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It Takes More than Good Intentions: Institutional and Attitudinal Impediments to Engaging Young People in Participatory Planning

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While participatory processes have become an important part of planning, young people are a particularly vulnerable group in terms of potential marginalisation and exclusion from effective participation. Including the views of young people in participatory planning is not simply a matter of bringing them into existing processes. Instead, participatory processes must find ways to integrate and accommodate their needs and ways of expressing their views. Without these adjustments young people may simply move from being kept outside the planning process to a situation where, although they are formally included, their claims are not taken seriously and they are not treated with equal respect. In this paper we reflect on the success of a community advisory committee, formed to consider water planning issues, in integrating the views of young people into their deliberations. Using Iris Marion Young's (1995) ideas of communicative democracy we highlight the challenges and opportunities presented by this participatory approach, as articulated by both the young people involved and the adult participants. We specifically consider how the elements of greeting, rhetoric and narrative were reflected in the committee process. We argue that both planners and adult participants need to ensure that participatory processes allow for the equal engagement of all participants and place equal value on their contributions. Our research shows that this involves both an institutional and attitudinal commitment to include the views of young people. The institutional commitment requires young people to be included in processes and for their involvement to be supported. However, the attitudinal commitment it is equally important and requires that adult participants be prepared not only to accept the views of younger participants but to actively encourage and support their full participation.

Keywords

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Key words
young people, youth engagement, water planning, communicative democracy, inclusive planning

Introduction

Participatory processes have become an increasingly important part of planning practice, particularly for dealing with wicked or complex planning and policy issues (Australia Public Service Commission, 2007). As part of this direction, there has been growing recognition that, while the public is comprised of a diversity of interests, not all are equally able to participate in universal or generic participation processes.

It has been observed that "young people in Australia are a minority in an ageing population" (Maunders, 2001, p.70) and struggle to have their views heard. Relegated to marginal roles in society, young people are considered to be in the *process of becoming*, consigned to a transitional state between childhood and adulthood (Couch & Francis, 2006, p.280). As a result, young people are a particularly vulnerable group in terms of potential marginalisation and exclusion from participation more broadly in political processes and specifically in engagement processes, and are rarely invited to participate in collective problem-solving and planning initiatives. This isolation creates social contexts where negative stereotypes of young people may flourish (Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes & Calvert, 2000) and reinforce judgmental attitudes against the participation of young people based simply on their age and cultural norms that favour hierarchical relationships between adults and young people (Golombek, 2002, p.8).

While the participation of young people in planning processes presents participatory challenges, for both planners and participants, their involvement is desirable because they are the generation that will experience to a greater extent the future impacts of longer term planning decisions made today (Frank, 2002, p.352). In recent years, a growing recognition of the importance of involving young people in participatory planning activities has lead to a considerable increase in participation activities which attempt to include the views of young people. Strategies for including the views of young people in planning exercises are varied and range from segregated activities which focus specifically on youth input (Sarkissian, Cook & Walsh, 1997), to fully integrated mainstream activities which do not provide any specific youth focus (Knowles-Yánez, 2005) and processes which advocate a combination of these two approaches (Cameron & Grant-Smith, 2005). However, there is still considerable work to be done to ensure that this participation is meaningful for young people (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin & Sinclair, 2003) and informs decision-making.

When young people are invited to participate, despite the best intentions of planning professionals, "translating the rhetoric of 'young people's participation is a good thing that should happen' into practice is difficult" (Freeman, Nairn & Sligo, 2003, p.57). It has been suggested that most municipal planning and policy processes which involve young people consider them to be passive recipients of information rather than active participants and the participatory processes employed "permit their presence without empowering them" (Checkoway, Allison & Montoya, 2005, p.1160).

Frank (2006, p.369) notes that much of the literature on youth participation tends to focus on non-government youth participation processes, many of which do not integrate the participation of young people into mainstream participatory processes, but tend to concentrate on the provision of youth-specific processes which focus primarily on what are traditionally considered to be youth issues. She believes that this is problematic because it provides only tentative guidance for the participation of young people in accepted local government planning practices. In this article, we begin to address this lacuna by considering attempts to

include the views of young people in an integrated participatory planning process on Australia's Gold Coast. We highlight the challenges and opportunities presented by the participatory approach adopted as articulated by the planners and participants in interviews undertaken to seek their views about the participatory process.[1]

As a single case study, the findings presented in this paper are not intended to reflect all young people's participation experiences. However, we feel that they do indicate some the challenges associated with local government attempts to move toward participatory planning processes which involve young people. While we recognise that there is both criticism and advocacy for various youth engagement approaches we neither intend to argue for the adoption of any specific participatory model (e.g. mainstreamed versus segregated) nor process techniques (e.g. committee versus public meetings); it is our belief that these cannot be prescribed, but must be based on the context of the participatory process and the needs and desires of the individual participants (Couch & Francis 2006, p.274). Instead, it is our contention that regardless of the participatory approach applied, the principles of Iris Marion Young's (1995, 2000) communicative democracy provides some broad guidance to ensure that the participation of young people, when included, is not simply a token gesture or mere decoration (Driskell, 2002, p.41).

Participatory planning on the Gold Coast, Australia

The Gold Coast is situated between the ocean and hinterland on Australia's east coast in the state of Queensland. With close to half a million residents (Department of Infrastructure & Planning, 2008, p.1), the Gold Coast is the second most populous city in the state and the sixth most populous city in Australia. The Gold Coast is renowned for its sunny subtropical climate, popular surfing beaches and variety of tourist attractions. The Gold Coast receives approximately 10 million overnight and daytrip visitors each year (GCCC, n.d. a) and is home to more than 82,000 people aged between 10 and 24 years (GCCC, n.d. b).

The Gold Coast City Council has a long history of trialling innovative participatory planning and community capacity building projects, ranging from the development of community consultation policy and strategies (Cuthill, 2001), to conducting human-scale development workshops (Cuthill, 2003), and using community visioning in local area planning activities (Cuthill, 2004). Despite these attempts there has been a perception that a low percentage of younger residents are included in Council's decision-making processes (Cuthill, 2004, p.434). To begin to address these concerns the Gold Coast City Council instituted a number of specific youth consultation initiatives including the establishment of the Gold Coast City

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[1] The findings on youth participation presented in this paper emerged from a larger research project focussing on the development of trust and the role of power in participatory engagement processes for water planning (Edwards, 2009). The data was collected via a multi-method approach which included semi-structured interviews with committee and project team members and reviewing documents relating to the operation of the Gold Coast Waterfuture Strategy Community Advisory Committee such as meeting minutes. Questions covered in the interviews were primarily focussed on eliciting information about perceptions of power and trust and covered a range of issues including: questions related to processes issues such as the presentation and communication of information and committee structure and operation; and questions related to issues associated with communication, dialogue and relationship building between participants.

Junior Council[2] (GCCC, n.d. c) and running separate participatory sessions for young people to explore alternative ways of involving them in planning activities (Cuthill, 2004). The Gold Coast City Council has also been proactive in conducting research into issues believed by the Council to be affecting younger residents living on the Gold Coast (for example see Boag, Hibbins, Harrington & Lloyd 2003; Bradley & Stinson 2008; Lloyd, Harrington, Hibbins, Boag & Cuthill, 2005; O'Reilly 2001). The involvement of young people was also integrated into plans for public participation in the development of the Gold Coast Waterfuture Strategy, the focus of this paper.

Planning the Gold Coast's water future

Recent flooding events aside, over the past two decades there has been a consistent and considerable decline in the average rainfall over dam catchments across southern Queensland which has put increasing pressures on the availability of water for commercial, domestic and agricultural use. This has been exacerbated by the strong growth being experienced on the Gold Coast which will see its population grow to an estimated 886,700 residents by 2031 (Queensland Government, 2008, p.5). As a result, state and local government in the region have been working to identify and evaluate options for ensuring water supplies into the future through a process called the Gold Coast Waterfuture Strategy.

Initiatives implemented through the Gold Coast Waterfuture Strategy include a diverse range of water supply and conservation projects such as: encouraging the installation and use of rainwater tanks for garden use and toilet flushing; reducing the pressure of the water supply network; augmenting existing surface water storages; exploring options for desalinated water supply; infrastructure enhancements such as raising the wall of the Hinze Dam; building new water supply pipelines as part of a regional water grid; and conducting preliminary investigations into the indirect potable re-use of highly treated wastewater for drinking purposes (Gold Coast Water, 2006a).

The Gold Coast Waterfuture Strategy was developed through a participatory planning exercise driven by the Gold Coast City Council to create a fifty year water supply plan for the Gold Coast (Gold Coast Water, 2006b). The strategy was developed between 2004 and 2005 and brought together twenty-four stakeholders from a broad range of state and local government agencies, community organizations and business interests in the form of a community advisory committee.

The role of the Gold Coast Waterfuture Community Advisory Committee was "[t]o oversee the development of a final report detailing a sustainable water supply strategy for the city, accounting for current and future growth requirements." (GCCC, n.d. d). A key element of the advisory committee's charter "was to consult with the community at every stage" of the development of the Gold Coast Waterfuture Strategy (Gold Coast Water, 2006b).

Members of the community advisory committee were selected through a process which involved a stakeholder analysis exercise conducted by the Gold Coast Water Project Team.

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[2] The Junior Council has approximately seventy members who are grade 10 and 11 high school students from state and private schools across the city (GCCC, n.d. c).

Invitations were then extended to identified stakeholder interests to nominate a representative to sit on the committee.

The community advisory committee was comprised individuals representing a range of interests including environmental, business and residents' groups (Figure 1). Members of the committee were expected to represent their stakeholder interest in two main ways. First, committee members were expected to bring the views of their stakeholder group forward into the planning process. Second, committee members were expected to take the committee's discussions back into their broader stakeholder group for feedback and comment. This feedback was returned to the committee as a whole for discussion and possible inclusion in the development of water conservation and supply strategies.
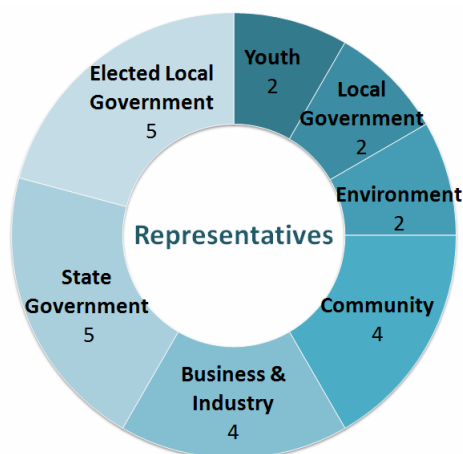

Figure 1. Stakeholder interests represented on the Gold Coast Waterfuture Strategy Community Advisory Committee

Involving young people in the Gold Coast Waterfuture Community Advisory Committee

Unlike some participatory planning exercises that use separate 'events' for young people or other marginalised groups, the Gold Coast City Council invited two members of the Gold Coast City Junior Council to participate as members of the community advisory committee. The purported role of these younger committee members was to represent the views of young people in terms of the proposals being considered and to take information back to the Junior Council and their respective local high schools to solicit feedback. This feedback was to be fed into the broader Waterfuture Strategy through the community advisory committee process.

Participatory processes can privilege the more educated and better informed, but it can also privilege "those who feel they have a right to assert" (Young 1995, p.149). The adult committee members expressed a perceived right to participate in the process as both community advisory committee members and as a representative of a specific stakeholder interest. As a result, it is not surprising that the majority of those interviewed did not, as a general rule, directly mention the interactions that they had with the younger committee members. An exception to this was comments made regarding what could be construed as condescending attempts to acknowledge the attendance of the younger committee members

but not necessarily to actively include them in the committee's deliberations as equal members.

Reviewing the committee composition, it was evident that the participatory process cast the young people differently to the other committee members who were selected for their interests in relation to specific water planning issues (e.g. a shared environmental or economic interest). By contrast, the younger committee members were expected to represent a broad 'youth' perspective which was based on a misconception that all young people share common views and that these are specific only to young people. This assumption is flawed. Defining the shared characteristics and attributes of young people is both complex and challenging because "[t]he boundary separating child and adult is a decidedly fuzzy one" (Sibley 1995, p.34). Depending on how the term 'young people' is defined in a particular planning exercise these participants could include anyone ranging from children, teens and pre-teens, through to young adults in their early to mid-twenties. Clearly, the commonalities shared by such a broad range of individuals would be few (Freeman, 2006) and even young people of the same age are not an homogenous group.

A consequence of segregation by age is the amplification of difference caused by assumed orientations and capabilities and an "exaggerated view of youth as other" (Camino & Zeldin, 2002, p.215). As identifiably 'different' members with 'different' rights to participate, the age gap between committee members was not only highlighted, but promoted as the primary reason for young people being members of the committee. In many respects the young people were seen and treated as "citizens-in-training" who did not possess equal rights with adult committee members (Frank, 2006, p.353). Their involvement in the committee as equal members would have challenged accepted youth-adult power relations. Instead, the younger committee members were almost treated as honorary members who were there to learn rather than to contribute in any substantive way. As a result, their treatment was generally well intended but at times paternalistic and certainly not as equal members. This perception of difference in their status and experience compared to other committee members was apparent to the younger members who noted:

> So, um, like I felt a bit intimidated. There were all these older people and there were all sorts of councillors and all sort of well-respected people in their professions and I just sort of felt like, oh god, a little high school student. [Youth Representative]

However, the younger committee members also recognised that they were not the only committee members to feel intimidated by either the process or some of the other participants:

> I was like I was quite shy and I don't know and like really intimidated by the whole thing...it took me a while, after like after months and months went on, that I kind of realised I wasn't probably the only one who felt that way. I think some of the others also felt a bit that they didn't have a thorough grasp of what was going on, as did some of the others, like the ones who had more of a controlling role, or like sort of had a bigger role. [Youth Representative]

It would be unfair and unsupported by evidence to suggest that this exclusion was purely a product of the committee design. The project team attempted to set up the broader participatory and planning process to allow for a range of views to influence the development of the strategy. For example, relatively clear Terms of Reference were developed for the committee to ensure that its members understood the broader process, scope and their purported role. The process also employed the use of an independent chair to ensure that committee discussions were perceived as fair, open and equitable. The importance of a

knowledgeable and independent chair in facilitating discussions and acting as a translator or mediator between different interests in complex participatory planning processes cannot be underestimated (Cameron, Grant-Smith & Johnson, 2005). However, the composition of the committee in general also plays a major role in how discussions unfold. Without some sort of balance between the numbers and types of stakeholders on the committee, the rules of engagement can be inherently biased toward preferencing certain views with a pre-determined outcome in mind. This kind of observation is generally made in terms of the variety of interests represented but it should also be seen as a comment on the potentially negative impact of membership characteristics such as age, gender, or ethnicity. This was certainly the case with this committee as one adult committee member noted that the age composition of the committee was *"very biased towards retirees… [with a] token couple of school students…but there was nothing in that middle area at all"* [State Government Representative]. This undoubtedly had an impact on the capacity of the younger members to participate equally in the process, both in terms of numbers and perceived tokenism.

It is also important to note that the relative importance of the inclusion of a youth perspective in deliberations, compared to other contributions, was underscored by the fact that while the majority of adult committee members had proxies attend meetings in their absence, proxies were not considered necessary for the younger committee members.

In theory at least, the participatory process adopted provided all members of the community advisory committee with an equal opportunity to provide their input. Each committee member was given the opportunity to provide background and insight into the organisation/interest they represented and their position. The independent chair was an integral element of ensuring that even those committee members who were reluctant to speak were provided with opportunities to contribute to discussions without interruption. However, the question raised is whether the committee as a whole, and in particular perceived 'technical professionals' and other 'experts' ascribed any value to the contributions of lay members, in particular those of the young people involved. Differentials in social power can prevent younger participants from being equal participants including "an internalized sense of one's right to speak or not to speak, and from the devaluation of some people's style of speech and the elevation of others" (Young 1995, p.137). The most telling statement of this perception comes from one of the adult committee members, who stated:

> *I am a little bit sceptical of young people being involved in this because it's is like saying you know we are doing brain surgery, what is your opinion? Should we go through the front or the side of the head? Well, you are bald, so let's go through the front. I mean, how the fuck would I know? What life experiences did they bring?* [State Government Representative]

Comments such as these are often made by participants who question the value of including the views of lay people, adult or child, into planning deliberations. Such a view questions the capacity of young people to provide meaningful input or to understand the complexity the planning task at hand. The cognitive and decision-making skills of young people are particularly questioned in these processes and their perceived deficiencies in these areas are often cited as reasons to support their involvement in segregated activities only (Sarkissian, et al, 1997). In particular, young people are often perceived as lacking the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours required to competently participate in planning exercises (Frank, 2006). As evidenced by the quote below, even intelligent young people were seen by the adult committee members to lack the capacity to participate meaningfully in debates over the Gold Coast's water future:

There was two students, two students, on the committee, senior students, grade 11 students I think, a girl and a boy from a private school and ah, the boy, he won some competition, a geography competition. He ended up in the final in Japan. I think he did fairly well. I think he won the Australian. So it was good to see him there and asking questions, intelligent questions and making comments. We didn't see a lot of the girl there, but there was a lot of the things that were a bit over their head. So as far as not being mature or knowing how things worked, and you felt that they were getting a bit lost in the whole thing. [Community Representative]

The younger committee members were aware of this perception, with one noting that:

I think some of the older people were a bit sort of, rightly so, a bit, um, they were thinking that oh, [they are] too young to be here. [he/she] doesn't know what is going on, which is, I mean in hindsight is true. Like that is sort of how it was, like they, yah I felt that they looked down on me, you know.[he/she is] just a kid and, yah I did perceive that a bit that I was sort of maybe ostracized a bit and I felt a bit awkward. [Youth Representative]

Ironically, the younger committee members were also aware that while they found it difficult to follow some of the information or process, they noted that some of the adults also 'got lost', with one noting that:

[I]t took me a while, after months and months went on, that I kind of realised I wasn't probably the only one who felt that way, I think some of the others also felt a bit that they didn't have a thorough grasp of what was going on, as did some of the others like the ones who had more of a controlling role, or like sort of had a bigger role. [Youth representative]

Applying the principles of Communicative Democracy to the Waterfuture youth engagement approach

According to Chawla (2002, p.20) "the ultimate goal for participatory initiatives is to make it 'practice as usual' to include children and youth". However, the success of planning processes which attempt to integrate the concerns of young people into decision-making are necessarily affected by the characteristics of the broader participatory and planning process. For example, Knowles-Yánez (2005) found that the legalistic and reactive aspects of planning processes and their domination by economic interests has tended to negatively impact the ability for the voices of young people and other marginalised groups to be heard.

Communication and building relationships are foundational to the effective engagement and involvement of young people in participatory planning both as individuals and as groups. The building blocks for effective communication and relationships in this context are based on: developing mutual trust and respect; listening, learning, understanding, responding and being open; reducing the power imbalance between adults and young people within participatory processes; and providing informal and formal support for young people to facilitate their involvement (DCS, 2006, p.7).

Importantly, the inclusion of young people (or any marginalised group for that matter) is not simply about bringing them into existing processes but requires the modification of these processes to accommodate different perspectives and ways of expressing themselves and their views. Without these adjustments many young people simply move from being kept outside the process, referred to as external exclusion, to a situation of internal exclusion where although they are formally included they "may find that their claims are not taken seriously and may believe that they are not treated with equal respect" (Young 2000, p.55). In

order to avoid internal exclusion within a participatory process and ensure that processes are designed to facilitate full participation by marginalised groups, like young people[3], Iris Marion Young (1995, 2000) proposes that sufficient attention must be paid to the elements of greeting, rhetoric and narrative.

Ensuring equality of participation through greeting

Young's concept of *greeting* involves the processes through which people "recognize one another in their particularity" through everyday courtesies and welcoming gestures that perform no rhetorical function other than politeness, inclusion and salutation (Young, 1995, p.145). As such greeting is the process of public acknowledgement and includes the words and gestures used to recognise others and to demonstrate a commitment to equal respect between participants (Kliger & Cosgrove, 1999). Young (1995) notes that greeting in this context can also be extended to include actions such as handshakes, smiles and the sharing of food and beverages. Elements of greeting show respect for others and include speaking to people in otherwise respectful ways including using honorific titles such as Councillor or Father (when appropriate) and remembering and using people's names.

Because applying the elements of greeting is somewhat instinctual and habitualised they are often taken for granted. However, although they might seem trivial as Young notes their absence is often "felt as coldness, indifference, insult" (Young 1994, p.145). One young committee member noted there absence and their belief that it was connected to their age and subordinate status within the committee:

> *I was in such a different age bracket that it was a bit hard to find common ground…everyone was friendly to me… [but] they had to think about my name.* [Youth Representative]

Elements of greeting cannot be 'forced' by process but relies instead on the actions and attitudes of those involved. However, their importance cannot be underestimated. Young argues that the speech and action of greeting can, as preliminaries to dialogue, help to establish trust and respect because they have the capacity to make all participants feel comfortable and welcomed and serve to acknowledge their right to be included in discussions thus legitimising both their presence and contribution; it is through appropriate gestures of greeting "a speaker announces her presence as ready to listen" (Young 2000, p.59).

Promoting fair discussion through rhetoric

Rhetoric concerns the way that information is conveyed and includes: emotional tone; the use of figures of speech such as similes, metaphors and humour; the use of symbols and images and physical acts; and targeting communication to the audience (Young, 2000, p.65). The devaluation of some people's style of speech and the elevation of others not only prevents equal participation but prevents some people's views from being heard. In particular, rational language devoid of emotion is privileged (Young, 1995, p.146) in planning processes and in policy making more generally. However, Young asserts that:

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[3] Although Young does not specifically mention young people in her work, they can readily be considered a marginalised group. As a result her work clearly has a direct application to considering and improving their experiences in participatory planning exercises.

in a discussion situation in which different people with different aims, values and interests seek to solve collective problems justly, it is not enough to make assertions and give reasons. One must also be heard. (Young, 1995, p.146)

Rhetoric and open listening are two sides of the same coin in allowing people to be heard. If open listening requires an openness to the diverse ways that people express themselves, then rhetoric is an important means by which people can adjust their claims to be heard by those in differing situations (Young, 2000, p.120).

Young argues that rhetoric is important because it can be attentive to the needs and interests of the audience in a way that a detached, 'neutral' speech may not. Young advocates for the inclusion of multiple rhetorics, that is to say different forms of expression and non-traditional communication, into deliberation is because devaluing these forms of speech devalues the contributions of those who speak in these voices. But rhetoric is also important because it we should allow multiple forms of speech because "deliberation is not just about exchanging reasons, it is about real people speaking to each other"; in other words it allows people to speak *to* each other and not just *at* each other (Chambers 2007, p.38).

Rhetoric, according to Young invokes or creates "specific meanings, connotations and symbols and serves as a connecting function whether the speaker and audience share meanings or not" (1995, p.146). Rhetoric can help determine which claims are taken seriously and is important in this sense because it recognises and respects the right of all participants to communicate in a style and manner that is comfortable to them, consistent with their views and likely to be persuasive to others. As such, rhetoric provides the speaker with an opportunity to construct their position in the context of the current situation and argue their position passionately and persuasively.

The role of narrative in developing shared understandings

If rhetoric allows people to be heard, then narrative can be seen as the tool that allows them to understand. Narrative, in Young's context, reveals the specific, subjective experiences of participants, allowing others to see the source of their values, culture and meaning (1995, 2000). Kliger & Cosgrove (1999) further define the role of narrative through storytelling and situated knowledge as a way to increase the ability of participants to understand and value each other's experience and to develop a shared discourse.

Narrative has the ability to empower relatively disenfranchised groups to assert themselves publicly (Young, 2000, p.53). Narrative helps with the understanding of others and countering any pre-understandings that participants may have (Young, 2000). Listeners can also, through reflexivity, discover how their own positions, actions and values appear to other participants from the stories they tell (Young, 1995) and begin to understand each other. Engaging in dialogue of this nature involves being open to views and experiences that might be different to one's own and consciously thinking about how to include varying perspectives, including both older and younger view points. The challenge is how to engage younger and older participants in discussions which enable both to feel able to say what they think and to negotiate decisions together. Establishing dialogue between young people and adults requires listening and learning, understanding other perspectives and responding constructively (Kirby et al, 2003, p.89-90).

Key findings

The challenge for planners

Professional resistance (Kirby et al, 2003, p.81) is often cited as a hurdle to the participation of young people in participatory planning processes. While we found that the planners and facilitators were purportedly well intentioned in this case, institutional barriers to the effective participation of young people included the training and background of those organising and facilitating the participation activities and an adherence to established ways of working which attempted to fit youth participation into existing participatory and planning methods (Freeman et al, 2003, p.55).[4]

Mirroring the findings of Freeman et al (2003, p.63) we did not find evidence that younger committee members expected "special youth-friendly" methods of participation but instead that they may have been satisfied with relatively minor improvements to existing methods which would both support and legitimate their involvement.

Such improvements would acknowledge that equality of participation does not imply that all participants enter the participatory arena with an equal capacity for participation. The denial of differences between younger and older participants can result in a situation where there is an expectation and understanding that young people think and behave in the same ways as adults and possess identical participatory skills (Camino & Zeldin, 2002, p.215). This is clearly not the case. It is important that the structures, practices and culture of planning activities support the participation of young people and provide support for those who do not yet possess the skills to participate effectively (O'Donoghue et al, 2002, p.21). However, it is also incumbent upon young people involved in participatory planning exercises to be prepared to help adults (planners and participants) to better understand and accommodate their specific participation needs and challenges (Kirby et al, 2003, p.74) and for adult participants and planners to be receptive to understanding and responding to these needs and differences.

Based on our findings, one of the most simple changes that could have been made, and which may have also benefited some adult committee members, would have been minimising the use of jargon, explaining technical terms, and providing "child-friendly" or lay summaries of documents (Kirby et al, 2003, p.91). However, most importantly, it is not what form this support takes, but that young people are provided with the opportunity to identify the support they required and to define the parameters for its provision. Participatory planning processes should also employ evaluation strategies which assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of different participation approaches and make process changes as required (Cameron et al, 2005). Young people must be involved in these evaluations and given the opportunity to help to shape the participatory processes they are involved in. For example, if ongoing meetings are a feature of the participatory processes, younger participants should be involved in discussions regarding how to improve the interactions with adult participants (Kirby et al, 2003, p.91).

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[4] This included both involvement in the Community Advisory Committee (as an integrated participatory activity) and the Junior Council (as a separate participatory activity).

The issue of which young people are selected to represent the views of young people based on adult views of what constitutes diversity in young people also remains an institutional issue. Since adults decided which young people would participate, their views of young people likely influenced the type of young person represented (Freeman et al, 2003, p.62). This 'type' was ever narrower in this instance as might otherwise be expected because both younger committee members were drawn from the existing youth council and attended private schools in the city. According to O'Donoghue et al (2002, p.21) allowing young people to participate effectively means overcoming the idea of representation and recognizing that young people engage with the world and participate as individuals not as representatives of all young people or even subsets or sub-cultures of young people, such as gay young people or skateboarders. Accepting each young person as a full participant in their own right allows planners and facilitators to identify the specific support needs of each individual participant.

It should be recognised that young people, like other unpaid committee members required to juggle competing priorities, can find it especially challenging to commit to these kinds of participatory processes (Cameron et al, 2005). The younger committee members reflected that full participation in the committee required a significant extra-committee time commitment to get through the background reading and preparation required. This is consistent with other studies which have found that unpaid committee members can experience a significant obstacle in terms of time and resources compared to those who attend as part of their paid-work responsibilities (Finnigan, Gunton & Williams, 2003). Participatory planning processes which seek to include the views of young people need to ensure that they provide sufficient resources and appropriate mechanisms to support their involvement, but it could be argued that a greater hurdle to their participation is the attitudes and actions of adults involved in the process.

The challenge for adult participants

Some adult committee members questioned the commitment of the younger members to the process, noting that *"the token school students in actual fact didn't manage to get to too many of the meetings"* [Community Representative]. The younger committee members themselves acknowledged the difficulties associated with participating fully:

> *To be honest, when the thing was over, I was just kind of glad that it was over. I was starting year 12, and stuff, and I was like I don't have time. It is really embarrassing that I was involved in something that was like, that was potentially so important and can have an impact on other people's lives and I was just so nonchalant about it. I didn't really; I didn't put the time and energy into it that I really should have. Yah, but, I do, I regret that that I wasn't, that I didn't do more and took a more passive role.* [Youth Representative]

Based on their 'difference', different expectations were also placed on the involvement of young people in the process and their ability to adequately represent an element of the community or stakeholder group:

> *Well, some of them would have, some would have just had imparted their own view on the committee. I mean, just looking at the membership list, there is a guy from [x] College. Who is he going to ask? The students, the teachers, the parents? I doubt that any of them got asked much at all, but I might be completely wrong. But I would expect that guy just had his own point of view to bring to the table and was limited to that.* [State Government Representative]

Such a view demonstrates the lack of clarity around who the younger committee members were actually representing. Depending on who was asked this ranged from their individual school, to the Junior Council, to all young people on the Gold Coast. Such a view is compounded by the fact that it is often the case that adults have "expectations that the young people who participated in council initiatives would have responsible, altruistic and mature motives and behavior" even though it was legitimate for adults committee members to have entirely self serving and partial motives (Freeman et al (2003, p.64-65). We note that comments questioning the commitment and capacity of the younger committee members to seek and represent the views of others such questions could easily be extrapolated to the broader committee membership whose commitment to the process and capacity and need to seek broader feedback was seemingly unquestioned.

By contrast to the comments made by some adult committee members, the younger committee member not only recognised the role that they were expected to play but also felt the need to justify their attempts to fulfil the expectations of the adults on the committee:

> *Well, um I think I think we were sort of meant to be the mediators like for example because I was a representative of the Junior Council. Then I would take back what we were talking at the meetings and I would talk about that at the Junior Council meetings which were once a month and say generally, what we are talking about, um, and then, um, I would get like general feedback from what kids were saying and tried to pass that on the next committee meeting. So in that way the community was like a, well the youth community could get their words heard.* [Youth Representative]

O'Donoghue et al (2002, p.21) note that "too often, discussions of youth participation are silent about the roles that adults must play as supporters" in participatory processes. The attitudinal commitment of adult participants is integral to ensuring that the views are young people are heard; problematically, it can't be guaranteed. It is vitally important that adult participants be prepared not only to accept the views of younger participants but to actively encourage and support their full participation.

Adult participants generally have more knowledge (or access to knowledge and understanding) of participation structures, processes and ways of working. Furthermore, many adults have institutional power that is not accessible to young people (Zeldin et al, 2000, p.7). Adult participants can, therefore, be a resource in assisting younger participants to participate by providing information or support in a clear and constructive way which still allows the younger participants to take and use their information in their own way (Kirby et al 2003, p.90). Adult participants can also assist younger participants to develop practical skills to support their participation such as map reading.

The development of the relationship between adult and younger participants is central to good participatory practice and the building of trust and respect, however, this relies on the attitudes held by the adults toward young participators and showing a genuine interest in them and their contribution (Kirby et al, 2003, p.8). This may require a significant shift in some adult participants' thinking about young people (Golombek, 2002, p.68) and the value of their contributions. The reciprocation of trust and respect is important in order to allow "a relationship of mutuality in which a…young person (and adults)" to develop (Kirby et al, 2003, p.87). To lay the foundations of trust and respect, adult participants must move past stereotypes and approach young people as individuals, not issues or merely youth representatives.

Unless adults make this change in how they view and interact with young people in participatory exercises, it will be very difficult to create an environment which supports the full participation of younger participants (Tayo, 2002, p.14). As a result, it could be suggested that "adults need to adapt to youth participation as much as (if not more than) youth do" (O'Donoghue et al, 2002, p.22). In essence for the participation of young people to work and to get the most out of it many adult participants need to adjust their understandings of young people and how to work with them in a collaborative way.

Conclusion

The field of the participation of young people in planning exercises is still developing. If, as some believe, young people are "citizens-in-training" we should be concerned what impact token participation may have on the citizenship behaviour of these young people as they become adults. While it is important that participatory processes are designed which support the participation of young people, it is incumbent upon adult participants to ensure that, through their own behaviour, the experiences of young people in participatory processes can be both empowering for the participants and provide positive outcomes for the planning process.

The broader literature on youth involvement in planning suggests that young people have a valuable contribution to make in participatory processes. Our research supports this finding and shows that a number of the adult members of the Gold Coast Waterfuture Strategy Community Advisory Committee recognised the value of their input into discussions. Evidence of the value of their contribution and the active participation of the committee's younger people is also recorded in the advisory committee meeting minutes (GCCC, 2004). However, the ability of the younger committee members to actively influence the decisions made or to participate fully and on the same terms as the adult committee members is less clear.

Using the lens of Iris Marion Young's communicative democracy, we believe that participatory planning processes which intend to engage young people need to adopt a more nuanced understanding of young people's needs and interests. This is particularly the case with respect to ensuring that processes (and participants and facilitators) recognize and accommodate differences in terms of age, class, ethnicity and gender among others (Chawla, 2002, p.16). Young people are often included in processes simply to provide what is believed to be an homogeneous 'youth perspective', which focuses exclusively on the needs and interests of young people. However, contrary to popular belief, young people have the capacity to think and contribute beyond a parochial youth perspective (Cameron & Grant-Smith, 2005). Our research found that the younger committee members provided input to discussions on a broad range of issues including new urban development, rainwater tanks, water pricing, and engineering and environmental issues—none of which could necessarily be considered traditional 'youth issues'. However, while their capacity to contribute beyond what was expected was unforeseen by some committee members their contribution was generally not encouraged in any meaningful way.

The meaningful participation of young people in planning is not accomplished by simply hand-picking and placing one or two of them on a committee. Inserting a couple of young people into an adult-created, adult-driven and adult-dominated process runs the risk of perceived tokenism and precludes any opportunities for meaningful influence. Furthermore,

in addition to the risk of tokenism, involving a small select few young people as representatives may result in exclusivity, whereby only the most privileged or skilled young people are chosen to participate (O'Donoghue, Kirshner & McLaughlin, 2002, p.21).

If articulate, committed and educated young people find full participation problematic, how much more difficult must it be for average young people, let along disadvantaged young people, to find the opportunity, courage and energy to contribute? Planners and adult participants alike need to ensure that participatory processes allow for equal participation of all participants and place equal value on their contributions. Our research shows that this involves both an institutional and an attitudinal commitment to include the views of young people and support their participation.

It will be important in coming years to build on the ideas presented in this paper to gain a deeper and more sophisticated and considered understanding of the conditions that best support the involvement of young people. Our understanding of how adults, particularly adult participants, can support effective youth participation requires development and closer consideration (O'Donoghue et al, 2002, p.19). To ensure the development of positive relationships between older and younger participants and ensure that their full participation is realized, power imbalances need to be either redressed or adaptations made to neutralise their detrimental effects on participative processes. Kirby et al (2003, p.9) note that this does not (and cannot) necessarily mean equal power in all respects but that there is significant scope for the power displayed in "everyday behavior and language" to be changed. We believe that paying particular attention to greeting, narrative and rhetoric, in both process design and implementation, may go some way toward achieving this.

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