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Pluralistic orientations of students – an empirical study

While the relevance of pluralistic orientations among students in the political didactic discussion is indisputable, it is based on the central importance of pluralism for liberal democracy and the consequent significance of pluralism in conveying democracy-affirming political orientations in civic education. Oberle emphasizes the consideration of the pluralism principle guaranteed in the Basic Law as a necessary component of such democracy-promoting objectives (cf. Oberle 2019, 102f.). Nevertheless, approaches to operationalizing pluralistic orientations have so far been undifferentiated and unspecific.

With the present PlurOS study, it has been possible to present an empirical measurement instrument for assessing pluralistic orientations. Theoretically founded facets of pluralism attitudes were identified and empirically confirmed. Existing operationalizations were adopted, modified and supplemented with new facets. Central to this is the differentiation between the levels of the social environment and the political system. Both levels of attitudes could be modelled as separate constructs and their empirical distinctiveness was confirmed. Thus, the measurement model takes into account the findings of political socialization research which highlight the significant influence of the family, school and peer groups on the development of political orientations in adolescents (cf. Böhm-Kasper 2010, 262). Overall, a facet structure emerges that focuses on different facets of pluralism as objects of attitudes, including the value, structure and performance levels of pluralistic democracy.

With the present measurement instrument, manifestations and empirical relationships of pluralistic orientations were examined in relation to socio-demographic background variables of the students. The students exhibit overall positive manifestations for the individual facets of attitudes on both levels. Such results correspond with the goal of civic education to promote positive attitudes towards the democratic system among students (cf. Detjen et al. 2012, 27f.). However, the observation of the empirical research shows that the manifestations of the different facets of attitudes vary. While the students are mostly positive towards the sub-facets of the value and system levels, the pluralism attitude concerning the performance level proves problematic.