Article

The Making of Democratic Actors: Counting the Costs of Public Cuts in England 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 that have encouraged young people to have a voice in local, regional, and national political debates. Specifically, the article examines the role of English youth services in building the spirit of citizenship in young people against the challenging question of the changing behavioural pattern and profiles of young English 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, and how English youth services understand and respond to the experiences of young people. The article presents the strengths 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

1. Introduction

The key focus of youth work is to 'enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential.

[1,2]

This article examines how UK youth services understand and respond to the experiences of young people in the wake of austerity. More specifically, I examine the contemporary value of youth work in building citizenship from the perspectives of young people from disadvantaged and marginalised communities. The idea of 'citizenship' [1–7] is here examined in its blended forms of economic and political participation to help illustrate the different ways in which young people subjectively build, activate, and mobilise skills and capital to have voice and influence in local, regional, and national politics. This perspective on citizenship takes into account young people's precious non-citizen or pre-citizenship status as they approach the age of enfranchisement and also gain rights to join the labour market.

In this paper, I take forward the view that youth work can be a highly effective approach for supporting personal and social development, and developing the social and functional capital [8] necessary to empower young people to become active citizens. However, the cultural particularities of liberal democracy can often mean space, power, and the politics of democratisation is unevenly experienced by young people. For example, 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 educational attainment and social capital at their disposal. It is well

known that an individual's demographic characteristics have a strong influence upon how or whether they participate in economic, civic, and political life. Resulting from the lack of research detailing the common steps taken by young people from disadvantaged and marginalised communities in their journeys from being non-citizens to engaged-citizens [8–11], this paper brings together examples of how youth services/projects have served as a catalyst for change in young people's lives. In an age of austerity and mistrust in political institutions and politicians, priority should be given to ensuring that all young people have a voice to help strengthen democracies. Consequently, this paper argues that while the 2008 Western economic crisis was significant, austerity has long been a feature in the lives of many young people living in England [12–14], and serves as a useful means to re-examine how institutional practices have occasionally helped disadvantaged and socially excluded groups of young people to navigate and negotiate their way through the personal and social obstacles to becoming engaged citizens [15]. Thus, the notion of austerity is both evaluated here and used as a theoretical lens by which to begin a more detailed discussion of young people's subjective perceptions of how they have been equipped and empowered to engage in their communities and wider society. For this reason, the paper questions how UK youth services understand and respond to the experiences of young people to build resilience and become empowered to take steps towards citizenship.

2. Context and Background

Youth work is a distinctive practice sitting alongside formal education, parenting, family, and the wider community in providing the teaching, learning, and development young people need to make successful transitions to adulthood. Yet still, we need to better understand how youth work contributes amongst the myriad of resources to produce effective interventions that improve the lives of young people to become engaged citizens. From this context, the paper questions how UK youth services understand and respond to the experiences of young people to build skills and resilience and become empowered to take steps towards citizenship using four studies that capture critical moments in youth voice and influence. Despite having a national youth strategy, and despite the rights agenda being enshrined in British law and legislation, there has been a downward shift in the part played by central government in supporting young people to participate in the public sphere and political processes. Public spending cuts in England are impacting on a range of social policy areas affecting young people, and have placed further strain on young people living in disadvantaged and socially excluded communities.

In recent years, there has been a gradual withdrawal of the State in delivering public programmes to foster civic engagement. Youth services in England 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. An estimated £387 million has been cut from youth service spending by local authorities in the last six years [16]. For instance, until 2011, youth services received less than 2% of the overall education budget, was traditionally known as the 'Cinderella service', and was delivered by local authorities. Now, central government funding for local authorities has been slashed still further, with the abolition of the revenue support grant—a central government grant given to local authorities. Local authorities will be left to self-fund all youth services, relying on business rates and Council Tax revenue. In practice, this has meant the closure of Connexions Centres—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, since 2012, the closure of over 350 Youth Centres with 138,898 lost places for young people [16]. The current rules also allow youth service provision to be merged into other services and to be provided as part of a broad package of educational and social care measures, which can weaken the core youth work offer. Concern has also been expressed in the field that some local participation mechanisms are managed corporately and fail to draw on youth service practice or expertise. Recent trends have seen reconfiguration of services, a move towards integrating services, external and multiple delivery partners/models, and a greater focus on targeted work. Only young people deemed to be at risk or 'risky' are targeted by government-funded

programmes [17]. Budget cuts have arguably served to heighten intergenerational inequalities, leading to 18-to 21-year-olds claiming state benefit not being entitled to help with housing costs, the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme in England being cancelled and replaced by a diminished bursary scheme focused on students from less wealthy households, and—despite public transport forming an essential pillar in the lives of many 16-to 19-year-olds attending education or training—many being forced to pay unreasonable fares. In terms of cuts in public health, local authorities in England have put an end to free access to swimming pools—during the summer holidays—for children and young people.

The rise in intergenerational inequity—helping older enfranchised voters—goes against evidence that suggests that building stronger and more cohesive communities is a practice that requires young people in order to be effective [16,18–20]. 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 narrated accounts that shed light on the fundamental characteristics of young people's civic identities and leadership are important, as they reveal the broader institutional practices that give impetus to young people's steps to move from being non-citizens to engaged citizens. The latter condition takes on even greater significance when you consider that only one of the major political parties in the UK has pledged to create a statutory requirement for youth services, or that funding cuts will be reversed.

3. Social and Cultural Capital and Young People

The paper's theoretical framework links human agency, resilience, and capital as capacities, or processes, taught and tested in the youth work environment to help explain how institutional responses to young people's needs are structured and delivered to help them make choices, bounce back from wrong choices, and to build soft skills, knowledge, and social networks to have their voices heard to make a difference in their communities. Unquestionably, young people come to the youth work environment with skill sets and assets nurtured over time through reciprocal relationships experienced in the community, at home, and in education. These skills and assets are essential to understand how young people build liveable lives from disadvantaged and marginalised communities. At its roots is the idea of resilience. Harts [21] 'resilience framework' shows how self-confidence and self-advocacy [22] is achieved with support, and how they are key components for young people to thrive academically and socially. From this stable foundation, the idea of 'social capital' [23,24] provides a useful way to demonstrate how youth services deploy service-learning as a mechanism helping to activate, harbor, and mobilise young people's capital—with supervision and resources—to influence the direction of community action. The paper considers 'capital' as developed, among others, by Bourdieu [25], who posits that there are three main forms of capital: Social, cultural, and economic. These forms of capital are intrinsically 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, and mannerisms, which are often linked to socio-economic class and power within society. Bourdieu [25] 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 musical 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 that young people narrated as features of their civic and political identities. Most crucial to the paper is the idea of social capital. Social capital is widely used today as a theoretical approach to study societal structures and dynamics. On the one hand, it can be applied on a macro-level to whole societies, where the question of the relationship between forms of social bonding—in institutions, associations, groups, and so on—and national economic or social development are central (e.g., [26]). 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 [25]. Social bonds can be more or less institutionalised, such as clubs and groups, but can also be family, friends, or colleagues. Granovetter [27] and Putnam [28] found that the quality of social networks can be more important than the quantity. In this sense, Putnam [28] differentiates between 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital: Bonding social capital supports solidarity within existing tighter groups, whereas bridging social capital creates new chances beyond their own groups, due to its relations between individuals who occupy distant social positions. The interrogation of the notions of social and cultural capital is particularly central to this paper's examination of how youth work services/practices have supported young people to become engaged citizens.

Traditionally, youth work in England is premised on the service learning approach, which focuses on building resilience and capital in young people through exposure to age-appropriate leisure and learning activities that take them out of their comfort zone. The starting point of youth work is establishing nurturing and trusting reciprocal relationships with each individual to help build resilience. Once this has been accomplished, the next step is to equip and empower young people to be able to inform, shape, and influence matters that affect their lived lives. In practice, young people have been encouraged and supported to be co-producers of public services and to play major roles in commissioning, scrutinising, and auditing public programmes, sometimes having direct control of budgets. To do this effectively, young people are also trained and supported in planning projects, undertaking inspections, research, and evaluation, and human rights law and legislation as it relates to youth participation, and more. The outcome from good youth work practices should be the building of skills, bonds, and knowledge to advance young people's ability to learn, work, and become citizens.

Thus, the paper does not claim that the English youth work experience is typical of all other Western countries, but by using the key concepts of agency, resilience, and capital, we can start to re-examine how the fundamental principles of youth work have or have not responded well to the needs of young people in an age of austerity.

4. The Decline and Revival in Political Engagement

Paradoxically, against the backdrop of austerity, we have seen in England a steady rise in young people's political participation. Young voters have grown up in an era marked by increased dependency on globalisation, hyper-consumerism, market instability, destabilised nuclear families [29], and disillusionment and disappointment with forms of national and global governance, as well as the uncertainty bought about by Brexit [30]. These combined factors have arguably subverted the way young people see and experience political institutions and agents [26,31–33]. Take, for instance, the British Parliament's decision to not give 16-year-olds the right to vote in the UK referendum on EU membership. This decision suggests a continued mistrust of young people's ability to empathise and communicate a clear set of political priorities. In contrast, the Scottish Government set a precedent in 2014 by granting 16-year-olds the right to take part in the Scottish Referendum on membership of the UK. While this might not have been an altruistic act by the Scottish Government, 85% of the eligible voters turned out, which included over 640,000 aged 18 to 24 and approximately 100,000 16-to 17-year-olds who had registered to vote. They were excluded from the EU Referendum. The Scottish example departs from the normative deficit model of conceptualising young people as lacking any political sophistication, and—perhaps to achieve a political end—viewed young people at the time of the referendum as competent citizens.

Conceptually, this paper is grounded in Wyness's [34] and Batsleer and Davies's [35] ontological model reflected in the New Sociology of Childhood, which conceptualises youth as a stage of 'being' as opposed to 'becoming' and draws on the foremost concepts of 'citizenship' (e.g., the economic and political conceptions) to help explore the participants' subjective perceptions and narrated enactments of citizenship. Although many theorists suggest that they are opposing conceptions of citizenship, both conceptions of citizenship are used interchangeably to help demonstrate the impact of youth work in helping young people address the complexities in their economic and political participation. So often the analysis of youth citizenship in the UK (and elsewhere) rests on an either/or option for discussing

the role of citizenship in young people's lives, and ignores the precarious social status experienced by young people as non-citizens or pre-citizens (i.e., standby, critical, or engaged) as they journey towards young adulthood. As a result, this paper is more concerned with young people's subjective perceptions of citizenship—in all its youthful guises—rather than with engaging in theoretical and philosophical debates about the meaning of citizenship, which is an abstraction too far away from the lived lives of many young people, especially young people at the margins of society. Thus, the economic and political features of citizenship adopted here are not viewed as diametrically opposed, but as different threads forming a partial picture into the lives of young people and how youth work practices have or have not served as a resource in equipping young people with the confidence, skills, and knowledge to make a difference in society.

Returning to the allegation of young people's declining involvement in politics, several writers [33,36–38] draw attention to the overall decline in the British electorate. This is particularly apparent in voter turnout rates in recent national and European elections [39–41]. In the general election in 2017, 43% of people aged 18 to 24 voted, compared with 78% 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 [42] (p. 141). Additionally, there are many different spaces in which youth participation does occur. These range from formal participatory spaces, such as youth parliaments and youth councils, 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.

In the years leading up to the 2008 crash, youth organisations responded in a number of different innovative ways to address young people's expressed need to increase their voice and influence in society. For instance, we saw an increase in mobile youth work to reach rural youth, designated youth workers in hospitals for young people with chronic illnesses, and youth services based in schools. We also saw the establishment of the Children's Commissioner Office in England to ensure that youth rights are considered by all central government departments, a Cabinet Office focused on working with the youth sector to better enfranchise young people supported by Parliament. As mentioned above, youth rights are enshrined in UK law, and most public bodies embraced their duties to involve young people in decision-making by opening up their board rooms and chambers to Young Mayors, Youth Councillors, and Young Police Commissioners. We observed in England a step change where good youth work practices were being fostered by public bodies to strengthen the apparatus of democracy and to educate a new generation of citizenship. In the years following the introduction of austerity, we saw a reversal in fortune because when difficult decisions were taken on public spending cuts, the axe usually fell on youth services.

5. Selection of Studies

This section outlines the four studies undertaken between 2008 and 2011, which have been supported by Darren Sharpe [43] in his role as development officer and/or researcher in collaboration with young people aged 15–21 as lay researchers [44]. This paper has used a thematic analysis to synthesise the qualitative studies as well. 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. I identified qualitative research studies from past work rich in accounts of empowerment and citizenship narrated by young people. Secondly, to be included, studies 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 [45], to look for the agencies' understanding and response to critical moments. This involved repeated readings of the studies to gain familiarity with the content before synthesising.

The data were 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 [46]. Coding was used to highlight key patterns relating to political awakening (i.e., being heard, recognized, and respected), recurring, similar and contrasting content, and links to the literature. The codes were then collapsed into central themes of developing, pre-standby, standby, critical, and engaged citizenship framed around the concept of critical moments, which is an idea borrowed from a study on teenage transition conducted by Thomson et al. [14]. 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' [14] (p. 339). The idea of critical moments is similar to Denzin's [47] 'epiphanies,' Mandelbaum's [48] 'turning-points', and Humphrey's [49] '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 sets of circumstances to construct a politicised 'self'. The paper now provides an overview of the four case studies.

The first case study is entitled In and Out of the 'Benefit Trap' [50]. 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 the role of youth-support services in helping young people who were not in education, employment, or training (NEET) to better manage money. The study participants were recruited through organisations from across England who were involved in the Money Mastery programme in the past and provided services to young people in a range of different circumstances (e.g., supported accommodation, not in employment, education or training, young parents, and disabled). In total, 30 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. The study received Research and Development approval from the National Youth Agency prior to commencing.

The second case study is entitled After the Wagon [51]. 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-to 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 to 18 can stand or vote. Once elected, MYPs organise events and projects, run campaigns, and influence decision-makers on the issues that matter most to young people. Six young researchers with Traveller 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 [52]. Note that the title 'Gypsies' is still used in the 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 the lives of 21st-century Travellers. The group of young researchers were supported by youth workers from Irish Community Care, Merseyside, the 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 [53] with 45 family and community members, and received Research and Development approval from the National Youth Agency.

The third case study is entitled Are they Bovvard? [54]. The study was commissioned by the YRN and undertaken by Signposts. Signposts is a community charity in Morecombe. The charity works to empower the community and provide services that relieve, support, help, and advise 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. I [43] worked with 13 young researchers aged 15 to 18 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 policymakers and young people, and how this aligned to the regeneration plan. The group of young researchers undertook semi-structured interviews with 40 local young people aged 13 to 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 young employees of the National Union of Students (NUS) [55,56]. The NUS is a voluntary membership organisation that 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% of all higher education (HE) and further education (FE) unions in the UK. The group interview originated from the need to find solutions to why only 1% 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-day group interview. This paper has pinpointed different patterns within the participants' narratives that suggest divergent and incremental steps towards political activism. Following the group interview, a thematic analysis was used to examine and categorise the qualitative data. The study received ethical approval from Anglia Ruskin University prior to commencing.

6. Discussion

6.1. Critical Moments: Pre-Standby Citizenship

In and Out of the 'Benefit Trap' [50] reveals some of the pitfalls of citizenship in England, particularly when work and citizenship intersect and reinforce the precarious position of today's 'disconnected youth' [57]. 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 [58]. This paper considers social capital formation, citizenship awareness, and economic well-being as being intrinsically connected [59]. All the participants had in common an experience (implicitly or explicitly) of what Petrongolo [60] called the 'unemployment trap', and narrated congealed pathways to building cultural capital and to activating 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 a benefit, so they could not afford to pay their rent, Council Tax, bills, food, and so on.

Despite living in poverty and insecurity [61], support workers cited an optimistic change in attitude towards work among some participants. They attributed this change in attitude to self-determination, rather than being influenced by external environmental factors (such as a new job, or training opportunities being created in the local area). Owens et al. [62] suggest 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 a 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 participants' 'aspirations' as an increase in their sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and gaining confidence in their own ability. Aumann and Hart [21] argue 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 participants' lives, 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 a part of the life worlds inhabited by participants. Several support workers cited the influence of parents and friends as key determinants of a participant's desire to move away from benefit dependency [63]. 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's description of collecting their benefits as 'picking up their wages', and a working life as being 'a mug's game'.

In such cases, some participants were felt to be unaware of, or found it difficult to visualise, a working life and the advantages that work might bring in contrast to a life on benefits. Some of the participants' life worlds offered them no real examples of how to fuse cultural and social capital to become employed [64]. Thus, attitudes and practices of being on benefits not only degraded participants' sense of self-worth, but also their sense of social identity. For instance, participants cited nocturnal lifestyles, internal lending systems, and purveyors 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 participants' 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, of the participants expressed frustration and deep anger at the way that the young unemployed were 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 England, but graver still because the young unemployed are accused of 'know [ing] nothing', having 'no experience', and of being '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 who 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 the wider community is often avoided due to the necessity of protecting their precarious existence, which can be exacerbated 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 a lack of self-confidence and self-worth. The narrative of 'self' superseded their sense of social responsibility, which was perceived as something for other people. The suggestive 'click' that gives rise to aspirations, which draws on resilience, and cultural and social capital, had not yet been recognised by all the participants and their support workers.

6.2. Critical Moments: Standby 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 Travellers' 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 that were overly reliant on the written word, but instead to 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, roadside, and by stables—in town and country—in houses, large trailers, small caravans, traditional wagons—in close proximity to neighbours or with no neighbours. These distinctions were extremely valuable for the group in 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 that was felt to be environmentally impoverished. The site was hidden behind a 20 foot-high wall in an industrial park. It had barred entrance gating, Closed-Circuit Television, a few cats, a lot 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 views of the countryside.

The study evidenced different aspects of 21st century Travellers' lives that have improved. Most notably, there was less reliance on begging. Some things were worse, such as racism and media portrayal of the communities. It was felt that little was being done to combat racism. Bullying in schools was still being commonly experienced, and teachers were not trained to be aware of differences in culture. Many things have remained the same, especially among those who are still travelling. While there were many personal changes in clothes, food, television 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 do not want to try to understand their way of life. The study found that there is concern that traditions are beginning to fade, that storytelling and singing are less common, and that old crafts and skills are 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.

6.3. Critical Moments: Critical Citizenship

The group of young researchers from Signposts were experienced in intergenerational dialogue and advocating on the behalf of other children and young people. They viewed democracy as being about more than the vote, and participation was a defining characteristic of 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 big issues 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 decision-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 on to the board to give a permanent voice to young people on the regeneration board. The regeneration board and council officials probably 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 to be respected as such.

6.4. Critical Moments: Engaged 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 motivations and stimuli that were cited in the focus group centred on a growing sense of selfhood and resilience triggered by life events (such as transition from FE to HE, and in the process, being treated like an adult; house-hunting and living independently; getting a 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 cause. 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 practise 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 England since 2002—failed to inspire them. Participants felt that pre-and post-16 citizenship curricula were undermined by how they were 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 participants' 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 the

Miners' Strike of the 1980s—also featured strongly in participants' accounts of the formation of their political consciousness. In contrast, participants who came from small and predominately male-centred households implied that they found it a challenge at first to have confidence in their 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 workplace and felt an injustice had been done, which motivated him to draw upon his knowledge and skills nurtured 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 are 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 over a sustained period of time, 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.

7. Limitations

The limitations of the study are those characteristic of synthesising secondary data. Firstly, I used a thematic approach to re-analyse qualitative studies, which had not been intended to be placed along a theoretical continuum constructed around citizenship. For this reason, other dimensions of 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 author, which did not have control measures in place to confidently build comparable data describing pathways to citizenship. Nevertheless, 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 to create value in society. We see how youth organisations have supported groups of young people to achieve the above goal.

The NYA sponsored the Money Mastery programme, with an aim to explicitly move young people into the desired direction of work, and implicitly towards citizenship. Through the evaluation of the financial literacy programme, the organisation was able to refine and repeat what works for new groups of learners. Paradoxically, the programme evaluation was undertaken in 2007, when the proportion of 16–24-year-olds who were NEET remained relatively steady, and at the beginning of 2008, 13.4% were NEET. The proportion increased following the 2008 recession and peaked in July–September 2011, when 16.9% of 16–24-year-olds were NEET (1.25 million people). Since then, the number of people who are NEET has been falling [65]. The programme responded to an identifiable need by listening to young people who had been asking for help with managing money and finding work. The outcome of the programme was that the young people built and enhanced their self-confidence, self-esteem, and problem-solving skills in financial literacy. What this meant for their sense of citizenship was an acknowledgement of their pre-standby status due to the preoccupation with dealing with their precarious set of circumstances.

UKYP sponsored a special interest group outside of its formal structure, which mirrors that of Westminster. The special interest group of Gypsies and Travellers formed a subgroup and were able to draw on the organisation's resources, and also leverage access to politicians to help persuade and influence changes in UK policy, especially in education. UK law denied Gypsies and Travellers ethnic or religious status, which prevented statutory bodies from dedicating time and resources to building public awareness of Gypsies' and Travellers' lives and culture. With distinct religious and cultural practices, they see themselves denied human rights and protection under UK law. As previously mentioned, the group reported back to the Select Committee using empirical data, and in the process, they began to see themselves as change-makers.

The community organisation in Morecombe Bay wanted to empower and equip local young people to feed into town planning decisions. Locally, young people with a keen interest in their community engaged in the process, becoming ambassadors for local young people and being supported by the organisation. With the support of the organisation, leveraging access to board members and councillors, as well as training the young people in research skills, the group were invited to sit on the regeneration board and contributed to joint decision making. They achieved their goal of having a voice in shaping locally delivered public services that impacted on their lived lives and embodied the idea of the critical citizens.

The NUS was concerned about how the student protest against tuition fees in 2010 occurred without the direct help of the NUS. Students self-organised, which worried and pleased the NUS in equal measures, but caused them to pause and reflect if the organisation had failed to adequately respond to the needs of the student population and get ahead of the situation. This moment in time in the life of the organisation—whose role was to represent the interests of students—allowed a group of staff members who had worked their way up from being student activists into being paid trade unionists to reflect on their journeys. They had often started their journeys being members of the school council, politics students, and/or being raised in politicised households, and they could track how they acquired the interest and wherewithal to sustain their position and champion the rights of students. They were the living embodiment of the engaged citizen, who had found the right institution—despite its complacency—to realise their political aspirations.

This paper has prioritised the narrated journeys that underpin the subjective choices made by young people in their steps towards citizenship. The paper recognises the impact of context in how young people embody and enact politics, and also identifies the interplay between the life events, significant adults, and social mechanisms that 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 that connect young people to civil society. The benefit 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 stimuli to activate citizenship.

The paper illustrates how youth organisations and projects have gone about building social and cultural capital in marginalised groups of young people in order to have their voices heard on matters that concern them. It would be premature to draw too strong a conclusion from the studies about 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. [66] 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 can 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 so 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, crystallised in the structured dialogue as part of the study, the group would not have been able to positively challenge the MPs and peers. However, while they were given the opportunity to present their findings and tell their stories to the MPs and peers, nothing changed. This calls into question their ongoing commitment to engage in formal democratic processes.

Evidenced in this study are stories by young people who have periodically and/or momentarily overcome the challenges of structural constraints by building strong social relations, which has helped them to negotiate and navigate adult-centric structures and discourses in order to have their voices heard; from this, the lessons are universal. Take for instance, the regeneration study, in which 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 of the human rights that bind the State and citizen.

Likewise, in the student activism study, the participants had consciously shifted from political 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 an understanding of how to bridge social capital to influence democratic processes. 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, 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.

8. Conclusions

To conclude, research suggests that young people living in disadvantaged communities are more likely to experience lower levels of cultural and social capital than their middle-class peers as a result of their adverse set of circumstances. This conclusion was not borne out in this paper, and instead findings suggest how young people facing hardship have skilfully and wilfully navigated and negotiated their participation on to local and national programmes, and used this platform as leverage to have their voices heard in influencing and shaping public policy and practice. Undoubtedly, budget cuts have negatively impacted on central 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 Connexions services. Austerity has not diminished English youth's call for citizenship rights, but it has diminished how English youth services respond to the needs of young people. The lessons for other Western governments are how best to make citizenship programmes less dependent on the boom and bust cycle of the economy and how to match political priorities so that young people are not denied the platforms and mechanisms of democracy when they are most urgently needed. This paper makes a case that the role of government should be to create the right climate for a range of co-operatives, mutuals, charities, and social enterprises to deliver public programmes that help to build the spirit of citizenship in young people, while at the same time, insulating providers from the volatility of financial markets and bipartisan politics. An example would be companies that endorse and finance Big Society Capital—that is, independent financial institutions with a social mission, set up to help grow social investment in England—to bring together skills development in the UK workplace and citizenship to meaningfully bridge the gap between the individual and society.

9. Declarations

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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