and assist them in developing new initiatives to improve quality of life.

The present action research study enabled its participants to achieve valuable learning outcomes due to the fact that each and every student was involved in setting learning goals. The initiatives proposed by novice teachers and youngsters are the first step towards welcome change in their lives. Action research made it necessary for youngsters and novice teachers to develop life skills, because finding themselves in new situations required making strategies to deal with relevant challenges. Civic initiatives and human securitability contribute to the betterment of daily life as well as support the belief that every individual is invited to contemplate their own and others' future, and take active part in global processes.

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