The Making of Democratic Actors: Counting the Costs of Public Cuts in the UK on Young People's Steps Towards Citizenship

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Abstract

This paper provides a synthesis of qualitative studies, examining youth empowerment projects and initiatives which have encouraged young people to have a voice in local, regional and national political debates. Specifically, the article examines the role of UK youth services in building the spirit of citizenship in young people against the challenging question of the changing behaviour pattern and profiles of young British electorates. To do this, the paper draws on four case studies to help rethink the critical moments for disadvantaged and vulnerable young people in their journeys towards citizenship. The article presents the advantages and limitations of the youth sector to enrich and furnish the spirit of citizenship in today's youth and argues for a more innovative role in the part played by the state in an era of austerity.

Keywords: Citizenship, Young People, Participatory Research, Political Participation

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Introduction

'*Democracy is easy to eat but difficult to digest*'   *Jean Jacques Rousseau (1772)*

This article examines the idea of 'general citizenship' (e.g. political participation, community involvement, general altruism, and disillusionment with government) as central to good youth work practice in the UK (see Bynner et al, 1997, MacDonald, 1997, Hall et al, 1999, Matthews, 2001. Sherrod et al, 2002 Cargo et al, 2003, Smith et al, 2005). The idea of citizenship is here examined in the figurative sense as a set of ideas and practices to help illustrate how young people subjectively activate and mobilise skills and assets to engage in local and national politics in the UK. A lot has been written about disadvantaged and vulnerable youth in the UK in recent years almost always portraying them as victims. This paper argues that austerity has long been a feature for certain groups of young people (Thomson et al., 2002. MacDonald et al, 2005. Percy-Smith & Thomas., 2009) living in the UK and whilst the 2008 Western economic crisis was significant they had the resilience to navigate and negotiate acts of citizenship (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). This line of argument illustrates a gap in the analysis of young people's lives in the UK and a break from a romanced notion that everyone has equal access to economic growth. Thus, the notion of austerity is both evaluated here and used as a theoretical lens by which to begin a more detailed discussion on young people's subjective perceptions of how they engage in British democracy. For this reason, the paper questions the role and function of youth work practice (e.g. youth clubs, education, health and social care) as a meeting place and mechanism for young people to build resilience and become empowered to take steps towards citizenship.

Context and background

Despite having a national youth strategy and the rights agenda being enshrined in British law and legislation, there has been a downward shift in the part played by the UK Government in supporting young people to participate in the public sphere and political processes. In the wake of the Western financial crisis, there has been a gradual withdrawal of the State in delivering public programmes to foster civic engagement. Youth services in the UK have been subject to a large range of financial cuts and restrictions. This impact has meant that many youth services cited in the studies have been closed, reduced, or are facing closure. For instance, until 2011, youth services received less than 2% of the overall Education budget and was traditionally known as the 'Cinderella Service'; and were delivered by local authorities. With the combined closure of many Connexion Centres (i.e. A 'Youth Connexions One Stop Shop' is a venue where local partners come together to deliver a wide range of services for young people) and three hundred and fifty Youth Centres since 2012 (Unison, 2014) access to help and information

for young people at a community level has almost disappeared. Only young people deemed to be at risk or 'risky' are targeted by Government funded programmes (see Davis, 2013). In addition, further welfare acts have seen cuts in housing benefit for vulnerable young people to prevent lone social housing tenancies, withdrawal of the universal Educational Maintenance Allowance to support young people from low income households in Further Education, increases in tuition fees in Higher Education, focus on Prevent to stop radicalisation among Islamic youth, cuts in Local Government spending in public health and ending of free swimming for children and young people in public pools, reduction in subsidised public transport and/or limited access to off-peak travel, and no increase in the minimum wage for under 18 year olds £3.50 to £4.05 in apprenticeships.

This logic goes against evidence which suggest that building stronger and more cohesive communities is a practice that requires young people in order to be effective (see Wall et al, 2009, Listen and Change, 2010, The Damage, 2014, and the Citizen Science White Paper, 2014). This paper argues that any idea of a 'healthy society' (i.e. a balanced society) can only be created with the help of young people. For this reason, the advantages and limitations inherent in the young people's accounts of their steps towards Citizenship are important as they reflect the local traditions they are embroiled in, the society by which they are surrounded, and the educational environment to which they are exposed. The latter condition takes on even greater significance when you consider no political parties have pledged to create a statutory requirement for youth services, or that funding cuts will be reversed.

Social and cultural capital and young people

The paper's central concept of 'capital' has been developed, among others, by Bourdieu (1981 and 1983) who posits that there are three main forms of capital: social, cultural and economic. These forms of capital are related to each other, so that the existence of one facilitates the acquisition of the other. Cultural capital can be understood as a collection of symbolic elements such as etiquette, knowledge, mannerisms which are often linked to socio-economic class and power within society. Bourdieu (1986) further hypothesises that cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state which refers to the work that one does on oneself; the objectified state which refers to cultural goods that one possesses such as books and music instruments; and the institutionalised state which can refer to the institutional recognition of cultural capital usually in the form of academic qualifications. This synthesis of studies will engage with different aspects of cultural capital which young people both produced and consumed as part of their involvement in the projects. Most crucial to the paper is the concept of social capital. Social capital, as a theoretical approach to study societal structures and dynamics, is widely used today and can, on the one hand be applied on a macro-level to whole societies; here the question of the relationship between forms of social bonding (in institutions, associations, groups, etc.) and national economic or social development are central (e.g. Inglehart, 1997). On the other hand, the concept of social capital can also be applied on a micro-level, starting from personal experiences and leading to mid-range theories about societal structures. In this sense, social capital has been defined as the resources to which a person has access by means of her/his social

background, bonds, connections and relations (Bourdieu [1981] 2005, p. 263). Social bonds can be more or less institutionalised, such as clubs, groups, but also family, friends or colleagues. Granovetter (1973) and Putnam (2000) found that the quality of social networks can be more important than the quantity. In this sense, Putnam (2000) differentiates between "bonding" and "bridging" social capital: bonding social capital supports solidarity within existing tighter groups whereas bridging social capital due to its relations between individuals who occupy distant social positions creates new chances beyond their own groups. The interrogation of the notions of social and cultural capital is particularly central to the consideration of how socio-cultural discourses may influence or shape young people's constructions of citizenship.

Thus, the analytical discussion in this paper is framed around UK youth forums - on which we are experts - where cultural and social capital has been nurtured or activated for political ends. Research suggests that young people living in disadvantaged communities and/or been through a lot of adversity are more likely to experience low degrees of human, cultural and social capital then their middle class peers as a result of their set of circumstances. As a way of seeing this dynamic the paper's conceptual framework links human agency, resilience and capital as capacities, or processes, to explain how participants make choices, bounce back from wrong choices, and use their soft skills, knowledge and social networks as a resource to support their steps towards citizenship.   The paper does not claim that the UK experience is typical to all other Western countries, but by using the key concepts of social and cultural capital as a common dominator, the paper illustrates how UK youth have often utilised different forms of capital to have their voices heard. Thus, the paper proposes that this experience is not confined to the UK.

The decline in political engagement

This next section begins by exploring the reported decline in young people's political participant in the UK. Young voters have grown-up in an era marked by increased dependency on globalisation, hyper-consumerism, market instability, destabilised nuclear families (see, Hall et al, 1992) and disillusionment and disappointment with forms of national and global governance as well as the uncertainty bought about by Brexit (Henn & Sharpe, 2016). These combined factors have arguably subverted the way young people see and experience political institutions and agents (see Inglehart, 1990, Beck, 1992, O'Toole, 2003, Stolle et al, 2005). Take for instance, the British Parliament's recent decision to not give sixteen olds the right to vote in the UK referendum on EU membership. This impasse suggests a continued mistrust in young people's ability to empathise and communicate a clear set of political priorities. In contrast, the Scottish Assembly set the precedence in 2014, by granting sixteen year olds the right to take part in the Scottish Referendum on membership to the UK. 85 per cent of the eligible voters turned out which included over 640,000 aged 18-24 and approximately 100,000 16 - 17-year-olds who had registered to vote - but were excluded from the EU Referendum. The Scottish example departs from the normative deficit model of conceptualising young people has lacking any political sophistication, and instead views young people as competent citizens. Accordingly, the paper is aligned to Wyness (2006) and Batsleer and Davis (2010) ontological

model reflected in the New Sociology of Childhood that conceptualise youth as a stage of 'being' as opposed to 'becoming'.

This paper sees citizenship in its abstract, fluid, and changeable forms; it reflects and reveals the on-going emotional scenarios played out in participant's daily lives. Criticisms against the defence of such postmodernist notions of citizenship have included the denial of an objective reality, the celebration of relativism, and the emphasis upon a narcissistic or self-obsessed (different from self-love) agent, etc. In this paper, these tensions are of interest along with the idea and practice of 'human rights', 'resilience', and 'social and cultural capital' to shade light on how the 'personal is political' (Baker, 2011) for young people.

Returning to the theme of young people's decline in politics, several writers (Miller, 1992, Piven & Cloward, 2000, Stolle & Hooghe 2004, House of Commons, 2014) draw attention to the overall decline in the British electorate. This is particularly apparent in voter turnout rates in recent national and European elections (Electoral Commission, 2005a; Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society, 2006; Power Inquiry, 2006). In last year's General election, 43 per cent of people aged 18 to 24 voted, compared with 78 per cent of those aged 65 and over. Paradoxically, UK youth are often singled-out for critical attention, condemned either for their declining presence at the ballot booths, or for their active participation in recent high-profile student protests and youth-led occupations of public spaces in major cities.

The decline in traditional political engagement is more complex than a simple rejection of traditional participatory practices; it could also illustrate the growing centrality of new forms of participation that are 'less institutionalised and more flexible' such as anti-globalisation protests and boycotting activities (Forbrig, 2005, p. 141). Additionally, there are many different spaces in which youth participation do occur. These range from formal participatory spaces such as youth parliaments and youth councils, through to demanded participatory spaces in which people act in their own right. Formal participatory spaces may be limited in that they are often based on adult democratic institutions; they may therefore have the effect of inhibiting the involvement of young people who do not, or will not, conform to adults' expectations of behaviour or interactions. Furthermore, the most active young participants are not necessarily representative of the general youth population, and tend to be those from higher socio-economic groups and with higher levels of education attainment and social capital at their disposal.

Selection of studies

This section outlines the four studies undertaken between 2008 and 2011, which have been supported by xxxxxxx (2011a) in his role has development officer and/or researcher in collaboration with young people as lay researchers aged 15 to 21 (see xxxxx, 2009). This paper has used a thematic analysis to synthesis the qualitative studies. A range of methods is available for synthesising qualitative forms of evidence, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Shown here are studies that reveal, cautionary accounts of how young people connect to the theory and practice of citizenship. The authors jointly identified qualitative research studies from their body of work rich in

accounts of empowerment and citizenship narrated by young people. Secondly, studies included needed to demonstrate different contours of navigating and negotiating formal and informal democratic mechanisms. The studies were then synthesised thematically following the principles advocated by Miles and Huberman (1994). This involved repeated readings of the studies to gain familiarity with the content before synthesising.

The data was then regrouped around critical moments, which represent either a cause, effect or catalyst to the young person's change in attitude or behaviour towards the adoption of citizenship (see Stake, 1995). Coding was used to highlight key patterns relating to political awakening (i.e. being heard, recognised and respected), recurring, similar and contrasting content, and links to the literature. The codes were then collapsed into central themes of developing, emergent, established and advanced stages of citizenships framed around the concept of critical moments, which is an idea borrowed from a study on teenage transition conducted by Thomson et al (2002). They applied the concept 'as an event described in an interview that either the researcher or the interviewee sees as having important consequences for their lives and identities' (Thomson et al 2002:339). The idea of critical moments is similar to Denzin's (1989) 'epiphanies', Mandelbum's (1973) 'turning-points', and Humphrey's (1993) 'social career' and 'career break'. Thus, critical moments should be read as researcher-defined and should help to clarify the strengths and limitations of social capital for young people in working through adverse set of circumstances to construct a politicised 'self'.   We now provide an overview of the four case studies**.**

The first case study is entitled *In and Out of the 'Benefit Trap'* (National Youth Agency, 2010). It was commissioned by The National Youth Agency (NYA) to help inform the development of its Money Mastery training programme aimed at young adults and youth support workers. Specifically, the goal of the research was to investigate the values, beliefs and behaviours of role of youth support services in helping young people better manage money who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). The study participants were recruited through past organisations who were involved in the money mastery programme from across the UK and provided services to young people from a range of different circumstances (e.g. supported accommodation, not in employment, training or education, young parents and disabled). In total, thirty beneficiaries of services and five service providers were involved in three focus groups and five semi-structured interviews exploring the drivers and barriers to coming-off benefit payments. The interview and focus group transcripts were analysed using a thematic analysis and the study received Research and Development approval from the National Youth Agency prior to commencing.

The second case study is entitled *After the Wagon* (National Youth Agency, 2009a). It was commissioned through the Youth Research Network (YRN) and undertaken by the United Kingdom Youth Parliament (UKYP). Run by young people for young people, UKYP provides opportunities for 11-18 year olds to use their voices in creative ways to bring about social change. Members of the Youth Parliament (MYPs) are elected in annual youth elections throughout the UK. Any young person aged 11-18 can stand or vote. Once elected, MYPs organise events and projects, run campaigns and influence decision makers on the issues which matter most to young people. Six young researchers with travelling and gypsy backgrounds and one full time worker completed the study and

presented their findings to the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies and Travellers[1]. Note that title 'gypsies' is still used in official title of the parliamentary group, which deviates somewhat from the EU and UN usage of the term. The goal of the study was to record the advancements and urban realities of twenty-first-century travellers lives. The group of young researchers were supported by youth workers from Irish Community Care, Merseyside, London Gypsy Traveller Unit, a parent and the UKYP Gypsy and Traveller Empowerment Officer. The group used photo-elicitation as its primary data collection method (Harper, 2002) with forty-five family and community members and received Research and Development approval from the National Youth Agency.

The third case study is entitled, *Are They Bovvard?* (National Youth Agency, 2009b). The study was commissioned by the YRN and undertaken by Signpost. Signpost is a community charity in Morecombe. The charity works to empower the community and provide services which relieve, support, help and advice those who are poor; the unemployed; the elderly; those physically or mentally ill or convalescing; people with a disability; people who are dependent on alcohol and drugs; victims of abuse, violence or crime; and families or carers of the above. The author xxxxx(2011a) worked with thirteen young researchers aged 15-18 years and one full time support worker on a study that aimed to explore the perceptions and feelings of positive activities aimed at youth from local policy makers and young peoples' and how this aligned to the regeneration plan. The group of young researchers undertook semi-structured interviews with forty local young people aged 13-19 and eight youth practitioners. Participants were recruited through the youth service and using snowballing. The study received Research and Development approval from the National Youth Agency.

The fourth case study is centred on a group interview that comprised of young employees of the National Union of Students (NUS) (xxxxxxx, 2011b). The NUS is a voluntary membership organisation which aims to make a real difference to the lives of students and its member students' unions by lobbying central government and campaigning for students rights. They are a confederation of 600 students' unions, amounting to more than 95 per cent of all higher and further education unions in the UK. The group interview originated from the need to find solutions to why only one percent of the 7.2 million students in Further and Higher Education engaged in NUS campaigns and activism. Nine participants were selected through liaising with the NUS Head Office to take part in a half-a-day group interview. Together we were able to pinpoint different patterns within their narratives which suggested step towards political activism. Following the group interview a thematic analysis was used to examine and categories the qualitative data which had received ethical approval from Anglia Ruskin University prior to commencing.

Discussion

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[1] The UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsy Roma Travellers was set-up in 2013 to address the social inclusion of gypsy Roma and traveller communities, improve community relations, and tackle accommodation issues.

Critical moments: Development of active citizenship

In and Out of the Benefit Trap reveals some of the pitfalls of citizenship in the UK, particularly when work and citizenship intersect and reinforces the precarious position of today's 'disconnected youth' (MacDonald, 2008). Critics argue that the two ideas of 'work' and 'citizenship' are embroiled in the neoliberal agenda, and reject the idea of unionisation, consumer power and personal financial independence that work affords individuals (Bosniak, 2001). This paper considers social capital formation, citizenship awareness, and economic well-being as being intrinsically connected (Standing, 2009). All the participants had in common an experience (implicitly or explicitly) of what has been coined by Petrongolo (2008) as the 'unemployment trap', and narrated congealed pathways to build cultural capital and to activate social capital with the explicit goal of finding meaningful work. For instance, participants commonly cited that the unemployment trap was most evident in their lives when employment gave them less financial gain than being on benefit, where they could not afford their rent, pay council tax, bills, and food etc.

Despite living in poverty and insecurity (Heap, 2014), support workers cited an optimistic change in attitude towards work amongst some participants. They attributed this change in attitude to self-determination rather than being influenced by external environmental factors (e.g. such as a new job or training opportunities being created in the local area). Owens et al (1996) suggests that self-determination is a source of self-esteem in young people enabling them to successfully adapt to the challenges facing them. The support workers singled out changes in participant's aspirations;

> *…something just clicked in him. He just decided that he didn't want to continue with the life he had before – he wanted to have a job and a house. For most people that clicks when we're in school but for some people it doesn't for some people it doesn't click until they're older, sometimes much older (support worker).*

Support workers described participant's 'aspirations' as an increase in their sense of self-worth, self-esteem and gaining confidence in their own ability. Angie Hart (2009) argues that these characteristics are markers of resilience in young people, nurtured in reciprocal relationships, which are important to help disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of young people to bounce back from adversity. Support workers gave several examples of where they had positively intervened in participant's life providing guidance, support and a solution to address their sense of worthlessness and alienation.

Also linked to the nurturing of the self-concept was the enabling and disabling role played by relatives, friends and social networks that form part of the life worlds inhabited by participants. Several support workers cited the influence of parents and friends as key determinants to a participants' desire to move away from benefit dependency (Kimenyi, 1991). They evidenced how young people's dependency on benefits could easily become an entrenched practice after seeing their parents and grandparents survive on benefits. A support worker

paraphrased a participant description of collecting their benefits as, '*picking up their wages'*, and a working life being '*a mugs game'.*

In such cases, some participants were felt to be unaware of, or found it difficult, to visualise a working life and the advantages work might bring in contrast to a life on benefits. Some of the participant's life worlds offered them no real examples of how to fuse cultural and social capital to become employed (Hoff and Sen, 2005). Thus, attitudes and practices of being on benefits not only degraded participant's sense of self-worth but also their sense of social identity. For instance, participants cited nocturnal lifestyles, internal borrowing systems and purveyor of services - such as child care – to friends in similar circumstances. Whereas social capital is shown to be strong and reduced the strain of living on benefits it paradoxically kept some of the participants out of work. The lack of bridging or connectedness to the world of work gave credence to the participant's belief that life without benefits was '*not for them',* and that they had little ability or hope of making work a reality.

Most, if not all, the participants expressed frustration and a deep anger in the way that young unemployed where socially portrayed. All the participants cited negative misconceptions of young people who claimed benefits. The two most commonly cited examples were that, '*people look down on you'* and '*people judge you'.* Participants likened their experience to the common negative portrayal of young people in the UK, but graver still because the young unemployed are accused of '*know nothing'*, have '*no experience'* and are '*worthless'*, '*lazy'* and '*yobs'.* Participants felt that this negative perception of the young unemployed was a real barrier to them trying to move into employment because it stressed deficits rather than assets – thus, compounding their sense of worthlessness. Conversely, the urge to escape the stigma of being on benefits also served as an enabler for a few of the participants to move into education or training and ultimately off benefits. None of the participants reported that they wanted to claim benefits in the long term although some felt that there were people in their social networks who did and were happy being on benefits.

To summarise, the critical moment of mobilising cultural and social capital to help connect vulnerable groups of young people with the world of work and wider community is often avoided due to the necessity of protecting their precarious existence, which can be exasperated by existing social networks and the effects of social stigma. Participants reported that they were trapped in a vicious circle of dependency on the state and felt powerless and/or unwilling to engage in broader community or regional politics due to lacking self-confidence and self-worth. The narrative of 'self' superseded their sense of social responsibility, and was perceived as something other people do. The suggestive 'click' that gives rise to aspirations, which draws on resilience, cultural and social capital, had not yet been recognised by all the participants and their support workers.

Critical moments: Emergence of active citizenship
The UKYP young researchers all had Roma and Traveller backgrounds and although challenged by environmental poverty and/or social exclusion the change from being an expert by experience to active citizen had occurred for the group of young people in their activation of social capital. They were at the early stages of challenging the

dominant normative narrative of traveller's lives. While they lacked solid experience of doing community politics they agreed that only by working together with non-traveller groups could they hope to change the public's outdated perception of their way of life.   The social capital they possessed was marked by low levels of literacy in the research group and most of the people to be consulted. Therefore, the group decided not to use research methods which were overtly reliant on the written word but instead use inclusive methods such as photo-elicitation to collect data.

A lot of time was spent by the young researchers in dialogue comparing and contrasting the nature of their own accommodation. Members of the group lived in 'settled' housing, differing council sites, road side and by stables – in town and country – in houses, large trailers, small caravans, traditional wagons – in close proximity to neighbours or no neighbours. These distinctions were extremely valuable for the group to developing a range of questions that they would be asking community members from across the country that lived contrasting lives. For instance, the study featured a dwelling site in Liverpool which was felt to be environmentally improvised. The site was hidden behind a twenty foot high wall in an industrial park. It had a barred entrance gating, CCTV, a few cats, lots of concrete and no play area. This was contrasted with the roadside encampment with a mixture of trailers and traditional wagons, horses, no running water, no sanitation, freedom, real grass and countryside views.

The study evidenced different aspects of twenty-first century traveller's lives which have improved. Most notably, there was less reliance on begging. Some things were worse, such as racism and the media portrayal of the communities. It was felt little was being done to combat racism. Bullying in schools was still being commonly experienced and teachers were not trained to be aware of the differences in the culture. Many things have remained the same especially amongst those who are still travelling. Whilst there were many personal changes in clothes, food, TV consumption and gaming there was a general nostalgia for earlier times. There was still a belief in traditions and freedom, the importance of family and family gatherings, collecting valuable china and that the 'settled' community don't want or try to understand their way of life. The study found that there is concern that traditions were beginning to fade, that story-telling and singing are lessening; old crafts and skills were being forgotten.

To summarise, the critical moment in the emergence of active citizenship for the group came about due to their involvement in UKYP but more profoundly when they began to see the social issues emanating from their own communities from different viewpoints. Bridging social capital for the common interest into the political realm of adults benefited their social-esteem and ultimately their steps towards citizenship. They were able to report their findings to the *All Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies and Travellers* and engage in intergenerational dialogue to build collective understanding and explore solutions.

Critical moments: Established active citizenship

The group of young researchers from Signpost were experienced in intergenerational dialogue and advocating on the behalf of other children and young people. They viewed democracy as being more than the vote and participation a defining characteristic to their identities. The established group of young researchers wanted to know exactly how consultative the local council and regeneration board had been during its planning phases in order to know whether they were addressing the needs of local young people. In the study, participants describe the West End of Morecombe as a place where there is not a huge amount for young people to do. Participants acknowledged the fact that the regeneration scheme had made a difference in some areas, such as the new parks and the architectural changes along the promenade.

The study identified the high level of drug and alcohol misuse, and the occurrence of unprovoked violence as a big issue in their lives, stating that it had a negative impact on them. The majority of the respondents identified the same hotspots for violence and public substance misuse, as well as identifying the same places for positive activity, such as the Super Bowl, cinema, More Music, Regent Park Studios and the skate park, to name but a few. Interestingly, the majority of these respondents cited the lack of 'safe' places for young people to congregate and socialise with one another as an issue.

The eight interviews with adults who worked in the area of youth, community and the local authority produced findings that were in contrast with many of the views of young people. The professionals' views can be summarised as generally positive, based on an expected acute awareness of local policy and the regeneration project, and generally comparative in their style of description, in that the majority of them cited the West End as being 'not that bad, compared to some places'. They identified the same places of activity as the young people, although they showed an almost complete lack of insight into the impact that violence and substance misuse can have on young people.

The critical moment of active citizenship for the group became apparent at the end of the data collection and write-up phase. Signpost supported the group to organise a launch event where key decisions makers from the town council - and by default the regeneration board - came to hear the key findings from the study. As a direct result of the event the research group were invited onto the board to give a permanent voice to young people on the regeneration board. The regeneration board and council officials properly would not have listened to ad hoc requests or yielded to demands made by a youth participation group had not the information been empirical and well argued. This example of bridging social capital illustrates how young people in the West End of Morecombe turned their feelings of dissatisfaction and alienation into tangible outcomes of recognition and respect. The step from having social esteem to gaining political esteem was a transformative moment for all of the young researchers involved in the study. This case demonstrates how democracy is much more than just the process of voting; it is about having the confidence, tools, and wherewithal to be change-makers and being respected as such.

Critical moments: Advanced active citizenship

What factors stimulated political activism? In a group interview with NUS members they shared their stories of stepping over the threshold of malaise and indifference to engage in formal party politics. The central motivation and stimuli that were cited in the focus group centred on a growing sense of selfhood and resilience triggered by life events, (e.g. such as transition from FE to HE and in the process being treated like an adult; house hunting and living independently; getting your first job; joining groups at HE; self-advocacy to deal with perceived injustices in education and at work; and exposure to common room culture). The ability to bridge social capital served the participants well in their transition to independence where they were able to align their own self-interest with a common course. However, their starting points to nurture social capital were different but they all shared in common reciprocal relationships bridging the home and school.

For example, participating in school councils proved to be an important space to practice their emerging sense of personhood and 'voice', along with building their knowledge of politics in taught classes. However, participants consistently reported that taught citizenship classes - which have been a statutory requirement for all schools in the UK since 2002 - failed to inspire them. Participants felt that pre and post 16 citizenship curricula were undermined by how they are delivered in schools and colleges. In a few cases participants had studied politics at University, where they reported exposure to *new* adults (e.g. lecturers), who inspired them still further to develop their own politics.

Other critical moments identified in the participant's accounts included attendance at National Student Conferences and the importance of hearing someone else speak on issues that were pertinent to their lived-lives, or equally, when they took objection to what was being said. Participants indicated that they connected at an emotional level with conference speeches, which sparked in them a genuine interest to engage and learn more about mainstream politics. For instance, discussions on gender inequalities in education and the workplace captivated certain participants who came from female-centric households. Relationships performed in such households appeared in the participants biographies as a driving force to 'who they are' as change-makers. Such relationships were cited as being empowering, and enabled participants to build resilience and test their skills exemplified in having one's own voice. Nostalgic family memories of collective activism - most notably miner's strike of the 1980s - also featured strongly in participants accounts of the formation of their political consciousness. In contrast, participants who came from a small and predominately male-centred household's implied that they found it a challenge, at first, to have confidence in one's own voice. Thus, moving to HE and participating in common room culture supported their growth in self-confidence to have a say on matters that concern them. This is proven by participants who later took on leadership roles in the NUS and at college/university.

Another important space and set of relationships worth mentioning is part-time work to supplement one's study. One participant witnessed racial discrimination in the work place and felt an injustice had been done, which

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motivated him to draw upon his knowledge and skills nurture in the worlds of home and education to establish a union branch in his workplace to tackle the behaviour and attitude of the perpetrator through an appropriate legal framework.

To summarise, each of these participants worked in the field of education therefore it came as no surprise that their accounts all focused on academic careers, which is privileged highly in their working environment. However, what their combined stories suggest is that their politicisation emanates from the move from dependency to independence (e.g. work and education) and greater exposure to other types of people (e.g. students and lecturers) who in turn stimulated their political activism. Conceivably, family served as an incubator to nurture confidence and resilience in participants and greater exposure to taught politics was the catalyst to their social action. Thus, the 'click' occurred for this group happened over a sustained period of time and often supported by mixed reciprocal relationships with parents, peers, and educators to produce the high level of political engagement exhibited by this group of young people.

This paper has prioritised the emotional journeys, which underpin the subjective choices made by young people in their fulfilment of citizenship. The paper recognises the impact of context in how young people embody and enact politics and also identified the interplay between life events, significant adults and social mechanism which have empowered young people to have a voice. This study has deconstructed and reconstructed how and where this negotiation of meaning occurs for young people and points of identification which connect young people to civil society. The benefits of using this approach is that it opens up questions to multiple points of identification and takes into account how individuals subjectively define and talk about themselves using cultural narratives, which often point to political systems and structures. Once we understand how young people furnish their interior worlds, we are closer to recognising their motivations and stimulus to activate citizenship.

Limitations

The limitations of the study are those characteristics of synthesising secondary data. Firstly, we used a thematic approach to re-analysis qualitative studies, which had not intended to be placed along a theoretical continuum constructed around citizenship. For this reason other dimensions to emotional determinates of citizenship were lost in the original analysis and write-up. Secondly, the continuum is built on the re-use of qualitative data from reports and transcripts produced by the authors which did not have control measures in place to confidently build comparable data describing pathways to citizenship. Yet still, the synthesis was able to identify different pathways to finding and articulating a political voice (or act), which rests on the presence of reciprocal relationships in young people's lives. We see how adults, as in the case of the benefit and NUS studies, have invested time in young people to build resilience and confidence, which in turn equipped participants with the necessary ability and sense of solidarity to start the process of aligning their own interests with the common good.

The paper exposes the challenges in providing universal citizenship schemes and also illustrates how structural constraints alone do not stop young people from becoming involved in their local communities and from seeing themselves as democratic actors. It would be premature to draw too strong a conclusion from the studies how connected young people feel towards British democratic values but it does dispel the myth that young people do not give a damn and are apathetic towards politics and civic engagement in general. Convincingly, Matt Henn et al (2005) suggest that young people are only disillusioned with political agencies and agents and not with the idea of strong democracies. This article reaffirms this idea. Participants wanted to see greater democratisation of the democratic process in which they are counted as democratic actors. For instance, we see from the benefit trap study how the simple act of challenging authority is not always easy to do. Without a doubt, there is still a mountain to climb to raise self-esteem and confidence among some young people that they can rightfully engage in politics, especially when they speak from a position of social exclusion. This is perhaps the greatest value of good youth work and citizenship education when it can nurture and help to furnish within vulnerable young people the confidence to speak out on matters that concern them. For example, in the Gypsy and Traveller study the youth worker leveraged access for the group to share their findings with the All Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies and Travellers. If it were not for their self-determination, crystalized in the structured dialogue as part of the study, the group would not have been able to positively challenge the MPs and Peers. But whilst they were given the opportunity to present their findings and tell their stories to the MPs and Peers nothing changed. Which calls into question their on-going commitment to engage in formal democratic processes.

This paper started from the presumption that British democracy is in a relatively poor state of health. In Western democracies, citizens of all ages, and young citizens in particular, are becoming disenchanted with the formal institutions, practices, performance and outcomes of democracy. Therefore, it is too simplistic to take from this paper that the participants are unwilling or unable to engage with formal political structures solely based upon what is happening to youth services and citizenship education in the UK. Evidenced in this UK study are stories by young people who have periodically and/or momentarily overcome the challenges of structural constraints by building strong social relations to negotiate and navigate adult-centric structures and discourses in order to have their voices heard, which lessons are universal.

Take for instance, in the regeneration study the young researchers were able to engage confidently in the political culture of adults. Although being closer to the issue than most adult decision makers the young researchers were not direct beneficiaries of the proposed changes. For those young people the click from being subjected to the law to contesting the law had occurred some time ago and they had experience of advocating on behalf of their peers. Their motivation to research regeneration issues was directly linked to their commitment to the fulfilment of youth rights and responsibility to society. Through practice in a supportive youth work environment they learnt how civic theory and practice are intertwined and form the basis to the human rights which binds the State and citizen.

Likewise, in the student activism study the participants had consciously shifted from politically activism from outside the formal political system to entering the formal system in unpaid and paid positions. This rested on a developed body of knowledge, a set of shared political values and understanding of how to bridge social capital to influence democratic processes. They arguably come to embody the citizen first envisaged by Locke. The research participants in this study spent time employed as trainee youth workers, policy officers, information officers and participation rights workers. They know the building blocks of democracy and are citizens who see that governance can only be done by consent and seek to change British society from the inside out to get things done.

Conclusion

To conclude, research suggests that young people living in disadvantaged communities are more likely to experience lower levels of cultural and social capital then their middle class peers resulting from their adverse set of circumstances. This conclusion was not borne out in this paper and instead findings suggests how young people facing hardship have skilfully and wilfully navigated and negotiated their participation onto local and national programmes and used this platform has a leverage to have their voices heard in influencing and shaping public policy and practice. Undoubtedly, austerity has negatively impacted on the UK Government's commitment to providing universal capacity building to help young people develop a spirit of citizenship – theoretically, taught in schools and, practically, in the provision of youth and Connexion services. Austerity has not demised UK youths call for citizenship rights. The lessons for all Western Governments is how to best make citizenship programmes less dependent on the boom and bust cycle of the economy and matching political priorities so that young people are not denied the platforms and mechanisms to democracy when it is most urgently needed. This paper make a case that the role of government should be to create the right climate for a range of co-ops, mutual, charities and social enterprises to deliver public programmes that help to build the spirit of citizenship in young people at the same time insulating providers from the volatility of financial markets and bi-partisan politics. An example would be companies which endorse and financed Big Society Capital (e.g. Big Society Capital is an independent financial institution with a social mission, set up to help grow social investment in the UK) to bring together Skills development in the UK workplace and citizenship to meaningfully bridge the gap between the individual and society.

Declarations

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