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A typology of different forms of support for employee participation (*Mitbestimmung*). Results of a qualitative study

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Numerous quantitative studies show that the vast majority of people have positive attitudes towards employee participation (*Mitbestimmung*). But do the respondents mean the same thing when they think and talk about (and evaluate) *Mitbestimmung*? *And* how much and what do especially young people know about this topic? To answer these questions, we conducted a study mainly based on 41 qualitative interviews with young people (aged 16 to 36, most of them around the age of 25). All participants also answered a structured questionnaire we used in a larger study.

The results show that while the general attitudes towards *Mitbestimmung* are consistently positive[2], the variation in the subjective meaning of *Mitbestimmung* is considerable. The qualitative design of our study allows us to explore these differences in detail. One of our results is a typology of different forms of support for *Mitbestimmung*, compromising 5 types. 1. *Conservative supporters* prefer a very weak form of employee participation, reduced to information and consultation rights. 2. *Ambivalent supporters* take the possibility into account that employees could have more than only consultation rights, but they also do not question the prerogative of the employer. The conservative as well as the ambivalent supporters' knowledge about employee participation is limited and vague. The 3. type supports *parity participation*, the 4. a kind of *economic democracy*. Their knowledge is much deeper. We could also identify 5. a *resignative attitude*. These interviewees support the idea of *Mitbestimmung* in a very vage way, but think negatively about the practice of employee participation.

All in all, our results indicate that young people support the general idea of *Mitbestimmung*. At the same time knowledge about employee participation is very limited. Only a few of our participants think of a parity form of employee participation or even economic democracy.

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[2] This result is mirrored in the positive evaluations we found in our larger quantitative study. We thank the Hans Boeckler Foundation for funding the research project.