Youth Participation in Policymaking in the Digital Age: Discursive change and the maintenance of political barriers

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Participation and Policy
10 years ago

• Government commissioned Bell, Vromen, Collin (2008)

• Political (cycle) response:
  • (re)Creation of youth advocacy peak
  • Online Australian Youth Forum
  • Attempt to diversify youth reps

• 2013 - defunding and delegitimising of youth representation
"This government does not believe that a single peak body is necessary for it to hear the views of Australian youth, nor that a single peak body is capable of representing the diverse interests, experiences and background of young Australians,"

"The government is currently developing plans to consult with young Australians using a more focused and targeted approach.'“

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education Scott Ryan

*Canberra Times*  May 20, 2014
Concepts and Questions

Right to ‘Participation’ as relational (Moosa-Mitha, 2008)
Underpinning discourses of structures and processes (Edwards, 2009)
Active/Failed Citizen (Harris, 2012)
Participation 1.0 / Participation 2.0: new norms (Micheletti)
Political agents / political opportunity structures (Vromen & Collin, 2010)

Why isn’t youth participation institutionalised / mainstreamed into
government frameworks in a digital age?
Youth Engaged Policy (YEP) Project

February – May 2016

Literature Review
International case studies
Forums with policy makers (n = 60)
Key Informant Interviews (n = 5)
Critical Issues workshop (n = 18)
Youth Engagement Index
Online survey
Youth Engagement Profile (n = 54)
Co-Design workshop (n = 35)
Engagement for young people

Discursive construction of young people’s engagement has changed

• Beyond apathy, issues matter
• The right of young people to participate
• Diversity and marginalised
• Monolithic category of ‘young people’

“the bright things”
“there is a marginalisation of Aboriginal young people and CALD young people”
Engagement for policymakers

Discursive construction of value of young people’s engagement for policy has not changed

• Engagement is for voice, not co-creation

  “policy making utilises a clinical, brief argument, there are restrictions, boundaries ..it’s not effective to have young people there, ‘in the room’” (Canberra forum)

• Individualised/youth-led focus, expects youth voices to be representative

• Questioning of advocacy organisations
Engagement *for* policymakers

Value of successful processes of engagement are distinguished *from* policy outcome:

- Mobilization *over* policy change
- Informing *over* co-creating policy
- Models of participation *over* policy.
- Individualised view *over* relational view
Engagement for policymakers

Digital media seen as risky for engagement
  • Insufficient resources or training or knowledge to engage ‘properly’

“Young people are skilled in social media. They are active in existing networks and share information and there has been a failure by policymakers to see this” (Melbourne forum)

• Risks/fears of digital outweighs benefits
• Representations of how/what young people do and say online over engaging with young people online
Rights over engagement?

“It’s recognised that [Article 12 is ] the gateway to realising all the other rights. If you don't have a voice, if you're not engaged and if you're not respected then your views are not respected...

...One of my biggest mantras is it should be the norm to consult and engage children and young people in decisions that impact on them, either as individuals or as a group. Virtually, every second bit of legislation and every second bit of program that gets developed has an impact on children, from everything from social security to family law to health policy to education policy, and yet consultations with children are not the norm”.

(Interview with Megan Mitchell, Australian Children’s Commissioner)
Child Rights (to Participation) & Policy Modes

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Tensions for future policy processes

• Engagement vs rights
  • Outcome vs process
  • Advocacy vs inclusion
• Organisation vs individual
  • Youth-focussed vs youth-led
  • Action vs expressive
• Individualised vs Relational

Power and authority not delegated or shared, but now harder to question.
Thank You

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