

Youth Engagement in Post-Earthquake Christchurch

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1. Abstract

An overall success identified from global literature recognises treating youth with respect and as valued citizens aids in enhancing the success of urban planning and development for both youth and society more widely. The post-earthquake context of Christchurch, New Zealand demonstrates the importance of meaningfully engaging with youth in the midst of undertaking a large-scale disaster recovery. To understand how youth engagement could be done better in Christchurch, we focus our research on certain themes of youth engagement. These themes are international youth engagement exemplars, the issues faced in engaging youth in post-earthquake Christchurch, and the relationships with mental and physical health. Through this we conclude that financial and institutional assistance is crucial to the success of youth-driven and focused projects. We also support the assertion in global literature of respect and recognition of youth opinions as key to youth engagement success.

2. Acknowledgements

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3. Introduction

As the global population becomes significantly more urban, and places like Christchurch rebuild following natural disasters, the importance of including young people in the process of urban design becomes vital. For youth engagement to be effective it needs to focus on empowering youth with financial and institutional support. The successes of international initiatives of such support could provide a framework that is able to be applied in a Christchurch setting. Creating a more inclusive process allows for a range of communities and individuals to be involved in urban design that have been historically marginalised. Youth engagement can have wide ranging benefits stemming from how young people engage with the world around them and their place within it. The two that will be focused on in this report will be the ideas of sense of place and community as well as youth mental and physical health. To understand how cities can be designed both by and for youth, this report attempts to answer the following research question:

'In the context of post-earthquake Christchurch, how can cities be designed both by and for youth to create better outcomes?'

3.1 Defining Youth and Better

Youth are defined as being below the age of twenty for the purpose of this research. This is based off the work of Christens & Dolan (2011) which focused on people who are explicitly excluded from the planning process. Hayward (2011) also notes the importance of recognising the fact that those who are not legally adults as being current and future citizens. However, the idea of youth can extend upwards to 35 to recognise the way that age can often lead to marginalisation and disenfranchisement from the planning process even if they are legally able to vote and participate (UN Habitat, 2016). When focusing on youth mental and physical health, youth is defined as between the ages of 6 and 18 years (Liberty et al, 2016).

Better outcomes for youth engagement are found around the outcomes of more democratic civic participation and a stronger community that is encouraged by the urban design of cities. The outcomes evaluated include a sense of community among youth and youth mental and physical health. Although these outcomes are not quantitative measurements, they are useful for understanding the benefits of higher youth engagement in the cities around them. These are not absolute outcomes but focus on improving quality of life for all residents, current and future, of Christchurch.

4. Methodology

It is important to note our position as youth within the Christchurch community for the last few years developing a strong sense of place to Christchurch. Furthermore, we recognise we are coming from a place of academia as postgraduate students with a particular focus on urban design and development. From this we recognise and note that we are not a representative

sample of youth. However, a wide range of perspectives and prior research was used to gain a broad understanding of youth engagement both in Christchurch and around the world.

Due to the nature of the research question, 'In the context of post-earthquake Christchurch, how can cities be designed both by and for youth to create "better" outcomes?', the research conducted was qualitative, focusing on academic youth engagement literature from both a local and global setting. Research around the sense of community was focused on a sense of inclusion and identity that is gained from place as well as how urban design in Christchurch and beyond impacted on minority populations at the intersection with youth. For youth mental and physical health, the main points investigated was the impact of natural disasters and the ongoing recovery as well as the importance of welcoming and safe community environments.

5. Limitations

Youth is globally defined in many ways causing challenges when using the term, as researchers will tailor the term of youth to suit the research. To combat this, it was decided that this research would follow the definition used by Christian & Dolan (2011) of under 20 and Liberty et al (2016) definition of 6-18 for the health aspect. It is important to note that youth can be defined in many ways and should be acknowledged within individual research for clarity, and when comparing across different research and populations.

Difficulty talking to children living in Christchurch means that the primary data of this research is limited, and the findings are based predominantly on bringing together prior research and putting it into a Christchurch context. A further limitation that was noted included the ability to conduct and receive responses from members of the community for interviews. A broader range of voices would have allowed the research to be more strongly connected to the issues of youth in Christchurch. This is an area of ongoing research both in Christchurch and overseas which means that a significant amount of data was available.

6. Youth engagement and Health

The research conducted within the literature review focused on three main themes within youth engagement. These themes are youth engagement in South Africa and the United States of America, youth engagement in post-earthquake Christchurch, and mental and physical health of youth. This research combines these themes to draw conclusions of youth engagement to provide better outcomes.

6.1 International Youth Engagement

Literature for this section focuses on the minority and majority world using examples of organisations and programs from South Africa and the United States of America. There are common themes across the literature reviewed, ranging from similar failures and successes to hosting conferences to discuss and evaluate projects with youth involved.

Cities Alliance and UN-Habitat are organisations which held a youth conference in Johannesburg 2015. This conference allowed for 13 youth-led projects from 12 different countries within Africa to come together and discuss successes and failures they had faced (Mulwa & Reudenbach, 2016). YouthPower is an organisation supported by the United States Agency for International Development with a key mission to empower young people to be active agents in their own development (YouthPower, n.d.). YouthPower evaluates and researches youth projects to understand the successes and failures to improve and upscale projects. These two examples of organisations share an overall mission to create positive youth development approaches engaging youth within families, communities, and governments in innovative programs.

The United Nations Conventions of the Rights of Child (UNCROC) recognises the right of those under 18 to participate in decision making processes and design. The UNCROC was adopted in 1989 and ratified in New Zealand in 1993. All UN members, apart from the United States of America, have ratified this convention (Ministry of Social Development, n.d). Furthermore, Goal 11 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) states “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable” (Youth and the City, 2016). This goal is only achievable with the inclusion of minority groups including youth. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 states the requirement of fundamental human rights, including the right of children as citizens. The UNCROC, Sustainable Development Goal 11 and the Constitution of South Africa are utilised and discussed as a core pieces of literature and legislation in youth engagement research (Bolay, 2020; Dubow, 2012; Kennedy, Kumar, & Messner, 2010).

More emphasis has been placed on engaging with youth through the work of the United Nations, Cities Alliance, UN-Habitat, YouthPower and the use of the constitution and UNCROC. Combining the successes from youth engagement conferences and utilising the policies in place supports in ensuring youth are recognised as key citizens.

6.2 Youth Engagement in Christchurch

A desire from youth to be engaged and empowered appears in the literature both before and after the earthquake but under different contexts. Hayward (2011) focused on the political action of youth in St Albans prior to the earthquake and the way that youth need to be respected and treated as both current and future citizens. The bottom up collective action was around a pool that was to be removed from the suburb and showed a wider desire from the young people to be engaged in the design of their city and how they live their lives within it. The idea of being current citizens recognises the reality of how young people currently live within cities and are equal participants with adults, while receiving a limited voice on what will happen to that city. The concept of future citizens recognises that when the young people grow up they will have to live with the consequences of current actions, as well as be the drivers of change within the city. Brake (2018) investigated the roles and agency for young people to become involved in decision-making post-earthquake. This was carried out through interviews, garnering a variety of young perspectives on the challenges and barriers to ensuring their voices were heard in the rebuild process.

The consensus from those that offered their contributions was one of young voices being frequently ignored or excluded by a top-down recovery approach. This led to shared feelings of frustration at the continual stifling of their attempts at action. Brake interviewed eighteen young people between the ages of 13-24, and fourteen of them were already active in some form with youth action groups in the city such as Christchurch Youth Council, leading to what could perhaps be considered somewhat biased responses from those with the strongest views and drive to action within the subset of that age bracket in the city. Research bias towards politically engaged youth fits into wider issues of what voices are privileged when youth are engaged that can often work to the benefit of existing power structures. The work of Christens & Dolan (2011) worked to connect the ideas of youth development alongside community development and how the interests of extant power structures can lead to certain voices being pushed to the forefront over others.

6.3 Mental and Physical Health of Youth

Prior research explains the mental and physical health impacts that can result from environmental disasters such as the Christchurch earthquakes, and ways in which they can be mitigated. The University of Canterbury's research conducted by Kathleen Liberty focuses on the mental and physical impacts within schools that have resulted from the Christchurch earthquakes. This research highlights the significant increase in demand for mental health services among all age groups (Liberty, 2017). Alongside her individual research, a collaborative paper investigates the behavioural changes which increased after the earthquakes, which consequently created stressors within the classroom environment for students (Liberty et al, 2016). The research conducted by Liberty is crucial to aid the response for this research topic, to understand how youth engagement in a post-earthquake situation can be maximised. The Child Poverty Action Group also discovered some key research regarding youth health and well-being after the Christchurch earthquakes. This work by Shirlaw (2014) highlights how youth are affected in the aftermath of an event such as an earthquake, and ways in which they can be supported through their school environment.

Post-earthquake Christchurch saw an increasing number of campaigns aimed at youth to benefit their health and the consequences of such traumatic experiences. The 'All Right' campaign was one of these which researched feelings in the post-earthquake environment and found that whilst many issues were correlated with growth during youthful years, these issues were magnified through the effects of the earthquakes. From living in a structured environment pre earthquakes, through to a non-structured environment post-earthquakes, youth were left to feel vulnerable in this time, which consequently triggered both mental and physical health impacts (AllRight?, 2013). Each of these studies have found similar outcomes in terms of the effects that the Christchurch earthquakes had on youth. With significant impacts on mental health, it is important to identify ways in which these impacts can be alleviated.

7. Discussion

The majority world in this example South Africa, have historically faced issues of discrimination, uncertain governments, and overall lack of fundamental human rights. It is through youth engagement and recognising youth as current and future citizens in urban design and development that will allow cities to create communities with long term benefits (Bolay, 2020). Similar to the UNCROC legislation, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, specifies the fundamental values of human dignity through the achievement of human rights and equality, including rights of children as citizens (Dubow, 2012). South Africa, like many majority world countries, have experienced uncertain governments whereby the status of human rights has not always been upheld (Bentley, Nathan & Callard, 2013). Various studies have suggested that the discourse of youth has led to a disempowerment notion amongst youth (Hansen & Dalsgaard, 2008; Steveson, 2007). South Africa specifically, has begun deepening 'South-South' cooperation from all levels to increase and acknowledge human rights (Kennedy, Kumar, & Messner, 2010). In a New Zealand context, working with youth in Pacific communities is important as typically this group has been marginalised.

Youth engagement in the minority world has seen high success in urban design and development. Initiatives designed by youth and for youth have systems in place with financial and institutional support. An example of this is the Boston city project 'Youth Lead the Change', whereby youth have access to one million dollars from the city's capital budget. This process is informed by the Participatory Budgeting Project with a system in place to choose and vote towards three winning youth designed projects (Pierce & Peters, 2015). This access to financial support aids in developing these ideas and initiatives into real life applications. Another example stems from the UN-Habitat recognising the importance of funding in youth projects. Creating the UN-Habitat Urban Youth fund in 2009 has involved 75 countries and supported 296 youth led initiatives. Each year roughly 30 projects are selected from an application pool of 8000 plus, to receive a grant of up to \$25,000 USD. Along with the grant funding, mentorships are provided to increase success (Mulwa & Reudenbach, 2016). This grant and mentorship aid, encourages and enhances the experience and outcome of youth involved in projects as well as the project itself. A critical factor to the success or failure of youth-focused and directed initiatives is the level of funding available to assist their implementation. A project by students of Banks Avenue School in the Christchurch suburb of Shirley offers a relevant local example of the relationship between the engagement of youth in developing what they want in their community, and the money that enables the outcomes of this positive engagement to be realised in the best ways possible.

In 2019, Banks Avenue pupils began to advance plans for an adventure playground and activity zone - to be known as Adventure Avenue - on a section of land in the Residential Red Zone (RRZ) near the school (Stuff 2019). While assisted by Avon-Otakaro River Network (AORN) education coordinator Sian Carvell, the students largely developed the plans for the site themselves based on what they wanted to see the space used for. The facilities included swings, bike tracks, tree huts and green space. With AORN having a significant connection to the major decision-making processes around the RRZ, this represents a strong positive direction for youth engagement in the city. The group, with the support of the school and AORN, have applied to Land Information New Zealand (LINZ, responsible for the management of RRZ land) for the land

they wish to use to be placed in a transitional use lease. LINZ expressed its desire to “be as flexible and supportive as possible under the current policy to enable and encourage activation projects in the RRZ” (Stuff 2019), showing a willingness to listen to and work with youth for action that has not been especially apparent so far in the context of the rebuild process. Earlier this year, approval was granted for Adventure Avenue to proceed (Stuff 2020). However, the cost of implementing Adventure Avenue is estimated to reach around \$30,000, and due to the absence of funding from government and/or the appropriate agencies, the Banks Avenue student group are currently having to foot the bill themselves through their own fundraising efforts. The project, expected to take two to three years to complete, has a good chance of success with its school and community backing and the indication of support from LINZ. However, international literature that we present earlier shows the advantages in external funding of these types of initiative.

Adventure Avenue could be more efficient and effective if proper funding was available to support the project. Giving the Banks Avenue cohort access to funding for developing initiatives that engage youth would benefit them and the wider community. Doing so would also signal a commitment by the relevant institutions to support youth-led initiatives, both financially and in principle. This could empower other individuals and collectives to take action in their areas that may have previously been hindered by prohibitive costs. This action of financial and institutional support empowers youth and creates a sense of importance and place within communities. A key similarity found in the overall research was recognising youth rights and the ability to aid in development. Many reflections on the success of a project were related to treating youth as adults. Thus, giving the youth involved, access to finances and responsibility helped them feel inclusive to the project.

Both the negative and positive post-earthquake interactions between youth and policymaking should be discussed in order to provide better outcomes in post-earthquake Christchurch. In 2013 the Amazing Place competition was jointly run by a number of key players such, involving several thousand Christchurch school students sharing their ideas for a multimillion-dollar playground anchor project in the CBD that became what is today the popular Margaret Mahy Playground. However, this initiative drew criticism from Hayward (2014), who described it as “the unfortunate recent experiment with local school children” (p. 185). The suggestion here - from an adult academic - is that this avenue of engagement patronised youth, by being “a competition of ideas” that denied them a real voice in the rebuild process (Hayward, 2014, p.185). This bright and cheerful child-friendly campaign therefore appears now to have been more of a token gesture of political virtue in youth participation than anything of substantive agency for youth engagement in the city.

The political imagination of youth allows them to approach issues without the baggage of as many pre-existing conceptions of what is possible under the current system and what should be strived towards (Hayward, 2011). This means that they are able to create spaces that work for them that are outside of what has been accepted as being possible or even wanted. In the construction of the Margaret Mahy playground there was a wide range of opinions gathered from youth that were not able to be applied but they allowed for greater political imagination around the project that would not have otherwise been possible (R. Kerr, personal communication, April 9, 2020). Youth movements such as the climate strike movement that gained support in

Christchurch demanded clear action on issues that had stalled at all levels of traditional governance for decades (Sutherland, 2020). Creating a collective sense of place within a fractured city would allow for young people to be engaged with the rebuilding efforts and create a city that works for a greater range of people than would be without youth involvement, both now and in the future.

For youth in Christchurch a strong sense of place can come out of access to communal spaces that are made both by and for youth. When connections to place are created at a young age it is more likely that there will be a longer lasting, stronger connection to that place and the communities around them (Hayward, 2012; Freeman & Tranter, 2010). Preserving a sense of community by reclaiming the places that people connect with is important to foster a sense of shared experience (Engwicht, 1999). As youth in Christchurch have noted, there is a particular lack of spaces which they can call their own, especially in economically marginalised areas, such as public parks and communal areas (K. Prendergast, Personal communication, May 15 2020; Farrell, 2015). This means that a range of spaces are needed for different age ranges and communities that fit within what their community needs and created with their input rather than through a top down decision-making process. The inclusion of indigenous elements and voices in the design process can also help to create a sense of identity and connection to place, even when incorporated into largely Pākehā structures (Gray & Hoare, 2010). Within the LGBT community many of the community spaces are similar to those for many of the youth population: bars, clubs, and rainbow community centres. With the loss of most of the city centre due to the earthquake many of the places that gave both the queer and youth communities a sense of place and somewhere that was their own, was lost (Gorman-Murray, Mckinnon, & Dominey-Howes, 2014). Due to the nature of social stigmatisation of the queer community there is often a greater need for non-familial communities (Choudhury et. al., 2009). However, all young people are affected by the loss of space that even to this day has not been able to return fully. Through rebuilding a variety of places that support a wide range of communities, youth can feel more included within the urban design process, as well as to the communities around them.

The concept of youth engagement can oftentimes become tokenistic as voices that fit into the predominant structures of planning are those who are able to participate in this process. Marybeth & Thompson-Fawcett (2010) noted the way that certain voices are privileged and how the processes of urban planning and development can work to disenfranchise parts of the population who are unable to engage with the planning process. Youth engagement needs to be intersectional to avoid marginalised groups across issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality from being ignored in the process of urban design. In Christchurch this can be important to recognise as historically Maori and Pasifika voices have not been a part of the process, an issue that is only exacerbated by the inclusion of age as well (Stuart & Thompson-Fawcett, 2010). Addressing inequalities between communities is also sometimes necessary before meaningful consultations and engagement is possible as youth are unable or unwilling to dedicate time or energy when having to deal with issues such as unemployment and precarious housing (Beer & Forster, 2002; Christens & Dolan, 2011). While it will never be possible to hear and consider every voice, by engaging with a range of youth communities meaningfully it creates a sense of trust that can lead to further engagement in the future (Hayward, 2011).

Experiencing a traumatic event such as the Canterbury earthquakes at a youthful age can be detrimental with further mental and physical development. Following the earthquakes, significant support was essential in targeting youth who were both directly and indirectly distressed by this event. For the purpose of this post-quake study, youth has been defined as between the ages of 6-18 years (Liberty, 2017). Depending on age and severity of the experience, health impacts such as nightmares, the need to have someone around and behavioural changes such as anxiety, depression and stress can result (Shirlaw, 2014). Physically, children can experience headaches, stomach aches and changes in appetite, all of which can dramatically affect an individual's personal environment (Shirlaw, 2014). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a significant health implication that has resulted from the event of the earthquakes among youth (Liberty et. al, 2014). At least one in five youth in schools show symptoms of PTSD following the earthquakes, along with an evident increase of behavioural problems within children who entered schools following the earthquakes (Liberty et, al. 2016; Liberty, 2017). A youth wellbeing survey post-earthquake noted that there is a significant feeling of loss of place, with 73% of people feeling as though they have nowhere to go, whereas 70% of youth felt anxiety around the ongoing shocks that the earthquakes have provided (Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority, 2014). The continuing impacts that the earthquakes are having on youth is detrimental towards their future. Whilst there is a general feeling of negative mental impacts within youth, it is key to note that youth are happy to see growth within their city, and the ability to be involved with these endeavours is important for their wellbeing (Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority, 2014).

The health and well-being of children and youth is vital in times of distress as they need to feel welcome and safe within their communities. In the post-earthquake setting K. Prendergast mentioned that youth feel unwelcome in areas which have been designed for their refuge, as well as a general feeling of not being heard within their communities (Personal communication, May 15, 2020). For children and youth who have grown up in Christchurch, it has been disruptive, with one youth saying that they “have not really had a city growing up” (K. Prendergast, Personal communication, May 15, 2020). The mental effects that this feeling has among youth has been discovered within schools who have recorded significant behavioural changes since the earthquakes among students. As a result of this, classrooms have been stressful and disruptive, consequently negatively impacting learning (Liberty, 2017). In the post-quake setting, we still see a number of ongoing effects, specifically within anxiety around triggering notions, for example loud sounds (Blundell, 2018). The disruptive environment that youth in Christchurch have grown up in has created an unstructured childhood, which can be directly influenced by the ongoing effects of the earthquakes (AllRight?, 2013). The opportunity that Christchurch has through developing programmes such as the All Right campaign aims to reduce stressors which result from disaster within youth.

8. Conclusion

Financial and institutional support for youth engagement is vital in ensuring that it is effective and not tokenistic. Recognising youth as current and future citizens that deserve a say in their cities now as well as how those cities will develop in the future is important to creating

trust and a sense of community. Youth are the people who will have to live in the cities that are designed today and will have to deal with the consequences of poor planning or execution. Involving a broad range of voices gives power to marginalised communities and creates better outcomes. Reinforcing the power structures that have created our current cities would do little to provide meaningful change and development. While at first it will not be a complete process and every voice will not be heard, engaging with a range of youth communities in a meaningful way will develop that sense of trust and connection to the city. Cities such as Christchurch have a great opportunity to promote youth mental and physical health and continue the work being done post-earthquake. These opportunities should not be lost as communities look to the cities of the future and how they can reduce the chronic and acute stressors in people's lives.

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