The Making of Good Citizens: Participation policies, the internet and youth political identities in Australia and the United Kingdom.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is the product of my own independent research. It does not contain material which has been accepted for any other degree or diploma, or any copy or paraphrase of another person's material except where due acknowledgement is given.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between youth participation policies, the internet and young people's political participation. In recent times youth participation policies have become an increasingly popular solution to a range of perceived 'issues' related to young people: either problems of youth disengagement from democracy or their exclusion from democratic processes.

At the same time, young people's lives are increasingly mediated by information communication technologies: identity, social relationships, learning and cultural, political and economic practices are embedded in the internet and mobile usage. Consequently, the internet is being increasingly utilised to promote and implement the aims of these youth participation policies. Despite the need to understand the relationship between policy and practice, research rarely considers the relationship between policy, practice and young people's views and experiences.

This thesis addresses this gap in the literature by looking at what participation means in youth policy, in the practice of non-government organisations and for young people themselves. It engages directly with young people's experiences and in doing so moves beyond questions of mobilisation and reinforcement. Instead it examines the diversity of ways in which young people conceptualise and practice participation, both online and offline. It also relates their views and actions to broader changes in governance and democracy and draws on contemporary theories of political identity and citizenship to make sense of the way that young people view, and exercise, citizenship.

This study draws on original qualitative research generated in a comparative study of Australia and the United Kingdom. The experiences of young people in two national non-government organisations are studied and explored in relation to the policy discourses on youth and participation in each country setting. This study has drawn on participant observation, document analysis and in-depth interviews with twenty four young people and eight executive staff and board members across the two country settings.

This thesis provides an in-depth account of how young people conceptualise and practice politics. In doing so, it argues, firstly, that the political identities of young

people are shaped by dominant discourses of youth and participation and that youth participation policies are transforming the ways that young people conceptualise participation and engage in participatory activities. Although participation policies are often intended to connect young people to government policy making processes, young people remain cynical about the interest and ability of governments to recognise and respond to their views. They see governments and politicians as remote from their lives and the issues they cared about. Comparatively, they demonstrate a passionate commitment to causes, to personally defined acts incorporated in their everyday lives through local volunteering and contributing to national initiatives. Furthermore, these young people reject traditional hierarchies, show significant commitment to action over ideology and value the cultural and interpersonal dimensions of participation. They often conceptualise participation as everyday acts through networks that transcend traditional models of membership-based organisations, of state-oriented politics, of locally-based action and of formal and informal policy making processes.

Secondly, young people use the Internet for a diverse range of participation activities. The internet facilitates activities which bring together the political, cultural, social and economic dimensions of young people's lives. For instance, participatory activities, friendships, study, hobbies and consumer activities were often interwoven as young people discussed participation. However, the picture that emerged in this thesis is that the agency and autonomy that young people value in online participation contrasts starkly with government policies which favour structured, managed, prescribed processes for youth participation both on and offline.

Thirdly, whilst participation policies have opened up new access points to policy-making from which young people have traditionally been excluded, they tend to legitimise managed forms of participation and de-legitimise others. Consequently, participation policies, in their present form, tend to exacerbate, rather than remedy problems of elitism and can further alienate young people from political elites. Furthermore, as discourses of participation are becoming more prevalent in the non-government sector, young people are increasingly oriented away from government towards other actors. This thesis finds that young people are becoming more, not less, alienated from formal politics as they find more resonance in non-government processes and feel more excluded from the processes of government.

Table of Contents

List of Boxes, Tables and Figures

Boxes

Figures

Tables

Chapter 1. Introduction

During the past decade, in Australia, Europe and the US, dwindling membership in political parties and low voter turnout have raised concerns that contemporary societies are facing a crisis of democracy. Research shows that the trend away from formal institutionalised participation is particularly marked amongst the young and this in turn raises concerns for the future of liberal democracies. In response, governments have been keen to formulate policies intended to promote participation amongst young people. Running parallel to this story of democratic civic deficit, a youth participation agenda has emerged from a range of other fields, influenced by the child rights movement, developmental approaches, participant centred approaches, and the new sociology of youth (Reimer, 2003; Sinclair, 2004).

In the academic literature definitions of youth participation are varied. In some cases, youth participation is viewed as the degree of civic mindedness and political behaviour of young people (Mellor, et.al., 2002) – for instance, the ways that young people contribute to and influence civil society (Pitman et.al. 2003: 424). Studies on youth political participation typically look to intention to vote or voter enrolment or turnout (Saha et.al., 2005), and membership of political parties (Leighley, 1994). However, more recent empirical work reflects a growing interest in attitudes towards participation and citizenship (Marsh et.al., 2007), subjective experiences of transitions as citizens (Lister et.al., 2003; Smith et.al., 2005) and critical revisions of political participation (Norris, 2003; Vromen, 2003, 2004). There is also growing interest in the ways that participation is mediated by Information and Communication Technologies. Studies explore the extent to which information communication technologies are creating opportunities for new forms of youth participation (Balnaves et. al., 2004; Coleman & Rowe, 2005; Vromen, 2008), or are reinforcing traditional structures and barriers to participation (Livingstone, et.al., 2007; Vromen, 2007).

Amongst the policy and practitioner literature, these different perspectives affect the approaches used to promote youth participation, for example, through civic education, or decision-making in sectors or roles from which they have been traditionally excluded (Wierenga, et.al., 2003). Furthermore, youth participation is conceptualised as a strategy for maximising the benefits of youth development programs that seek to

impact on the capacity and skills of individual young people. As such, youth participation is used to describe a whole range of activities in diverse settings, some adult-led, some youth-led, some focusing on young people as individual agents and others that view them as social groups or cohorts.

In the context of growing concerns about democratic civic deficit, youth participation emerges as a focus within a range of social and public policies. Youth participation policy tends to address the ways in which young people are engaged in conventional practices (McAllister, 1992: 51 – 52), for instance, within the education system, the work force, and institutional politics (Jones & Wallace, 1992; Sercombe, 1996: 51, 53; White & Wyn, 2004: 82). At an international level, instruments of international law such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (CROC), set out standards for young people's participation which nation states should observe in domestic policy and law. In Australia and the United Kingdom, frameworks such as the CROC form part of the broader policy context for federal, state, territory, and local governments, are influential in the non-government sector and have been the source of good theoretical arguments in favour of extending children and young people's citizenship rights (Kaplun, 1995: Sidoti, 1998). However, these frameworks are rarely anchored in legislation. A critical failure in policies for youth participation – particularly those that appeal to a human rights framework – is that they do not compel individuals or organisations to act on these obligations (Shier, 2001; Bessant, 2003: 98). This has been highlighted by recent debate on the purpose and effectiveness of youth roundtables in Australia (Saggers, et.al, 2004; Bo'sher, 2005; Bridgland, 2007). In the case of the National Youth Roundtable, young people and academics have argued that discussion themes of the roundtable are set by politicians and bureaucrats, and there is no legislative mechanism by which participants directly contribute to policy development (Bo'sher, 2005; Bridgland, 2007). As a result, the roundtable is considered tokenistic, elitist and designed to emphasise the development of select individuals over the broad sharing of decision-making power with young people (Bessant, 2003: 93; Bo'sher, 2005; De Brennan, 2005; Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, 2006). These concerns form part of a broader debate over the elitist tendencies of new participatory opportunities created through network governance (Bang, 2005).

Chapter 1. Introduction

I argue that competing discourses of 'youth' and 'participation' complicate the definitions and experiences of citizenship for young people and shape young people's attitudes towards politics and influence the forms of participation in which they engage. In this thesis I look at the relationship between youth participation policies, the internet and the development of youth political identity by analysing young people's experiences of participation in Australia and the United Kingdom. Using empirical qualitative data I examine the policy discourses, youth participation policies in non-government organisations and young people's subjective experiences. I address two key questions: What constitutes youth participation? How are young people's political identities shaped by policies for youth participation?

In order to understand the association between youth participation policies and youth citizenship I investigate the relationships between three spheres of inquiry: policy frameworks for youth participation; organisations as vehicles for these policies; and young people's experiences of participation in organisations. In doing so, this thesis addresses a number of theoretical and empirical challenges: What is the nature of 'youth'? How do we define citizenship and participation? How do we research participation? How do we understand the role of the internet for participation? What is the role of policy in the development of political identity?

1.1 Youth studies in the context of late modernity

Youth studies sit across many disciplines including sociology, political science, social work, education and psychology. Studies of youth – or adolescence – have emerged from distinct disciplines, epistemological positions and theoretical traditions. Influenced by psychology and developmental sociology, the traditional approach has historically viewed 'youth' as a universal, biological stage, focused on identifying and promoting normative pathways to 'adulthood'. This has shaped policy that creates pathologies of difference and promotes interventions that target the behaviour of individuals and groups. However, by the 1960s, studies on young people's experiences of social reproduction and transformation challenged the essentialist and deterministic assumptions of the functionalist approach on the basis that youth experience is shaped by social structures (Allen, 1968: 322).

Chapter 1. Introduction

Wyn and White have also argued that youth should be viewed as a *relational* concept and that studies of youth '…refers to the social processes whereby age is socially constructed, institutionalised and controlled in historically and culturally specific ways' (Wyn & White, 1997: 10–11). They have called for a balance to be struck between recognising the physical and psychological changes experienced by young people and the extent to which these are constructed by social institutions and negotiated by individuals (Wyn & White, 1997). Mizen has argued that age has a practical, rather than essentialist importance for the experience of youth as it is the basis upon which young people's lives are organised and regulated by the state through policy on education, welfare and legal rights (Mizen, 2004). Of particular interest is the way that social structures - in particular class and education (Bynner et.al., 1997: 3) – and cultural and historical processes (Wyn & White, 1997: 10) shape the experience of youth. From this perspective, youth is defined and understood in relation to structures, processes and social conventions – including the notion of 'adulthood'. These scholars argue that youth is a relational concept and that young people are often positioned as 'becoming', rather than 'being', as deficient rather than sufficient, as needing protection – or protection from.

These two approaches to youth – the 'developmental' and the 'contextual' – currently have the greatest influence over academic inquiry and policy development. A third theoretical approach, less prominent in policy and practitioner literature, is the 'subjectivist' approach which privileges agency over structure in its analysis of youth experience. This approach to the study of youth has emerged since the 1970s and argues that youth experience is primarily the performance of the acceptance, resistance or transformation of dominant discourses on youth and related concepts (such as 'adulthood', 'family', 'education' and 'work') (McDonald, 1999).

These different approaches emerge, respectively, from positivist, realist and interpretivist traditions (Marsh & Furlong, 2002: 20). In addition to the epistemological assumptions and theoretical perspectives on what we can know about the social world (and how we can know it) they each reflect different beliefs about the roles of structure and agency for explaining social behaviour. Despite some challenges to the relevance of the structure-agency debate to the work of political scientists, scholars argue that it is impossible to study social or political behaviour without taking a position on the role of structural or agential factors (McAnulla, 2002:

272–273; Cleaver, 2001). As contemporary life trajectories in the form of traditional pathways from school to work, family to independence, and youth to adulthood have become much less predictable, an academic tug-of-war in Youth Studies has emerged. On one hand, scholars have studied why some young people now appear to be failing to 'transition successfully' according to traditional markers of development and adulthood (Roberts, 2007). On the other, scholars argue that the conditions of late modern society are sufficiently changed so as to require new questions, new methods for researching, and new lenses for analysing, youth experience (Wyn & Woodman, 2006, 2007). Of particular interest to the second approach is the extent to which individual agency can challenge the strength of social structures in shaping the experience of youth (Furlong, 2000). In this thesis I draw on literature that argues that some structures (such as access to education and employment) underpin enduring inequalities, but that subjective experience is increasingly employed by young people to make sense of, and develop strategies for managing, this new context of increasing risk and uncertainty.

1.2 Youth citizenship and participation

The experience of youth is often framed in terms of the relationship of young people to key social institutions, such as the family, justice and education systems and the state (Jones & Wallace, 1992; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; White & Wyn, 2004). These institutions are underpinned by notions of citizenship in western democracies, closely tied with ideas about rights and obligations. Yet young people occupy an ambiguous place as there is no distinct point or age at which, in either the United Kingdom or Australia, young people become full citizens. In terms of rights, the age at which young people can officially leave formal education varies according to jurisdiction – anywhere from 15–17 years – but they are not paid 'adult' wages until age 18 if living in Australia, or 22 if living in the United Kingdom. From the age of 14 they can be held criminally responsible for their acts and from 17 years be jailed in adult prisons, but in Australia, young people are not considered 'independent' for the purposes of accessing student support payments until they are 25 years. In terms of obligations, young people in both Australia and the United Kingdom can, and do, participate in political activities although they cannot become members of a political party until

they are 15 years (or 16 years for those young Australians wishing to join the Liberal Party) or participate in elections until age 18.

Social policy has traditionally taken a 'deficit' approach to youth citizenship whereby young people are situated as 'citizens-in–the-making' and are the subjects of socialisation strategies seeking to create the 'good citizen' (Owen, 1996: 21; White & Wyn, 2004: 87). In the United Kingdom, there is a strong social justice approach underpinning contemporary policy regarding youth citizenship (Bell, et.al., 2008: 37) although some argue that a deficit model continues to dominate social policy affecting young people (Smith et.al, 2005: 425) by focusing on civics education (Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998). Additionally, school curricula and pedagogical approaches have been criticised for constructing young people as 'becoming' citizens, rather than 'being' citizens (Bennett, 2007; Holdsworth et.al., 2007: 9).

The new sociology of youth has played an important role in promoting a youth participation agenda by demonstrating that young people are often excluded from social processes, rather than being incapable of participating (White & Wyn, 2004: 93–95). In addition, rights-based movements have made considerable headway in promoting opportunities for young people to participate at many levels of society (Harris, 2006: 222). These arguments have led to a substantial policy and practice response anchored in specific structures and processes to make possible youth participation. Some research on the outcomes of youth participation strategies for policy, program or community development has been conducted in the United Kingdom (Matthews, 2001; Tisdall & Davis, 2004; Kirby et.al., 2003) but little research has been undertaken in Australia that goes beyond the outcomes for individual participants.

Using a capacity-based approach, others have argued that definitions and models of participation need to be rethought. In particular, young people should be recognised for how and what they contribute in a changing social environment characterised by risk and individualisation (Harris, 2006: 224). Nevertheless, youth participation is often discussed in the context of making sure that young people 'have a voice' in the democratic process (Bessant, 1996: 33), though participation, narrowly defined as 'having a voice', severely limits the range of activities that young people can engage in as members of society. This raises one of the central problems for studying youth

citizenship which is often conceptualised in terms of adult-led structures and processes. Young people are subject to expectations to which they are simultaneously denied the means and access points to meet. Whether it is exercised online or offline, youth citizenship is compromised by conflicting standards and expectations. As Livingstone et.al. put it:

> *What exactly must young people do [online] before society will judge them 'politically active' or 'engaged in civic participation'?*

(Livingstone et.al., 2005: 289)

One of the problems is that, as Bennett (2008b: 227) puts it, civic education policy views young people 'as if they were their grandparents'. What, then, are the critical questions relating to young people and political participation? Participation is a key concept in political theories of democracy, implicitly linked to citizenship, both as legal and administrative status, and as normative concept or theory (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994: 352; Stokes, 2002: 24). A cursory glance at the youth participation policies reveals a concern to promote 'active' citizenship – what exactly does this mean for young people and according to what theory of democracy? To what extent do studies of youth participation take into account the broader context in which citizenship takes place – particularly the ways in which systems of governance are changing? For example, in the context of emerging patterns of 'network governance' (Rhodes, 1997; Considine, 2005), or 'culture governance' (Bang, 2004a), there is a concern that 'professional political deliberation, participation and cooperation uncouples citizenship from the politics of the ordinary, which is also at the heart of democracy' (Bang, 2005: 173).

My research examines these questions in light of the experiences and views of young people in Australia and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, I ask to what extent are young people's perspectives on participation policies shaped by structural factors? And finally, in what ways do participation policies challenge or reinforce structural barriers to participation? Can they be an effective institutional response to the need to incorporate the 'politics of the ordinary'?

1.3 Youth participation and the internet

The dilemmas of how to define and measure youth participation in democracy have been brought into stark relief as the internet and other information communication technologies have come to play an increasingly significant role in the social and political lives of citizens. Research has increasingly sought to understand the general impact of information communication technologies on democracy and citizenship (for example, Norris, 2001; Gibson et.al. 2004; Howard & Jones, 2004). The study of the internet and youth political participation can be summarised in two broad approaches.

The first assumes a normative position on political participation and looks at how technology is extending or deepening democracy as a legal and administrative mechanism, and for strengthening the legitimacy of normative political ideas and culture (Montgomery, et.al., 2004: 102). The focus is often on the opportunities and effectiveness of 'e-democracy' in strengthening existing institutional arrangements (Lewis, 2005: 10), the ability of technology to link decision-makers and political elites to citizens (Delli Carpini, 2000; Dahlberg, 2001; Luhrs, et.al., 2001) and extending government to marginalised or 'hard to reach' groups, such as young people (Brackertz et.al., 2005; Simpson et.al., 2005). These accounts view the internet as a vehicle for public information and 'civic education' (Dahlberg, 2001: 618–619; Montgomery, et.al., 2004: 103). There is also optimism that the internet will foster 'active citizenship' – community engagement in (often local) government (Goodwin, 2005) or 'youth service to the community' – through such mechanisms as online volunteer matching (Delli Carpini, 2000:347).

The current top-down nature of e-governance has been criticised for focusing on communicating policy to young people, being government/decision-maker focused and limiting the degree to which young people are able to contribute to agenda setting or decision-making (Lewis, 2005: 12). There is also concern that digital technologies may reinforce the role of those who are already engaged, whilst further marginalising those who are not (Norris, 2001: 98). Indeed, studies in the United Kingdom (Livingstone & Bober, 2004) and Australia (Vromen, 2007) argue that class and level of education are predictors of internet use and quality of internet access. Furthermore, top-down mechanisms fail to effectively link policy makers with forms of online

youth participation taking place through Non-Government Organisations, youth-led sites or social movements.

The second approach challenges both the way that political participation is conceptualised (for example Norris, 2001; Vromen, 2003) and the way that it is researched (for example Coleman & Rowe, 2005; Livingstone et.al., 2005). Bennett has argued that the internet is imbricated in contemporary political participation, organising and activism (Bennett, 2003). He has found that the internet has transformed and is transformed by the political actions of individuals and groups who, through wide, shallow networks, use the internet as both a space and a tool for political communication (Bennett, 2003). Survey-based research in the UK (Livingstone, et.al., 2005) and in Australia (Vromen, 2003) has deliberately explored a broad range of participatory opportunities, deepening our understanding of the range and forms of online participation. Nevertheless, one of the key challenges continues to be how 'participation' is defined (Livingstone, et.al., 2005: 289–290). This dilemma reflects a wider limitation of existing research on young people's political participation, epitomised by quantitative studies with predetermined notions of how young people relate to the political and how they translate their conception of the political into action (O'Toole et.al. 2003: 53; Marsh et.al. 2007: 18). In Chapter 2, I look in greater detail at several studies that have sought to explore young people's ideas of the political and the forms that participatory actions take. In particular I examine the work of scholars who look at the role of the internet in the everyday lives of young people. I argue that further in-depth qualitative research is still required to fully understand contemporary forms of youth participation – particularly in the context of rapidly evolving information communication technologies – and draw on these author's conceptualisations of youth identity and citizenship in my analytical framework.

1.4 Structure of thesis

In Chapter 2, I review the literature on citizenship and youth participation policies. I consider the distinct ways in which citizenship and participation are conceptualised. I look at arguments that we are experiencing a shift from government through hierarchy, to governance through networks, and consider the implications that this has for studying political participation. Here I pay special attention to the work of Henrik

Chapter 1. Introduction

Bang who suggests that new political identities are emerging in the context of new forms of governance. I also consider in–depth the work of Stephen Coleman who has put forward a theoretical framework for examining the role of organisations in shaping citizenship through e-participation projects. I argue that his thinking can be applied more broadly to look at how organisations conceptualise and operationalise participation policies and the implications this has for youth citizenship.

In Chapter 3, I look at existing studies of youth political participation and critique their respective strengths and identify gaps that my research addresses. In doing so, I draw on a growing body of literature that critiques the concepts of citizenship and, in particular, participation. Here I also look in depth at the literature on e-participation. In particular, I consider the empirical evidence on how young people use the internet to explore and perform citizenship.

I then present my methodology in Chapter 4, Here, I introduce the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network - the case study organisations in which this research is located. Particular attention is given to the appropriateness of the use of qualitative methods especially the use of in-depth interviewing. I defend my use of a comparative approach and explain my reasoning for looking at Australia and the United Kingdom.

The following four chapters present my analysis of the data collected for this project. Beginning in Chapter 5, I look at key policy documents related to youth participation in both Australia and the United Kingdom. In this discussion I argue that there are important distinctions in the youth participation policies of Australia and the United Kingdom. I argue that the distinct policy traditions in each country have differentially shaped the attitudes and experiences of participation amongst young people in their respective countries. I look at the responses of case study organisations to these policy contexts and present analyses of the perspectives of executive staff and board members at the Inspire Foundation and Youth Action Network.

This is followed by a discussion of young people's perspectives and experiences in Chapter 6, There I explore the relationship between policy and the development of political identity. I analyse young people's views of politics, policy and participation and discuss the ways that participation was conceptualised by young people and the kinds of activities they were involved in. There is a particular consideration of what mobilised young people and how they related to the state and political traditional

institutions. I employ Bennett's theory of self-actualising citizens and Bang's notion of Expert Citizens and Everyday Makers to explore what kinds of youth political identities are emerging. Here I argue that young people were cynical and felt unrecognised by traditional political institutions and processes. However, they were mobilised around issues and took action in a wide range of ways. Furthermore, they were self-reflexive in forming their political identity: the ways in which they felt they were viewed by the state shaped their attitudes towards politics. However, far from being disengaged or apathetic, the young people in this study sought out spaces, organisations, agencies and opportunities to take action on issues that they cared about.

Throughout this thesis I consider the role that the internet plays in the development of youth political identity. However, in Chapter 7, I present an in-depth analysis of the views of research respondents towards e-citizenship and explore the way that they used the internet for political participation. I also consider how the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network utilised the internet to facilitate young people's participation and use Coleman's schema for e-citizenship (2008) to examine the kind of youth citizenship that these organisations are promoting.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I turn to questions of who is mobilised by participation policies in the case study organisations. Drawing on the work of Marsh et.al. (2007) I examine the ways that ideas about politics and participation are structured by life experience. I look at how age, gender, ethnicity, class and disability shaped young people's participatory experiences, particularly as expressed through issues that they care about and which act as catalysts for engagement. I examine how the case study organisations conceptualised and respond to issues of diversity. Bang (2005) argues that the emergence of Expert Citizens as new, legitimised political identities creates a problem of elitism for democracy as Everyday Makers struggle for recognition. In this penultimate chapter I look at this problem from the perspective of participation policies – do they challenge, or perpetuate elitism?

1.5 Conclusion

Youth participation policies are widely considered necessary to address either issues of youth disengagement from democracy or young people's exclusion from

democratic process. In this thesis I asses the ways that young people experience these policies and their relationship to young people's views and participatory practice. I move beyond questions of mobilisation and reinforcement, instead placing greater value on the ways in which young people conceptualise and practice participation. I compare Australia and the United Kingdom as a way of examining the role of context for the development of youth political identity and to gain a more detailed understanding of the relationship between policy and practice.

I am not only concerned with young people's subjective experiences of participation, but also the roles of policy, organisations and the internet which I argue constitute important settings for the participatory practices of these young people. Finally, I relate their views and actions to broader changes in governance and democracy and draw on contemporary theories of political identity and citizenship to make sense of the way that young people view, and engage in, citizenship.

Chapter 2. Youth Citizenship and Participation in Context

A key test of participatory initiatives and processes from the perspective of inclusive citizenship is whether they do challenge traditional power relations or simply reinforce them.

(Lister, 2007: 439)

This chapter begins to map the academic terrain on which my study takes place. Questions of youth participation are fundamentally about citizenship. As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, both the statutory and discursive markers of youth citizenship in the United Kingdom and Australia are ambiguous and young people receive mixed messages on their rights, responsibilities and opportunities to exercise citizenship. In the context of an apparent decline in formal political engagement in advanced democracies, increased dissatisfaction with the institutions and mechanisms of democracy ('civic deficit') and the limitations to the development of democratic society and polity created by social and economic inequality, there has been a renewed interest in theorising citizenship (Carter & Stokes, 2002: 3; Stokes, 2002: 24). This has led to claims that citizenship should play an independent normative role in political theory (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994: 368), renewed emphasis on the Aristotelian 'good citizen', emphasis on concepts of 'active citizenship' (Stokes, 2002: 24; Marsh et.al. 2007: 33) and 'responsible citizenship' (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994) in theory and public policy. As such, studies of youth citizenship take place in the context of broader debates on democracy and the role of citizens.

I therefore begin by examining the various theoretical positions on the nature and scope of citizenship. I look at the different conceptualisations of citizenship, in particular, how different theoretical positions frame youth citizenship. I then consider the debates about the changes in modern nation states as a result of globalisation and changing systems of governance both at the local, national and international levels. In the context of theories of a shift from government to governance, I reflect on the implications of network governance for participation and review, in particular, Bang's theory of project-oriented political identities which he argues are associated with increasing participatory governance (Bang, 2004b). This line of thinking has

particular resonance in relation to young people who are the targets of a range of policies which are opening up new opportunities to connect into policy networks. Though just as normative ideas about what constitute 'good' or 'active' citizens vary amongst different democratic theories, so too is there variance in the policies and approaches to youth participation. I look at Henrik Bang's arguments that new political identities are arising in response to processes of network governance. His work is useful for exploring the consequences of youth participation policies for youth political identity.

Consequently, I then turn to the literature on youth participation policies to understand how different approaches to youth participation engage with distinct notions of citizenship. By definition, youth participation policies have normative aims in sight − though there is much debate over the ability of policies to deliver citizenship rights to young people and the constraining powers of institutions – both government and non-government. I examine literature in both Australia and the United Kingdom according to the purpose and intent of youth participation as a way of understanding the various perspectives that contribute to this field of research. In particular I reflect on notions of participatory governance and consider under what circumstances particular policy approaches to youth participation policies can be understood as part of a broader trend towards network governance. Here I look at the work of Coleman (2008) and consider his views on the role that organisations play in implementing youth participation policies and, therefore, shaping youth citizenship. I conclude by looking at the potential for participation policies to address – or perpetuate - processes of exclusion.

2.1 Participation and citizenship

In a recent review of citizenship literature, Moosa-Mitha (2005) distinguishes between theoretical approaches which take an individualist (neo, social and contractual liberal theory), relational (communitarian and civic republican) and difference-centred (radical, post-structuralist) approach to citizenship. Marsh, O'Toole & Jones (2007) have also examined the literature, but focus on how different approaches to citizenship regard the *extent* (ie. criteria for inclusion and exclusion from citizenship), the *content* (the balance between rights and duties) and the *depth* (participation) of citizenship (Marsh et.al. 2007: 34). They distinguish amongst

different approaches to citizenship based on their relative emphasis on rights (liberalism and neo-liberalism), responsibilities (communitarianism, civic republicanism and neo conservatism) and, direct participation of citizens (radical and post-structuralist). Because my study explores the tension between participation policies and young people's subjective views and experiences, I find the way Marsh et.al. (2007) break up the literature to be a useful one and, therefore, here I discuss the different approaches to citizenship according to the relative emphasis that they place on *rights, responsibilities* and *participation*. However, I focus on how these different approaches grants citizenship status and look at the kinds of participatory acts thought to be indicative of a 'good' citizen. I then consider ideas about citizenship and participation as they relate to theories of a shift away from government to governance. This work is important because it suggests that citizens now participate in networks which traverse old divisions between the state and civil society. Furthermore, these interactions can take place in new settings, such as the internet, and enable citizens to look beyond the state in order to influence public policy. Here I review the work of Bang, (2005) who argues that in the context of new forms of network governance (or 'culture governance', as he calls it [Bang, 2004a]), policy partnerships are forming across the public, private and voluntary sectors which have given rise to new citizen identities.

2.1.1 'Good citizenship' as the exercise of rights

The hegemony of liberal democracy in western societies (Marsh, et.al. 2007: 35) has shaped debate on youth citizenship, just as it has inspired important challenges to the ethnocentric, gender specific, ageist and universalist nature of citizenship (Jones & Wallace, 1992: 20; Turner, 1990; Mann, 1987, in Walby, 1995). This makes liberalism an important point of departure in considering youth participation and citizenship. Though there are different streams in liberal democratic theory, the central tenet is the same: democracy is an institutional arrangement designed to protect the legal and political rights of individuals (from arbitrary or oppressive acts by government or individuals) and *rights* are privileged as the regulating mechanism of democracy (Habermas, 1996: 22; Stokes, 2002: 28). In liberalism 'politics' is narrowly defined and there is a clear distinction between the private and the public sphere and political and civil rights are both effectively seen as mechanisms by which

individuals can pursue private interests (Habermas, 1996: 22). Rights-based accounts take a legalistic view of citizenship.

Different liberal theories advocate slightly more or less participation. Realist liberal accounts of the good citizen stress voting, whereas pluralists, argue that good citizens also cooperate with other like-minded individuals to pursue their mutual interests (Stokes, 2002: 29). Liberals consider participation to take place in the public sphere and generally focus on the conventional acts of voting, and membership of political parties or interest groups. Liberals privilege agency as the driver of social behaviour. Because political participation is seen as an individual choice, non-participation is usually viewed as an expression of ignorance or apathy (Marsh, et.al., 2007: 35). Both perspectives assume that all individuals are equally positioned and able to act on their rights to participate, and that opportunities to participate are evenly distributed (Leighley, 1994: 187).

Most social policy in advanced democracies reflects liberal conceptualisations of citizenship whereby young people are constructed as apprentice citizens. Social policy emphasises the need to socialise young people for 'minimal' (Evans, 1995: 16), or 'thin' citizenship (Marsh et.al 2007). The 'good young citizen' is one who successfully transitions to adulthood by achieving educational and employment status and becoming an economically independent and productive member of society. The 'good young citizen' is therefore independent of state support, law abiding, and exercises political involvement through voting for representatives in government (Evans, 1995: 16). Socialisation is typically assessed by measuring young people's participation in political parties, voting (or intention to vote) in elections, their political attitudes and literacy (Civics Expert Group, 1994; Lean, 1996; Banks et.al, 1992, National Association of Secretaries of State, 1999 in Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Critiques of minimal, rights-based approaches to youth citizenship object to limited arenas of participation and targets of political actions (Norris, 2002; Marsh, et.al., 2007: 36), narrow definitions of political participation (Norris, 2003; Vromen, 2003), the normative construction of the citizen-as-adult (Moosa-Mitha, 2005: 369; Lister, et.al. 2005: 42-428), the assumption that participation opportunities are equally distributed regardless of structural inequalities (Moosa-Mitha, 2005: 373), and their

failure to explain youth engagement in political activities – not just formal political process - or sufficiently explain how political socialisation is achieved (Frazer & Emler, 1997; Henn et.al. 2002; Coleman, 2005). In addition, comparative studies have suggested that low levels of youth participation in traditional political activities do not indicate broad levels of apathy or disengagement, but a generational shift away from what Norris calls the 'politics of loyalties' to the 'politics of choice' (Norris, 2003).

Nevertheless, in most accounts of youth political participation, the lack of conventional engagement by young people is considered a failure in the socialisation processes and feeds into debates around providing young people with 'capacities', skills and political literacy to engage in normative political participation.

2.1.2 'Good Citizenship' as the exercise of duties

In the context of the apparent failure of political socialisation and the resulting decline in engagement with traditional political agencies (such as political parties, unions, voter enrolment) theoretical approaches that emphasise *duty* as the key component of citizenship has experienced a renaissance. I will crudely group these together under the label 'duty-based' although there are important distinctions between civic republicanism, communitarianism and neo-conservatism.

Like liberal accounts, duty-based notions of citizenship emphasise participation in the public sphere, and in existing political institutions and processes (Stokes, 2002:34). However, these positions prioritise the 'common good' over private interests and value civic virtue, common values and ethics in public decision-making (Habermas, 1996:23, Stokes, 2002:31). Duty-based approaches contest narrow, purely legalistic approaches to citizenship, emphasising the role of participation in the community, and the reciprocal acknowledgement that one receives as a member of a community, for citizenship. For communitarians, the importance of community is to facilitate citizens' use of reason and deliberation is encouraged (Etzioni, 1995) whilst civic republicans view participation in community groups as an expression of civic virtue (Van Gunsteren, 1998).

Political socialisation (required for political participation and effective governance) is also important for duty-based conceptions of citizenship but is achieved through

participation in civil society groups. For instance, civic republicans value participation in civil society organisations and believe a cohesive society is one where civic virtues are '…embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations' (Putnam, 2000: 19). Good citizenship is increasingly linked to notions of 'active citizenship' in which citizens respond to their *responsibilities* to participate in managed deliberation and decision-making opportunities which, in turn is believed to improve welfare, well-being and serve as a 'training ground' for (norm-consistent) participation in the broader public arena (Stokes, 2002: 32; Johansson & Hvinden, 2005: 111). Like liberalism, republican approaches make a clear distinction between the public and private and whilst participation in the community is fundamental for reinforcing norm-consistent view on rights and (more importantly) obligations, citizens are firmly oriented towards the state. A cohesive society is one where citizens respond to their duties to participate in the workplace and exercise responsibility for themselves, their families and their community (Marsh, et.al., 2007: 37) and to collaborate with each other for shared interest (Putnam, 1993: 182).

Although the nature of civil society, and particularly Putnam's interpretation of republican civil society organisations, has been the source of significant debate, civic republican notions of the active citizen and discourses on social capital have had significant influence on policy affecting youth citizenship. Empirical studies have shown that young people recognise this and associate socially constructive participation with citizenship (Smith et.al., 2005: 436-439). These duty-based conceptions of citizenship promote 'active' participation, and emphasise participation in social groups and contribution to the common good. Civic republicanism, in particular, values the role of citizens in public decision making through involvement in civil society groups. This broader notion of citizenship as political participation that can be found in duty-based conceptions of citizenship promotes a maximal interpretation of citizenship (Evans, 1995: 16). However, they maintain focus on civil and legal status, rights and responsibilities, promote law-abiding behaviour and an active commitment to the community through service. Young people are therefore, viewed as apprentice citizens for whom community service through volunteering is not an expression of citizenship, but a method for socialisation.

2.1.3 'Good citizenship' as direct participation in democracy

Radical and interpretivist readings of democracy have developed in response to liberal and republican models. They have substantive ontological differences and it is not my intention to deny this. Radical – or critical realist - interpretations emphasise the way that structured inequality (such as class, gender and ethnicity) impacts on citizenship. The experience of inclusion and resistance to exclusion is what defines citizenship (Lister, 1997). By comparison, post-structural and post-modern views see citizenship as problematic precisely because both the substance (forms of participation) and the arenas (public and private) by which citizenship is articulated are contested. They argue that patterns of inclusion and exclusion reflect unequal power relations which illustrate the ways in which citizenship is always a contested notion. Nevertheless, I bring them together in this discussion, and set them apart from the theoretical positions outlined above for three reasons: they acknowledge and seek to respond to structured inequality through the recognition of difference; they promote maximum participation of citizens for the effective operation of democratic systems; and, they hold that political participation can take place outside formal political – and traditional public - arenas.

Difference-centred views call for a rethinking of many of the assumptions embedded in both rights-based and duty-based perspectives. The first is a rejection of 'equal citizenship' in favour of 'differentiated citizenship' – that is, citizenship predicated on difference (Young, 1989; Kymlicka & Norman, 1994: 370). They may emphasise either group (critical realist) or individualised (postmodern and post-structuralist) orientation of difference-centred citizenship. Nevertheless, implicit is the assertion that political power structures are the reflection of broader social, cultural or economic inequalities. Marxists, feminists and anti-racist approaches all take different positions on how and which groups are (dis)advantaged in the democratic process but all argue that inequalities undermine the fundamental principle of democratic participation: opportunity to exercise rights and obligations (Young, 1989: 251). These structural inequalities may be classed, gendered and, or, racialised and traverse the classical dichotomy between public and private sphere. As such, for difference-centred theorists, access to the rights promoted by liberals and the ability to respond to the obligations emphasised by republicans are mutually dependent.

Therefore, the second significant challenge by difference-centred approaches is the defining and distinguishing between the private and public spheres. They hold that politics takes place outside of traditional arenas and that all aspects of an individual or community's life can have political dimensions (Marsh et.al., 2007: 39). They challenge the traditional distinctions between private and public, pointing out that political acts can take many forms and have many targets. Mouffe, for instance, reflects on Oakeshott in revisioning the private/public dichotomy as the civil condition by which activity is always private but is articulated publicly through the conditions and rules of democratic organisation (Mouffe, 1992: 237). From this perspective, failure to participate in traditionally accepted democratic arenas (political parties, elections, petitions or protests) is seen as collective alienation from public power and decision-making (Marsh et.al., 2007). In fact, difference-centred accounts of citizenship challenge notions of participation and non-participation. The good citizen from a difference-centred perspective is one who is self-reflexive and politically purposive (as opposed to passive) and emerges through an increased awareness of self-identity and collective forms of identification (Mouffe, 1992: 235-236). A good citizen is also subversive and challenges normative ideas expressed in liberal and civic republican/communitarian approaches. This 'difference-based' notion emphasises a 'think' conception of citizenship where citizens look beyond the state to other political actors (including themselves) to determine and implement policy. In a world increasingly characterised by unpredictability, risk and decentred governance some scholars argue that the struggle for common political identity has not abated but simply shifted focus (McDonald, 1999). In contrast to duty-based notions of citizenship which also value active participation and hold citizens to be sovereign, 'difference-based' interpretations are transformative.

Below I demonstrate that most studies of youth political participation assume a liberal or republican position on citizenship, though as argued here, these positions are challenged from a variety of theoretical perspectives. These studies assume an unchanging political environment in which traditional institutions and processes of democracy are sustained. In particular, they assume the enduring sovereignty of the nation-state in which hierarchies of decision-making peak with the government. However, it is increasingly common for studies of contemporary western democracies

to acknowledge a shift from 'government' to governance with implications for the way we understand and study citizenship.

2.2 Political participation in a risk society

It is increasingly common for political and sociological studies of participation to consider the effects of processes of continuity and change in the economic, cultural and political contexts of nation-states and citizens. Some authors suggest that the rise of globalisation, restructuring of labour markets, rapid exchange of information via the internet and other digital technologies and the decline of the welfare state and the replacement of hierarchies with markets signals the beginning of a new era in which structural analysis no longer explains social change or continuity. Post-modernists, such as Lyotard (1984) and Baudrillard (1988) have argued that the post-modern era cannot be explained through the application of key explanatory variables such as gender and class. For others, the dominance of capitalism and the rise of neo-liberal ideology in the 1980s and 1990s signalled 'the end of history' (Fukuyama, 1992). However, alternative perspectives have argued that the transformation of contemporary democracies is characterised by processes of individualisation and risk which have fundamentally changed lived experience. This perspective has been forwarded by Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) who argue that unpredictability and uncertainty can no longer be managed through increased rationality and scientific knowledge. They argue that a risk culture, not experienced by previous generations, is now at the centre of people's lived experience. One consequence of this is that as old institutional arrangements are no longer able to deal with this pervasive risk, individuals are required to be reflexive and negotiate this risk in their everyday lives (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007: 138-144; White & Wyn, 2008: 6-7).

Both Beck and Giddens demonstrate the importance of self reflexivity and identity for managing the conditions of 'reflexive modernity' (Beck, 1994). However, this new risk society does not mean that structural factors no longer impact on people's life chances. In fact, inequalities in both the distribution of risks (Beck, 1992) and choices or freedom to recreate their world (Giddens, 1991) persist. Furlong & Cartmel have demonstrated that despite a weakening of collective social identities (individualisation) and increased opportunities for personal responsibility young people's lives continue to be shaped by structural forces such as gender and class

(Furlong & Cartmel, 1997: 112-113). They refer to this as 'the epistemological fallacy of late modernity' in which young people take personal responsibility for collective problems (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997: 114). This argument has consequences for the study of youth political participation. In particular, the need to explore the role of identity for young people as they construct notions of and respond to politics, whilst examining how their views and actions are structured by social divisions such as gender and class (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Marsh et.al., 2007; White & Wyn, 2008). This is particularly important in the context of theories on network society and governance which suggest there are new ways in which citizens are engaging in politics and decision making.

2.2.1 The role of networks for changing the context of participation

Another dimension of the increasing complexity of late modernity has been described as a shift from industrialised society to network society (Castells, 2001). The network society is characterised by increasingly globalised economic, social and cultural practices driven by knowledge and information exchange. The implications of a networked society are many, but in relation to citizenship and democracy, some are particularly relevant.

Firstly, collaboration, not conflict underpins the network society (Marsh, 2008: 4-5). Under these conditions governments, leaders and managers need to involve ever more people, communities and organisations in the production and implementation of public policy (Bang, 2004a: 159). Networks are therefore thought to be energising old institutions of public policy production and stimulating new forms of public participation (Considine, 2005). Theories of 'network governance' (Rhodes, 1997; Considine, 2005), or 'culture governance' (Bang, 2004a), argue that policy networks have changed, expanding from functional networks in government departments to include other actors from the private and voluntary sectors (Rhodes, 1997: 45). Governance, as a process of social and political communication, is creating 'partnerships, joint ventures and team building between elites and sub-elites from public, private and voluntary organisations' (Bang, 2003: 242). This has created a shift away from government which is based on hierarchy, to governance based on networks and the emergence of new partnerships that traverse old boundaries between public, private and voluntary sectors.

The extent to which network governance is taking place and the level at which new policy networks have an impact is the source of great debate. Whilst some argue that there has been a significant shift towards governance (Rhodes, 1997, 2001;) others contend that top-down forms of government prevail, where certain, aligned and elite non-government players are invited to the table in an effort to *retain* control and governance by government (Marsh, 2008: 8). Though theoretically, it is argued that the prospects for network governance are promising in that they can foster functional and deliberative representation, open up opportunities for more participatory democracy and engage actors who might otherwise remain on the margins of politics, empirical research suggests that in practice the deliberative and participatory potential is limited (Hendriks, 2008: 1010).

I am not concerned here with arguing the case for or against a substantive shift to governance, but rather, to examine young people's experiences *in the context* of such debates. Here I consider two key questions: to what extent are youth participation policies indicative of a broader shift towards network governance; and, do participation policies contribute to processes of inclusion or exclusion for young people's political participation? Here I find the work of Bang (2004; 2005) particularly interesting.

2.2.2 Policy contexts and political identity: Bang (2005)

Bang's theoretical work on new forms of political identity is drawn from empirical research in the Inner Noerrebro community of Copenhagen (Bang & Sørensen, 1999, 2001). Bang argues that, in order to manage the pressures of increasingly complex societies, governments and policy makers must involve ever-more individuals and groups in the process of governance (Bang, 2004). This trend, he suggests, is bringing together authorities and lay-people in processes of policy production, with increased participation of non-government organisations and identified 'community experts'. As such, the political system now embodies various governance networks and partnerships between private, public and voluntary organisations. These governance networks encourage general citizen participation, but specifically promote opportunities for a small number of individuals to engage in policy discussion and production.

Bang calls these new policy players 'Expert Citizens'. Expert Citizens are often professionals in voluntary associations and their cooperative attitudes towards working with elites in private and public organisations distinguish them from old grass-roots organisers (Bang, 2005: 163). That is to say that where traditional activists find their purpose in challenging the authority of the state, and party political players find legitimacy in supporting the authority of the state, these new political identities find legitimacy in *doing* work that was once considered the domain of the state. This includes developing and delivering policy into 'the community'. Box 1. contains a description of the Expert Citizen.

Box 1 Description of Expert Citizens

<u>Expert Citizens</u>

Expert Citizens take a discursive approach to 'the political', whereby participants create their own political realities through action. This action involves accessing existing processes and structures of governance by assuming professional roles in voluntary and non-government organisations. They are strategic in their pursuit of these roles to inform and take part in decision-making processes because they seek political influence. Participation is an integral, almost logical, extension of their identity and they consider themselves part of the system (Bang, 2005:164). Expert Citizens have, or can access, the skills and resources that enable them to influence agendas and decisions, so they place negotiation and dialogue over opposition or confrontation (Bang, 2004: 21). Bang warns that Expert Citizens represent a new republican elite that may further alienate ordinary citizens from the political process.

The role of Expert Citizens in public policy production via governance networks is a substantial shift in contemporary political identities as they are fundamentally cooperative. I suggest that in the context of youth participation, Expert Citizens might be found in the youth affairs peak bodies, youth councils and representatives to government departments and agencies, and as staff or volunteers in youth-serving non-government organisations.

2.3 Youth participation policies

At this point, I turn to the question of the role that youth participation policies play in the building of networks and the development of youth political identity. The phrase *youth participation* has enjoyed revived popularity in policy and organisational practice in western democracies during the last decade (Kirby et.al., 2003; Reimer, 2003). In its broadest sense, youth participation refers to the involvement of young people in decision-making processes from which traditionally they have been excluded (Wierenga et.al., 2003). These include programs and initiatives in the government and non-government sectors, as well as the introduction, in 1997, of civics education programs in both Australia and the United Kingdom. However, the push for youth participation policies has arisen out of different fields, influenced by the Child Rights movement, developmental approaches, participant centred approaches, and the new sociology of youth (Reimer, 2003; Sinclair, 2004). Youth participation has come to mean different things in different contexts and central to this area of research is the still unresolved question 'what do we mean by participation?' (Sinclair, 2004: 108-109). Nevertheless, principles of youth participation are increasingly included in youth policy within a broader tradition of social and public policy. In both countries it is possible to identify at least two dominant approaches to youth participation: youth development and youth involvement. These approaches reflect both different notions of 'youth' and 'participation'.

2.3.1 Participation as youth development

Interest in understanding how 'positive development' occurs has resulted in the identification (and promotion) of youth participation as an intervention for promoting positive development in young people (Jarrett, 1998; Larson, 2000, Catalano et.al., 2004). The youth development approach to involving young people has been particularly influential in the United States of America (Larson et.al, 2005), and during the 1990s and early 2000s in Australia (for example, through the AusYouth initiative). Youth development models generally emphasise youth participation as a key strategy for enabling the development of skills, such as initiative and self determination, as well as emotional, social, cognitive and behavioural competency (Jarrett, 1998; Larson, 2000, Catalano et.al., 2004).

Chapter 2. Youth, Citizenship and Participation in Context

In the youth development literature, 'youth' is a naturalised concept and emphasises the developmental needs and goals of young people in their transition to 'adulthood'. The developmental approach emerges from the fields of developmental and social psychology and finds resonance in positivist epistemological positions such as behaviouralism and rational choice theories. In the United Kingdom and Europe it has also influenced 'functionalist' normative traditions in sociology (Evans & Furlong, 1997: 23)[1].

The first theoretical premise of the developmental approach is that behaviour is observable and linked explicitly to clearly identifiable processes which are universal and are age-related (Heaven, 1994). The second premise is that the responsibility for successfully completing the developmental tasks necessary to attain 'normality' lies with the individual. The focus on age as the core dimension of youth has reinforced a view of youth as a process of transition from childhood to 'normal' adulthood (Wyn & Woodman, 2006: 511).

At the core of the developmental approaches is a theoretical focus on intentionalism - the intentions and actions of individuals or groups are the focal point for explaining behaviour and events (McAnulla, 2002: 274). Individuals are considered to have a 'pre-social' essence (Wyn & White, 1997: 71) and whilst some scholars recognise that environmental factors influence individuals (Weissberg & Greenberg, 1997), policy informed by the developmental approach creates pathologies of difference and promotes interventions that target the behaviour of individuals and groups. Changes in the social and economic structure (for instance, work, education, family) may influence how individuals are socialised, but structural influences are treated as peripheral, though useful for locating individual agency in a social context (Weissberg & Greenberg, 1997).

In Australia, the dominant policy approach to youth participation has been to promote 'youth development' as an intervention to address social problems (Bessant 2003). The main purpose of youth participation policies is to support young people in their transition from adolescence to adulthood to manage or avoid anti-social or problematic behaviour associated with drug and alcohol use, incomplete education, unemployment, mental illness, teenage pregnancy and so on. Youth development

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[1] Here 'functionalist' and 'developmental' will be used interchangeably.

programs often promote the development of leadership skills amongst young people, or address risky behaviour.

In terms of citizenship, youth development approaches can be divided broadly into two types: those which promote rights-based conceptualisations of citizenship focusing on young people's participation in education and employment as a precondition to citizenship (such as mutual obligation welfare policies, such as the New Deal and Work for the Dole). Others promote responsibilities of citizenship and aim to foster a sense of civic duty through 'youth development' programs and civic education (Mellor et.al., 2002; Kirby et.al., 2003; Freiberg, et.al., 2005; Holdsworth, et.al., 2005).

The youth development approach perpetuates beliefs that young people are 'becoming', rather than 'being', and has enshrined a 'deficit' approach whereby young people are situated as citizens-in-the-making' and are the subjects of socialisation strategies seeking to create 'good citizens' (Owen 1996, p. 21, Thomson, et.al., 2004: 219; White and Wyn 2004: 87). The 'naturalness' of these interventions has been challenged by arguments emphasising the discourses which frame young people as deficient (Roman, 1996; Bessant, 2004), and the structures in society that position young people as different to adults, requiring policies that ensure their supervision, surveillance and regulation (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Wyn & White, 1997; Wyn & White, 1998; White & Wyn, 2004). These policies may target young people 'at risk' or 'youth leaders', but they invariably view young people as apprentice citizens in need of support to successfully transition to full citizenship. An example from the Australian context helps to illustrate the youth development approach to participation.

In 1998, support for a national youth peak body (The Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition) to represent youth issues and views at a federal level was withdrawn and in 1999 the government established the National Youth Roundtable. The roundtable involved a limited number of young people in a highly managed research and consultation process. Ministers were not held accountable to the views of the National Youth Roundtable and there is little evidence that, during its existence, the roundtable influenced federal government youth policy (Bo'sher, 2006). In interview-based research with National Youth Roundtable participants, young people

indicated that the highly elite and possibly negative experience of participation in the National Youth Round table turned them off formalised participation processes in government (Bridgland-Sorensen, 2007).

Youth participation policies conceptualised as youth development have very little to do with democracy and cannot be understood as participation in any meaningful sense. At best they represent examples of structured consultation (Westhorp, 1987) or where young people are listened to (Shier, 2001). At worst, such policies can be understood as manipulation (Arnstein, 1969), decoration or tokenism (Hart, 1992). This is because young people are not recognised as holding expert knowledge or skills to contribute and because their views and beliefs are often represented to authorities by adults. However, there is a second policy approach I have identified as the 'youth involvement' approach to youth participation policy.

2.3.2 Participation as youth involvement

In contrast to the youth development approach, youth involvement approaches emphasise the rights of children and young people to participate in decisions that affect them (Hart, 1992; Kaplun, 1995: Sidoti, 1998), the broader social and political benefits of youth participation (Sinclair, 2004) and on the social justice outcomes of youth involvement, such as strengthening democracy and civic participation (Lansdown, 2001; Badham, 2004; Lister, 2007). As with youth development, youth involvement approaches recognise the roles that young people play as consumers for informing policy and program development, and that participation can have benefits for individuals in terms of skills, knowledge and experience (Bell, et.al., 2008). However, youth involvement approaches look beyond the developmental benefits, legal criteria and instrumental role of participation and emphasise the rights of young people to citizenship. Youth involvement approaches promote young people's involvement in a range of decision-making arenas and for many purposes including:

- Participation in individual decision-making on aspects of their own lives. For instance, when receiving medical treatment and decisions about where children should live and who they should be cared for.

- Participation in service development and provision: involvement individually or collectively as consumers of services. Young people plan, shape, deliver or evaluate services.

- Participation in research as consultants, commissioners or researchers.

- Participation in communities as members of neighbourhoods, communities of interest and citizens.

(McNeish & Newman, 2002)

In the United Kingdom, youth participation policies have led to the introduction of statutory obligations for local, devolved and national government bodies to consult with young people (McNeish & Newman, 2002; Tisdall & Davis, 2004: 131). This mostly involves consultative mechanisms such as youth representative roles and youth councils (Matthews, 2001). In Australia, state and federal governments have had varying levels of commitment to young people's participation, and involvement is almost without exception in the form of formal, structured consultative mechanisms (Bell et.al. 2008: 34). In both Australia and the United Kingdom, the non-government sector has been particularly prominent in promoting youth involvement (Wierenga, 2003; Kirby et.al. 2003).

In short, where the developmental approach sees young people as 'becoming' citizens, the involvement approach sees young people as 'being' citizens (Bennett, 2007; Holdsworth et.al., 2007: 9). The youth involvement approach draws on contextual notions of youth which is understood as a process or experience fundamentally affected by the social, economic and political context in which a person exists. In other words, they argue that the subjective experiences of young people '…are simultaneously shaped by institutional processes and social structures' (White & Wyn, 2004: viii). Contextualists reject pure structural determinism preferring to explore the dialectical relationship between structures and individual agency (White & Wyn, 2004; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; 2007). In comparison with developmental theories of youth, the thrust of this realist argument is that youth is not a universal human stage and that individual behaviour cannot be measured independent of other social, political and cultural dimensions such as class, gender and culture (Allen, 1968: 324; Jones, 1988: 716; Wyn & White, 1997: 9 – 14).

Instead, the opportunities and constraints experienced by different young people affects how they exercise their rights to participation in decision making processes that affect them (Bessant, 2003; White & Wyn, 2004: 93-95). Research in the United Kingdom on the role of youth participation in public decision making (Kirby & Bryson, 2002) found that where meaningful participation takes place and young people's participation is integral to the effective practice of the organisations (government or non-government organisation) there is also enhanced social inclusion of young people (Kirby et.al., 2003).

The more recent social inclusion policy agenda has provided a new context for youth involvement. This is relatively established in the United Kingdom following over a decade of explicit policy platforms focusing on tackling social exclusion. In Australia, at a federal level the social inclusion approach has only gained weight since the election of the Rudd Labour Government in late 2007, although in South Australia a Social Inclusion Initiative in 2000. The social inclusion agenda holds promise for the return of a social policy agenda which acknowledges and values the role of participation in community and government decision making. This would specifically involve a shift from equating youth participation only with education and employment, as well as normative political acts. However, Edwards warns that, though the social inclusion agenda promises a more participatory approach to social policy, the experience of the United Kingdom and early policy directions in Australia suggest that youth participation may continue to be constructed in terms of economic outcomes (Edwards, 2008). Whilst my field work and policy analysis took place prior to the election of the Rudd Government, I acknowledge that this shift in the policy environment has implications for the study of youth political participation. I will return to this in Chapters 8 and 9 and consider how future research in youth participation will need to account for this change of tack in Australia government policy. The point here is that whilst social structures arising from access to education and employment may be the target of a social inclusion agenda, participation should be an end as well as means for securing more equitable structures.

2.4 Consequences of youth participation policies

Youth participation policies therefore, cannot be taken at face value. It is not always self evident who the policies are aimed at, what the desired outcomes are, what

notions of citizenship underpin policies and what the role of implementing authorities are.

2.4.1 What kinds of citizens?

Few evaluations have been undertaken on the impact of youth participation in public and programmatic decision-making (Cavet & Sloper, 2004). Where these do exist there is evidence that a critical factor affecting outcomes is the way that power operates. In the literature this is usually focused on the degree of control that young people have in decision-making processes (Kirby & Bryson, 2002: 37; Wierenga, 2003: 68). In this way, power is typically treated as 'control' and existing literature tends to explore power from a 'one dimensional' (Lukes, 2005) view. A notable exception is the work of Tisdall & Davis (2004) who have shown that the policy network literature can help to evaluate the influence that young people have on public decision-making through policy networks. Importantly they find that through participation policies, young people can leverage a range of resources, including information and knowledge required by policy-makers and networks that can be mobilised for action, which mean that, even as 'outsiders' they can have influence over decision-making processes (Tisdall & Davis, 2004: 140). Furthermore, they find that the role of adults and organisations is a significant one, and whilst they do not draw conclusions on the implications of their research for youth citizenship, it is clear that the relationship between participation policies, implementing bodies (such as organisations) and youth political identity deserves further attention.

The limited empirical evidence of young people's experience of policies, and weak frameworks for analysing power, have resulted in this being a neglected area of research. Consequently, there is limited evidence of the outcomes of participation policies, either for policy-making or young people themselves (Matthews, 2001; Cavet & Sloper, 2004; Tisdall & Davis, 2004; Bell et.al., 2008).

Whether drawing on the youth development or youth involvement tradition, the literature tends to look at adult-led and designed strategies to link young people into adult-led institutions and organisations. The few studies which have examined youth-led initiatives find they present more participatory approaches to citizenship, but that because young people are operating in adult-dominated societies, they struggle to exercise influence or power beyond their initiative or group (Douglas, 2006). Scholars

have argued that as such, some youth participation policies deliver mechanisms that enable young people to influence decision-makers, but most are highly controlled and extend only to structured consultations (White & Wyn, 2008: 112). Others are more scathing in their assessment, arguing that youth participation policies have little to do with democracy and are designed to control young people (Bessant, 2003). Here the key question and one which is frequently overlooked in the youth participation literature (though significantly more consideration has been given to this question by scholars of education) is what kind of citizenship is promoted by participation policies?

Recent studies of online strategies for youth participation have paid attention to the kind of citizenship being promoted. For instance, Montgomery et.al., (2004) drew on the typology of youth citizenship promoted in educational settings developed by Westheimer & Kahne (2004) to examine the kinds of citizenship promoted by online participation initiatives in the United States of America. By analysing over 400 websites, they categorised e(participation) initiatives as either fostering 'personally responsible citizenship' (legalistic, norm-consistent, rights and duties-based), 'participatory citizenship' (focused on reaching and mobilising citizens in direct action) and 'structural change agents' (focused on structural change to achieve social justice) (Montgomery et.al., 2004: 108-109). In addition to these categories, Montgomery and colleagues (2004) also found that many e-participation initiatives were aimed at educating young people for citizenship and were targeted at those deemed 'pre-engagement' (Montgomery, 2004: 110). They acknowledge that a limitation of their study is that they make assessments about the intention of the initiative based on publically available content and not on the views and visions of those behind the sites. Vromen (2008) has addressed this by examining the role of distinctive online spaces for democratic participation by looking at both the internet-based practices (site and level of activity) and the processes of initiatives (discussions with creators of the site and external commentary through media) (Vromen, 2008: 83). She has assessed the forms of citizenship promoted by three Australian participation initiatives as either: liberal, communitarian or deliberative. Both Vromen (2008) and Montgomery et.al. (2004) found that assessments of youth participation online reveal a diverse range of activity but that liberal (or personally responsible) and communitarian (participatory) forms of participation are more common than

deliberation or direct action online. From Vromen's research we can see that the role of the individuals and organisations behind participation initiatives play a key role in determining the form of citizenship promoted.

Similarly, Coleman has assessed online initiatives for participation in the United Kingdom by interviewing key managers of online initiatives. He argues that participation policies tend to promote either 'managed' or 'autonomous' forms of citizenship. His approach is particularly relevant to my study as he provides a framework for exploring the policy intent and the practical outcomes of participation initiatives in terms of the kind of citizenship being promoted for young people. I spend some time here exploring his work before using it in my analytical framework in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

2.4.2 Managed and Autonomous citizenship: Coleman (2008)

Coleman (2008) provides a useful framework for examining the role of organisations in promoting youth participation policies. Though the empirical work he has undertaken in developing a theory of forms of participation as promoted by through both government and non-government organisations is focused on the use of technology and is, therefore, concerned with the potential for youth e-citizenship, I argue that it is a useful framework for examining participation policies both on and offline. Here I have left in all references to the internet and online participation because I will return to look explicitly at the role of the internet for participation in Chapter 7.

Coleman has undertaken many studies on the role of digital media and information communication technologies (particularly the internet) for citizenship and democracy and he has look specifically at young people's use of digital media and citizenship (Coleman & Rowe, 2005; Coleman, 2007, 2008). The work in which I am most interested is a recent chapter in which Coleman develops the idea of 'managed' and 'autonomous' forms of citizenship (Coleman, 2008). He argues that that the policy of 'targeting young people' (specifically in relation to e-democracy) can be read as either 'a spur to youth activism or an attempt to manage it' (Coleman, 2008: 191). He distinguishes between these two policy goals in terms of organisations that aim to promote 'managed' or 'autonomous' citizenship. To illustrate this binary model, Coleman examines six youth civic engagement online initiatives in the United

Kingdom. Two were government funded, one was auspiced by a national charity and three did not receive any external funding. In analysing interviews with key actors involved in these initiatives, Coleman explores:

- their political objectives

- their use of digital technologies

- the extent to which they sought to control the discourse on politics and democracy on their websites

- their views towards government and other political institutions.

Through this analysis he identifies tendencies of 'autonomous' and 'managed' e-citizenship projects, described below in Table 1.

Table 1 Forms of e-citizenship (Coleman, 2007)

Managed Citizenship	Democratic Citizenship	Autonomous Citizenship
Receive external funding from governments or charities.	Government funded but independently managed. Young people are 'free' to express themselves and define the terms of citizenship	Do not receive external funding.
Mainly interested in establishing 'connections' between young people and institutions and political elites.	Include horizontal channels of interaction through which networks and collective associations can be formed including vertical channels linking young people to institutions that have power over them.	Express reservations about having too close a relationship with the state. Less interested in engaging with powerful institutions than forming communities for action.
View youth as apprentice citizens.	Young people seen as legitimate citizens who set the terms of their own political debate and engagement. Clear expectations about scope of influence outlined.	Regard young people as 'catalysts' - independent political agents.
Promote 'habits of civility' and empowering young people to 'have a say'.	Young people are encouraged to define participation and mobilise online however they see fit.	Less interested in 'having say' than actually taking action.
Liberal conception of citizenship	Participatory conception of citizenship	Participatory conception of citizenship

(Adapted from Coleman, 2008)

Whilst Coleman does not define them as such, I suggest that his definition of 'managed' citizenship reflects a rights-based conception of citizenship, while 'autonomous' citizenship reflects a participatory approach.

Coleman observes that the projects he has examined define 'the political' in traditional ways and that they are either reacting against, or in support for traditional democratic structures and actors (politicians, governments, trade unions) (Coleman, 2008: 203). He also acknowledges that his typology should be viewed with caution:

> *Although these two faces of e-citizenship represent ideal types, and should perhaps be understood as opposing points on a spectrum rather than mutually exclusive positions, they differ sufficiently in their contrasting conceptions of the status of young people, the affordances of digital technologies and the authenticity of "actually existing democracy" to provide a useful theoretical context…*

(Coleman, 2008:191)

Coleman goes onto suggest that a 'productive convergence' of these two empirically tested models is possible (Coleman, 2008: 202). This would form the basis of a contested or, perhaps difference-centred democracy in which deliberation and debate are fostered as described in Table 1. This productive convergence could be encouraged through the adoption of six policy principles on e-citizenship:

1. Government is willing to fund, but not directly manage or interfere with, common online spaces in which young people are free to express themselves as citizens, and about the terms of citizenship.

2. Online democratic spaces for young people shall include horizontal channels of interaction, through which networks and collective associations can be formed, as well as vertical channels, providing dialogical links to various institutions that have power and authority over them.

3. It is up to young people to set the terms of their own political debate, without any external censorship.

4. E-citizenship involves both free expression and consequential political engagement. Young people are not to be expected to participate unless the scope and terms of their influence is explicitly outlined.

5. Among other aspects of e-citizenship, opportunities and resources will be provided to ensure that young people encounter others with whom they might disagree strongly, within various kinds of deliberative settings.

6. Young people are encouraged to mobilize online to counter social injustices and broaden the political agenda in any way that they see fit.

(Coleman, 2008: 202)

By drawing into question the role of e-participation policies for 'autonomous' or 'managed' youth citizenship Coleman presents a framework for considering the role of e-participation policies for youth citizenship in my study. I therefore employ Coleman's framework to examine other case studies in an attempt to identify what other forms of citizenship may exist along the spectrum, of which 'managed' and 'autonomous' types form the extremities.

One weakness in Coleman's framework is that he doesn't consider who these policies are aimed at. As is often the case in the youth participation literature, young people are treated as a homogenous group and it is assumed that participation policies implemented through organisations are aimed at and received by all young people equally. Bang's work is useful here as he indicates that new forms of 'expert activism' may in fact produce patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

2.3.3 Participation policies and issues of inclusion and exclusion

The literature on youth participation quite consistently identifies concerning patterns of exclusion. There appear to be two areas of concern. First, that participation policies are being interpreted in a way that creates relatively few opportunities for a small minority of young people and that this minority tends to be made up of young people with good access to social, cultural and economic capital (as discussed in Marsh et.al., 2007: 131 – 132). The second concern is that participation policies as top-down, adult managed processes have the effect of legitimising some forms of youth participation and de-legitimising others.

Wierenga and colleagues find that young people in Australia perceive participation policies to engage with a small, privileged minority (Wierenga et. al., 2003: 24-25). This is a perception echoed by young people in the United Kingdom (Matthews, 2001: 316). Other studies question the representativeness of formal youth participation mechanisms such as roundtables (Bessant 2004: 400; Bo'sher, 2006: 343 - 344; Bridgland Sorenson, 2007), though they do not explore in detail which young people are mobilised and what processes influence who gets involved and why. Recent studies that have explored structured approaches to youth participation - such as youth advisory boards – found that they tend to facilitate the participation of high achieving young people who are well educated and employed (Singer & Chandra-Shekeran 2006: 50). This has been attributed to the fact that these policies often reproduce the processes and hierarchies of participation found in formal and traditional settings which require young people to understand these processes and have the skills and knowledge to contribute in a structured way (Mattews, 2001; Saggers, et.al. 2004: 106). Research has found that particular groups, such as young people from new and emerging communities and young people with disabilities are regularly excluded from discussions on participation (Badham, 2004; Francis and Cornfoot, 2007: 8-9). These young people are consequently less likely to know about opportunities to participate or see themselves as potential participants (Olliff, 2006; Bell et.al. 2008: 133). The emerging picture is that participation policies are not engaging with young people from a range of backgrounds and therefore are contributing to processes of exclusion.

This leads to the second, related concern about what is considered legitimate youth participation – who it is defined by, undertaken by and whether or not it is recognised. Some scholars express concern at the top-down nature of participation policies suggesting that it stifles bottom-up participation of young people (Hart, quoted in Badham, 2004: 4). From another perspective, some warn that network governance contributes to patterns of civil society appropriation by setting up, funding and managing civil society group whose autonomy is then seriously compromised (Maddison et.al., 2004; Marsh, 2008). This suggests that, as representatives of their peers or non-government organisations, young people may be coopted into managed processes which limit, rather than open up opportunities to contribute to policy making. For Coleman (2008), the concern is that participation policies push particular

notions of citizenship – for example dutiful citizenship – where conventional activities are emphasised (such as voting and dialoguing with elected representative in managed forums). Where this occurs, there is potential for activities that take place outside these normative activities are de-legitimised or not recognised.

In his work, Bang (2005) argues that the emergence of the Expert Citizen has the effect of producing a republican elite by requiring citizens to have 'professional' skills and competencies, therefore creating a bias towards those with the greatest advantage within the social structure. Whilst Bang accepts that Expert Citizens may be a necessary response to the growing complexity and reflexivity of society, he argues that this republican elitism further alienates 'lay-people' from the political process, creating a more serious problem of exclusion. On this note, Hendriks (2008) has argued that inclusion has received too little attention from network scholars given the central importance of inclusion to democracy, but also because, along with Bang, she is concerned about what she has found to be exclusionary tendencies in network processes (Hendriks, 2008).

2.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I have explored the broad context of youth participation whilst keeping in mind the literature that relates specifically to Australia and the United Kingdom. In doing so, I have identified a number of issues for the study of youth participation policies and youth political identity.

The first is that the study of youth participation policies must take into consideration the different theoretical perspectives that inform approaches to democracy and citizenship. This discussion has demonstrated that there are a number of ways to conceptualise citizenship and participation. Similarly, there is no single agreed purpose or practice for youth participation policies and that there are at least two approaches to youth participation: youth development and youth involvement. These different policies have implications for youth citizenship and raise important issues of inclusion and exclusion that have, to date, not been sufficiently dealt with in any systematic way in either Australia or the United Kingdom. Regardless of the extent to which government has been replaced by systems of governance, the language of participatory governance and the creation of mechanisms and roles that link citizens

to policy processes is an increasingly prominent feature of current policy in relation to young people. It is now almost obligatory for government and non-government organisations working with or for young people to include a commitment to youth participation in their objectives. Whilst the question of the extent and authenticity of network governance is an important one, my research is concerned with the relationship between *the idea* of participatory governance as it is presented in policy and how young people view politics and their role as citizens. In this discussion an emergent tension between network-oriented political identities and hierarchical systems of government is apparent and it is this tension that I am interested in exploring in the remainder of this thesis.

Using the work of Coleman (2008), I will consider in Chapters 5 and 6 the ways in which these different conceptualisations of youth and citizenship are reflected in policy and young people's perspectives. In particular, I use his typology to examine the role that organisations play in developing and delivering youth participation policies. In these discussions I also reflect on Bang's theory of new political identities and search for evidence of Expert Citizens, keeping in mind the relationship of participation policies to broader processes of network governance.

In the following chapter I will look at the way in which youth political participation has been studied and identify the gaps in knowledge that I seek to address in this thesis.

Chapter 3. Young People as Political Agents

So far I have discussed how youth participation policies are shaped by notions of citizenship and youth. In this chapter I look at the literature and identify ways of conceptualising and researching youth participation that responds to contemporary dynamics of democracy. I consider the literature addressing the ways that young people do - or do not - participate in democracy. In recent years, there have been several significant challenges to the way that political participation has been studied. In her influential book, *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism,* Norris (2002) argued that:

> *...political activism has been reinvented in recent decades by a diversification in the* **agencies** *(the collective organisations structuring political activity), the* **repertoires** *(the actions commonly used for political expression), and the* **targets** *(the political actors that participants seek to influence).*

> (Norris, 2002: 215 – 216. Words in bold are my own emphasis.)

This proposition has significant implications for the study of political participation, although Marsh et.al., (2007) have argued that much contemporary political science – at least in the United Kingdom – has been slow to respond (2007: 10). Here I consider Marsh and colleagues' claim that studies of youth participation have failed to take up this challenge of understanding how political participation may have changed and to consider the implications for contemporary democracy. I look at the literature from Australia as well as the United Kingdom and identify outstanding questions that my thesis seeks to address. As indicated in Chapter 2, theories of governance provide some consideration of these changes, though less attention has been paid to the kinds of repertoires, actors and targets of youth political identities.

By comparison, research in the area of internet use for political participation has drawn attention to the ways that civic engagement is changing and looks to young people's online practices to understand the nature and implications of such a transformation. Although there are debates about the extent to which the internet can mobilise those seen to be 'disengaged' or to reinforce the participation of those who are already civically-minded (Norris, 2001: 96 – 98), debates have shifted to examine how different groups use the internet for political participation and the diversity of

online practices that support civic engagement (Livingstone et.al. 2005; Vromen, 2007). Though this literature provides rich insights for the broader study of youth participation, mainstream studies continue to overlook the internet as a setting for a wide range of individual and community acts.

The final section of the chapter I consider three aspects of contemporary political participation: what underpins an interest in causes; the role of the state; and, the convergence of social and political life. In discussing these three aspects of political identity I focus on the work of Bang (2005), Bennett (2007), Marsh, O'Toole & Jones (2007) and Coleman (2008). I also identify how these scholars differ in their approaches to the study of citizenship in ways which compliment and extend how we research and conceptualise youth participation.

3.1 Issues in the study of youth participation

Though this research focuses on young people, it is broadly a study of participation. In many established democracies, there are indications that there is a decline in certain forms of political participation. Diminishing levels of electoral participation (IDEA, 1999, Pintor & Gratschew, 2002); party membership (Mair & van Biezen, 2001; Seyd & Whiteley, 2004), civic organisation membership (Putnam, 1995, 2000) and trust in governments and politicians (Norris, 1999: 6) have been heralded as signalling a crisis of democracy. Furthermore, there is evidence that these trends are more pronounced amongst young people (IDEA, 1999; Norris, 2003).

In the United Kingdom, studies of young people's behaviour and attitudes find lower levels of participation and loyalty to political parties and that lower numbers of young people vote or view electoral participation as a civic responsibility (Park 1998; Henn et.al., 2002; Pattie, et.al., 2004). The dominant view is of a youth cohort that doesn't care about politics or democracy. Pirie and Worchester (1998) have concluded that young people who were aged around 21 in 2000 have turned away from formal political processes and institutions, such as political parties and elections (Pirie and Worchester, 1998: 10-11). Although they find that this cohort is prepared to take action on issues they care about and that one in four have participated in activities such as fundraising for a cause, they conclude that this is an 'apolitical generation' (Pirie and Worchester, 1998:10). Henn et.al. (2002) also find that young people are

sceptical of governments and politicians, but that they are still supportive of democratic process and elections (Henn et.al., 2002: 186). In contrast to Pirie and Worchester they argue that young people are not apathetic, but they are disillusioned with unresponsive officials and political systems (Henn et.al., 2002: 187).

In Australia, research on political participation has also focused on forms of participation in traditional political arenas such as voting (eg. Hill & Young, 2006), political elites (eg. McAllister, 2003), levels of political knowledge and the 'effectiveness' of civic education (eg. McAllister, 1998; Mellor et.al. 2002) and membership of community groups (eg. Brown, et.al., 2003). There has historically been a preoccupation with civics and citizenship education which has resulted in a number of studies (Civics Expert Group, 1994; Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, 2007, Print, 2007) that conclude that there is a civic deficit that can be redressed through civic and electoral education. These studies take a normative approach to participation and focus on how conventional forms of political participation can be promoted. Where research on youth political participation has been undertaken, with few exceptions, the focus has been on political knowledge or 'civic literacy' (Civics Expert Group, 1994; McAllister, 1998; Mellor, et.al., 2002; Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, 2007); electoral participation (Print et.al., 2004; Saha et.al., 2005; Edwards et.al., 2006, Saha, et.al., 2007; Bean, 2007) and attitudes towards citizenship, politicians and governments (Lean 1996; Mellor, et.al., 2002; Manning & Ryan, 2004; Saulwick & Muller, 2006). Studies report that political knowledge and trust in politicians and parties is low amongst Australian young people and that very small numbers join political parties, unions and other formal political organisations (Beresford & Phillips, 1997; Vromen, 2003; Harris, et.al. 2007). Because voting is compulsory, Australia records high levels of participation of all age cohorts relative to countries with non-compulsory systems, such as the UK and USA. However, the Australian Electoral Commission has estimated that only 80% of young people aged 18 – 25 are enrolled to vote (Print, 2004: 2). Furthermore, when asked if they would enrol to vote if it were not compulsory, much lower numbers respond in the affirmative. The study found that only 50% of survey respondents 30% of focus groups respondents said they would enrol and vote if voting were not compulsory (Print, 2004). Many reported they did not see the efficacy of voting (Print, 2004).

In both country contexts, these approaches to researching youth political participation can be criticised on two fronts: for taking a narrow view of political participation; and, for not taking into account the role of the internet for political participation.

3.1.1 Narrow conceptions of political participation

Several recent studies have critiqued the mainstream literature for taking a 'narrow' and normative view of political participation (O'Toole, 2003; Vromen, 2003; Lister, et.al. 2003; Marsh et.al., 2007: 19; Harris et.al., 2007). Although some research has acknowledged that young people may conceptualise politics and participation differently (Park, 1998; Henn, 2002; Russell, 2005: 556), the tendency within the literature is to conclude that young people are not participating in traditional forms of political participation because they are either apathetic or insufficiently knowledgeable or socialised (Pirie & Worcester, 2000: 31-35).

Critics of the mainstream literature on youth political participation argue that it does not take into account – or seek to understand – the ways in which new 'agencies, repertoires and targets' (Norris, 2002: 215-216) of political participation feature in the political views and practices of young people (O'Toole et.al., 2003; Vromen, 2003; Harris et.al., 2007; Marsh et.al., 2007). This is partly due to the fact that most research is quantitative and uses surveys to assess attitudes and aspirations. However, large scale, survey-based research is not itself problematic, but rather the frames of reference used in analysis. For example, despite recognising 'non-conventional' forms of participation arising out of social movements and including demonstrations and protests (McAllister, 1992: 51-52), much of the literature concludes that young people who do not engage in predetermined forms of participation are 'inactive' (Parry et.al., 1992: 16) or 'disengaged' (Print et.al., 2004: 22). Whilst recent major studies have significantly expanded the definition of participation (Pattie et.al., 2004), they have none-the-less failed to explore young people's own views on politics and participation, instead measuring youth behaviour against 'adult-centric views of engagement' (2007: 22).

The failure to consider young people's conceptualisations of participation leads to two related criticisms: that non-participation is equated with apathy (O'Toole, et.al., 2003: 48); and, the omission of new forms of participation including those arising out of participation policies. Although mechanisms such as youth committees, advisory

boards and representative roles have been the subject of research into the efficacy of participation policies, these are rarely explicitly considered within the mainstream literature on political participation. Though they may be assumed to fall into the category of volunteering, it has been found that young people do not consider many of their participatory acts to be 'volunteering' (Ferrier, et.al., 2004) and so, it is likely that such forms of participation are not reported by young people and consequently may be 'falling off the radar'.

What is more problematic than not identifying non-conventional forms of participation, is that non-participation is rarely seen as a political act in itself and where engagement in non-conventional forms of protest or political participation are identified amongst young people they are dismissed due to negative correlation with voting intention (Saha, et.al., 2005: 17)[2]. These studies position young people as citizen apprentices and view disengagement as a failure in socialisation. The common assumption that disengagement or non-participation equate to ignorance (at best) or apathy (at worst) reflects a particular approach to youth and democracy. These studies take a developmental approach to youth and study youth political participation through a transitions lens.

Ultimately, the problem with this approach to studying youth participation is that new political views and vantage points are missed. A counter-point to the tune of non-participation is being promoted by approaches that reject the study of youth as a period of transition to adulthood, instead examining youth experience from a generational perspective (Wyn & Woodman, 2006). This means that studies must account for the distinct political, cultural, social, technological and economic environments in which young people live and explore how young people themselves conceptualise and respond to politics (Marsh, et.al., 2007). Some foundational work has been undertaken in this area (Marsh et.al. 2007; Eckersley et.al., 2007). These studies have used youth-centred, qualitative methods to explore young peoples' own conceptualisations and experiences of participation and to help explain why young people appear to be disengaging from conventional forms of political participation. Although there is significant debate about the nature and extent of changes in political

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[2] Edwards (2007; 2008) has published subsequent analysis of the YES data in which she has challenged the way non-normative acts and the qualitative data from the study is reported in the official YES reports.

participation across western democracies, there is little doubt that change in common approaches to political participation have taken place (Norris, 2003). As Pippa Norris describes it:

> *...the opportunities for political expression and mobilization have fragmented and multiplied over the years, like a swollen river flooding through different tributaries...*

(Norris, 2002: 216)

3.1.2 Accounting for information communication technology

The second criticism is that, mainstream studies of youth political participation do not consider the role that information communication technology has played in shaping the nature and forms of social relations that underpin political attitudes and actions.

Before looking at the way that the literature has examined young people's use of information communication technology for participation it is worth clarifying what a definition of new media and information communication technology might be. In the most recent edition of the *Handbook of New Media*, Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006) suggest that new media is made possible through information communication technology that can best be understood as 'infrastructures'.

> *...Infrastructures with three key components: artefacts or devices used to communicate or convey information; the activities or practices in which people engage to communicate or share information; and the social arrangements or organizational forms that develop around those devices and practices.*

(drawing on Star & Boweker in Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006: 2).

Therefore, in order to make sense of the impact of information communication technology, research must take into account how young people negotiate social structures and make meaning through technology. As a literature, research on youth and information communication technology is diverse and emerges from a range of disciplines including sociology, media studies, psychology, medicine, education and political science. Consequently, there are distinct epistemological, theoretical and empirical approaches which generate different kinds of knowledge about the impact

ICT are having on youth participation. Additionally, some studies look broadly at information communication technology use (Livingstone & Bober, 2004), others explore particular technologies, such as the internet or mobile phones, whilst others look at particular online practices, such as blogging (Wright & Street, 2007; Coleman & Wright: 2008), forums, chat rooms and social networking sites (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Boyd, 2008) and gaming (see von Fielitzen et.al., 2000). However, whilst rapid innovation in mobile and digital technology - including mobile phones, media players, and digital television - impacts on the experience of youth, the largest body of literature to date explores the role of the World Wide Web (WWW). As such, I have focused mainly on literature on the internet, but also take into account the critical role of other information communication technology and media in the contemporary experience of youth. For this reason, from here on, I mainly refer to the internet.

Whilst recent research in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Australia [Bennett (2003; 2007), Montgomery et.al. (2004) Livingstone and Bober (2004, 2005), Coleman and Rowe, (2005) and Vromen (2007; 2008)] has contributed significantly to our understanding of the role that information communication technology plays for young people's political participation and citizenship, this work has yet to be integrated and responded to by mainstream studies. For example, major studies, such as those by Print, Saha and Edwards (2004, 2005, 2006) and Marsh, O'Toole and Jones (2007) make mention of the internet only in passing.

The internet is often viewed as a novel situ or a means by which to extend existing political structures and as such, is often not seriously considered as a setting where young people are engaging and responding to issues. However, the literature on young people's use of the internet for participation indicates that incorporating the internet into broad studies of youth participation can shed new light on participatory attitudes and action. The recent use of mobile phones and internet by the Obama presidential campaign in the United States of America highlights the importance of understanding and integrating information communication technology use in mainstream studies of political participation. However, there are theoretical and empirical challenges for how 'e-participation' is conceptualised and how is should be researched.

3.2 New understandings and ways of researching youth political participation

A number of studies in both Australia and the United Kingdom have found that although young people are distrustful of politicians and governments, less knowledgeable and efficacious about politics and less likely to join political parties, unions and other formal political organisations, they are interested in political issues (Henn, et.al., 2002; Beresford & Phillips, 1997; Threadgold & Nilan, 2003; Harris, et.al., 2007) and engage in a more diverse range of political acts than are usually considered by mainstream quantitative studies (Vromen, 2003, 2007; Pattie, et.al., 2004; Fyfe, 2006; Harris, 2007). This paradox suggests that rather than being a-political or apathetic, young people are conceptualising politics and participation in new ways.

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, a major contribution to recent thinking on the nature of political participation has been made by Norris who has argued that political activism has been reconstituted by a diversification in the *agencies, repertoires* and *targets* of participation (Norris, 2003: 215-216). Norris has used the 15-nation Social Survey to examine changing patterns of political participation across age groups (Norris, 2003). As a result of her comparative research (2002; 2003 and with colleagues, Walgrave & Von Aelst, 2005) Norris has argued that low levels of youth participation in traditional political activities do not indicate broad levels of apathy or disengagement, but a generational change in common forms of political participation. She conceptualises this as a shift away from citizen-oriented activities to cause-oriented activities. This move towards cause-oriented repertoires is associated with less engagement with traditional voluntary associations such as unions and political parties, and more with new social movements. Figure 1 presents the theoretical typology developed by Norris:

Figure 1 Typology of the evolution of political action

<div align="right">
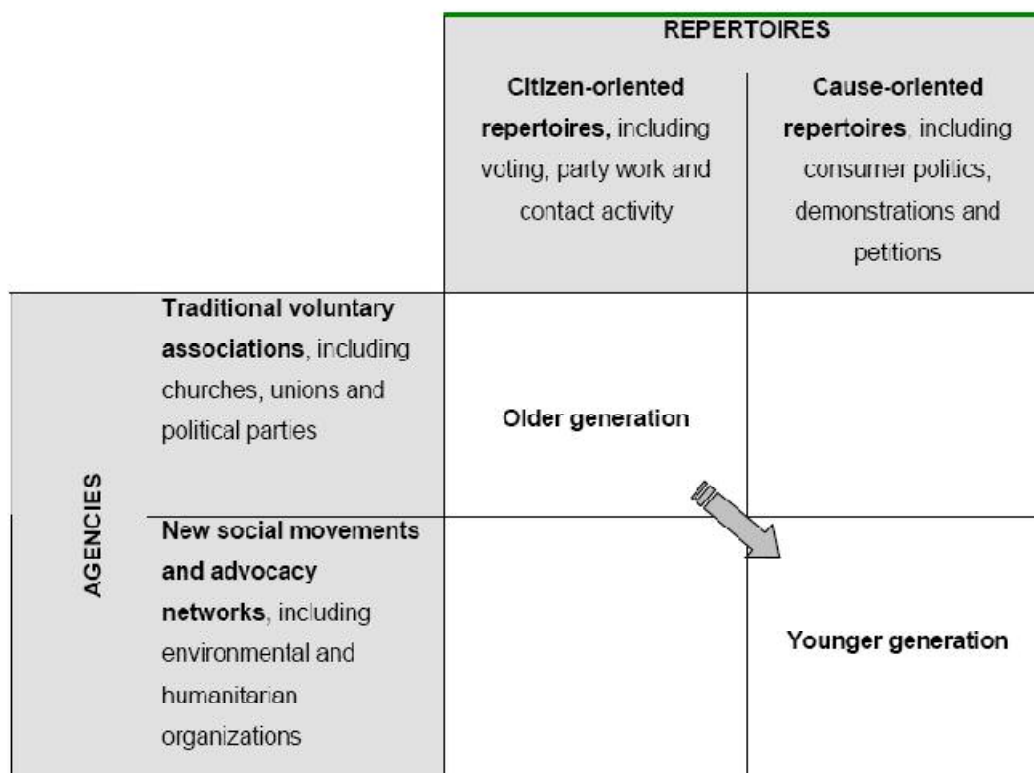
(Source: Norris, 2003: 22)

</div>

Norris posits that there has been a generational shift away from the traditional 'politics of loyalties' to the new repertoires and agencies reflecting a 'politics of choice' (Norris, 2003). She finds that this is particularly apparent amongst young people (Norris, 2003).

There are three implications of Norris' theory that are particularly relevant to my study. Firstly, there is an empirical question of how young people conceptualise politics and what kinds of participatory acts they are engaging in. Secondly, it suggests that the role of the state has changed with citizens increasingly directing their political activities towards the public, private and voluntary sectors. Thirdly, that the distinction between the political and the social has become blurred as people are increasingly engaged in consumer and lifestyle politics. Below I look at how the literature has addressed each of these points, and provide a focused discussion contrasting the positions of Bang (2005), Bennett (2007), Marsh, O'Toole & Jones (2007) and Coleman (2008) who have all made important empirical or theoretical

contributions to the study of youth political identity which I use to make sense of my empirical data. In this final discussion I bring together both general studies and those that focus on online participation because the division between online and offline participation is potentially a false one, and I argue that studies of online participation can tell us important things about young people's approaches to participation in general.

3.2.2 New repertoires of participation

There is significant evidence of the distinct forms of participation undertaken by young people and much of the literature supports the idea that young people are mobilised by issues, rather than traditional loyalties to institutions or ideologies.

Forms of participation

Research finds that young people in both Australia and the United Kingdom are engaged in a diverse range of individual and group-based forms of participation. Many of these reflect activities that can be associated with social movements, such as signing petitions, attending rallies and events (Vromen, 2003; Saha, 2005; Roker & Eden, 2002), traditional volunteering and (Brown, et.al., 2003; Attwood, et.al., 2003; Ferrier, 2004), participation in formal consultations (Mattews, 2001; Roker & Eden, 2002; Bridgland-Sorensen, 2006) and new acts related to information communication technologies, such as online petitioning, blogging and contacting decision makers via SMS (Stayner 2005). Similarly, new forms of deliberation and communitarian action such as information sharing and bringing together new networks for action utilise email, user-generated content and social networking sites (Montgomery 2007; Vromen 2007; 2008). Research on the use of the internet for participation has provided the richest source of knowledge on new forms of participation as many are facilitated by the internet and related technologies.

For example, in Australia, Vromen has used surveys to examine the relationship between young people's political participation and internet use, but employed a broad definition of 'participation' (Vromen, 2003; 2007). She surveyed a range of participatory acts, that could be undertaken individually or as a member of a group and that accounted for normatively 'conventional' and 'unconventional' participation. For example, boycotting, using the internet to find information on an issue,

organisation or action, discussing issues online (Vromen, 2007). She found that the internet plays a significant role in facilitating information seeking and sharing (Vromen, 2007) and that the internet plays an important role in creating space for young people's political participation. However, she contests the normative ideal of deliberation as a goal for online e-citizenship initiatives (Vromen, 2008: 94) arguing that the liberal and communitarian-style sites play an important role in facilitating information sourcing, individual-led and group-led communication in which young people are able to explore and express political views and take action. However, she warns against constructing deliberation as the normative ideal for youth e-citizenship:

> *Setting up a normative ideal of youth-led Internet spaces as a democratic public sphere is possibly another benchmark that will interpret young people's political engagement and behaviours as deficient.*

<div align="right">(Vromen, 2008: 95)</div>

The more useful pursuit, as Vromen sees it, is to sudy the diversity of young people's internet use for political participation, expression and community-building.

Similarly, Livingstone & Bober (2004) used focus groups and a multi-media, computer aided face-to-face survey, to study the internet use of 12 - 19 year olds in Britain (*UK Children Go Online*: http://www.children-go-online.net). They asked young people about their online activities such as online gaming, chat, looking at other people's homepages and searching for information, advice and news. By measuring three types of online activity − interacting with websites, visiting civic websites and creating websites – they used cluster analysis to develop a typology of young people's online participation. They conclude that there are three distinct groups: *Interactors, the Civic-Minded* and the *Disengaged. Interactors* are most likely to be middle-class boys, with high levels of access and skills in the internet and although they engage in a wide range of online activities including seeking information, advice and content creation, Livingstone et.al. conclude that these activities are not likely to be civic pursuits. By comparison, they find that the (somewhat misleadingly named) *Disengaged* are likely to be from lower socio-economic status and do not have a computer at home. They find that these young people are less likely than the other two groups to engage in online activity. Despite providing valuable insights into the ways that young people engaged with the internet

generally, their conclusions in relation to political participation are more limited. Although focus groups were also conducted, it is not clear from the survey research what young people mean by 'political'. Indeed, the authors acknowledge that unanswered questions on the relationship between online and offline activities remain (Livingstone, et.al. 2005: 304).

Though both Livingstone et.al. (2005) and Vromen have surveyed a broad range of activities their (largely quantitative) studies still required the researcher to define the range of participatory acts. These studies do not, therefore, provide insight into the meaning and use of seemingly 'non-political' acts (such as using social networking sites, such as www.myspace.com or open publishing, such as www.vibewire.net or www.actnow.com.au). Nevertheless, they make a number of important findings on young people's online participation and, therefore, advance our understanding of youth participation generally.

Firstly, young people use the internet in diverse ways to support participatory activities. This includes searching for and sharing information, peer-to-peer communication and content creation. However, whilst there is interest on the part of young people to seek out information and opportunities for civic engagement, their activity is limited. Both Livingstone et.al. (2005) and Vromen (2008) suggest this is a challenge for youth organisations and content producers – rather than a deficiency in young people.

They also find that the internet reinforces existing political practices, rather than mobilising new political actors. However, Livingstone et.al. find that all forms of online activity are positively correlated so that the more young people do online the more likely they are to be engage in civic activity online. Importantly, these studies also demonstrate that e-participation is shaped by gender, level of education and employment status.

Shaping young people's views

Young people care about a wide range of issues that relate to local, national and international concerns (Henn, et.al., 2002: 176; Beresford & Phillips; 1997; Aveling, 2001; Harris et.al., 2007: 25). However, studies often take for granted or overlook what influences their interest in issues and the forms of participation they engage in (Roker & Eden, 2002: 15). Here I contrast three accounts of politics as everyday life.

Politics as 'lived experience'

Like Norris, Bennett (1998; 2007) has argued against the claim of a decline in civic engagement in favour of a shift towards new forms of political interest and participation due in large part to the increasing uncertainty of the contemporary social, cultural and economic environment (Bennett, 1998: 751-753). Consequently, he argues, young people are employing 'independent identity management strategies' (Bennett, 2007: 61). They are increasingly reflexive and self-actualising and consequently find greater satisfaction in defining their own political paths (Bennett, 2007: 61). This is in contrast to previous generations who could be characterised as 'Dutiful': guided by ideologies, mass movements, and traditional loyalties to particular parties or government support structures. The main characteristics of self-Actualising[3] and Dutiful citizens are listed in Table 2.

Table 2 Characteristics of Dutiful Citizens and self-Actualising citizenship

self-Actualising Citizen	Dutiful Citizen
Diminished sense of government obligation – higher sense of individual purpose	Obligation to participate in government centred activities
Voting is less meaningful than other, more personally defined acts such as consumerism, community volunteering or transnational activism	Voting is the core democratic act
Mistrust of media and politicians is reinforced by negative mass media environment	Becomes informed about issues and government by following mass media
Favours loose networks of community action – often established or sustained through friendships and peer relations and thin social ties maintained by interactive information technologies	Joins civil society organisations or expresses interests through parties that typically employ one-way conventional communication to mobilise supporters

(Source: Bennett, 2007: 63)

Self-Actualising Citizens therefore are mobilised in relation to personal political concerns and connect informally to issues through family and friendship groups, lifestyle and identity, a position supported by empirical research in the United

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[3] Bennett switches between referring to 'self-Actualising' and 'actualising' but here I will use 'self-Actualising'.

Kingdom (Roker & Eden, 2002: 15). Self-Actualising Citizens contribute to permanent campaigns at local, national and international levels, undertake a wide range of individual and personalisable acts, such as boycotting and ethical purchasing, volunteer at a community level and contribute to counter-discourses through online publishing (Bennett, 2007). He finds that self-Actualising Citizens are unresponsive to Dutiful Citizen values, repertoires and actors (Bennett, 2007: 62) and that they are largely issue-oriented.

Politics as project-based

Bang provides a slightly different interpretation, although there are many similarities in his account to Bennett's. In Chapter 2 I introduced the notion of the Expert Citizen (2005) who Bang suggests is a response to the processes of network governance characteristic of late modernity. Bang theorises that Expert Citizens engage in 'project-oriented' participation which is replacing traditional collective and oppositional participation (Bang, 2005: 163). He argues that this demonstrates how:

- the political is growing increasingly personal and self-reflexive;

- civil engagement is couched increasingly in political networks rather than positioned against a hierarchy;

- participation is becoming structured around the choice of whether and when one will 'engage' in, and 'disengage' from a given context;

- the desire and perception of necessity together drive the sense of engagement;

- ethics, personal integrity and mutual confidence appear as central elements in political life.

(Bang, 2005: 163)

So whilst Bennett's self-Actualising citizen is mobilised by a sense of individual purpose and issues that relate to personally important, socially relevant issues, the Expert Citizen is mobilised through the full-time project of network governance. However, Bang finds that the prerogative of the Expert Citizen is challenged by another new political identity: the 'Everyday Maker'.

The Everyday Maker is also politically disposed, and project-oriented, but whose political activities are directed beyond formal or official policy networks. They are cause-oriented, but are not inclined towards collective action (for instance, as part of a social movement), favouring individualised or micro-political participation instead. They see potential for political participation in everyday activities and seek to effect small, profound change, rather than shift grand narratives or create new spaces in the existing political structure. Everyday Makers might engage in such activities as blogging, sitting on the organising committee for an event, signing online petitions, timing their showers (to keep to under four minutes!) and riding a bicycle. Box 2 contains a description of the Everyday Maker.

Box 2 The Everyday Maker

The 'credo' of the Everyday Maker as:
- do it yourself;
- do it where you are;
- do it for fun, but also because you find it necessary;
- do it ad hoc or part time;
- do it concretely, instead of ideologically;
- do it self-confidently and show trust in yourself;
- do it with the system, if need be.

(Bang, 2005: 169)

Like the Expert Citizen, the Everyday Maker does not assume an oppositional or legitimising political identity, in the 'passive' or 'active' (Turner, 1990) sense. Rather, the Everyday Makers is a reaction *against* what they see as the elitist, professionalised politics of the Expert Citizen. Like Bennett, Bang argues that these project-oriented identities demonstrate how the political has become personal and self-reflexive, about 'choice', responding to one's own need to take action on a cause (Bang, 2005: 163).

Politics as 'structured, lived experience'

Responding to the claim that young people's disengagement from conventional forms of participation is an indication of widespread apathy or ignorance, Marsh, O'Toole & Jones (2007) conducted a qualitative study into how young people in Birmingham, England, conceptualised politics and participation. Using focus groups that utilised

photo-language[4] and in-depth interviews they explored the way that young people's experiences of gender, class, age and ethnicity shaped their views and approaches to political participation.

They argue that young people are marginalised from mainstream political arenas through social economic and cultural processes - including management by the state - and that these experiences shape their views towards politics and participation. In particular, they find that:

- young people's experiences of adult political domains structure young people's lived experiences,

- access to economic capital affected young people's perceptions of politics and the extent to which they felt politics affected their everyday lives

- experiences of gender were closely linked to class with disadvantaged young women more likely to talk about gender inequalities

- racialised political discourses, mono ethnic political institutions and ethnic segregation contributed to young people's disengagement from formal politics

(Marsh et.al., 2007: 212-215)

They conclude that politics and political actions are a crucial way through which young people construct their identities and that some of these young people expressed their political views in everyday actions. Marsh et.al., note that '[i]f Bang is right, and particularly if there is a growing number of Everyday Makers… then people, perhaps especially young people, are redefining politics as part of their 'lived experience' (Marsh et.al. 2007: 215). However, they emphasise that 'lived experience' is structured by experiences of gender, class, age and ethnicity. Marsh, O'Toole and Jones (2007) provide a framework for exploring the way that structural inequality shapes young people's views and participatory trajectories. This account of structured lived experience is supported by a consistent finding in the literature that youth participation is shaped by class and gender (Vromen, 2003; Thomson et.al., 2004;

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[4] Photo-language involves presenting participants with a range of images and asking them to interpret what is going on. Marsh et.al. also asked respondents to sort the images into those which they thought were political and those that we not.

Livingstone et.al, 2005) and that young people's views of citizenship reveal processes of inclusion and exclusion (Lister et.al, 2003).

Whilst each of these approaches highlights the important role of everyday life experience (as opposed to ideology or tradition) for shaping young people's political views and actions, Bennett and Bang emphasise the role of agency, whilst Marsh et.al. draw attention to the role of social structures.

3.2.2 Role of the State and traditional political institutions and actors

Traditionally, citizenship theory has conceptualised political identities primarily in terms of their relationship to the state: as either legitimating (consenting to state domination) or oppositional (struggling against state domination) (Bang, 2005: 169). It has been well established that young people are sceptical and distrustful of politicians and governments (Henn, et.al., 2002: 186; Print, 2004: 21; Saulwick & Muller, 2006: 09) and this has been used to explain low levels of participation in political parties and enrolment or intention to vote. As discussed above, whilst some have interpreted this as an indication that young people are disengaged from politics (Pirie and Worchester, 1998; Print, 2004), others have suggested that young people are refocusing their efforts on other political targets (Norris, 2003).

Bennett notes that young people experience the world of government and politicians, elections and law-making as distant and often disagreeable (2007: 62, 66). He observes that the reasons for this are complex:

> *The pathways to disconnection from government are many: adults are frequently negative about politics, the tone of the press is often cynical, candidates seldom appeal directly to young voters on their own terms about their concerns, politicians have poisoned the public well (particularly in the United States) with vitriol and negative campaigning, and young people see the media filled with inauthentic performances from officials who are staged by professional communication managers.*

(Bennett, 2008: 1)

By comparison, he suggests that when young people do take political action, it is often in relation to 'lifestyle' concerns which are perceived to be outside the realm of

government (Bennett, 2008: 2). However, both Bennett and Bang suggest that a decline in youth engagement with traditional political institutions and forms of participation is not only due to disillusionment and feelings of alienation, but also because of new opportunities for political action that are appearing through networks. Whereas Bennett highlights new activist networks facilitated via (Bennett, 2003), Bang focuses on the role of formal policy networks (Bang, 2005).

Bang argues that project-oriented political identities do not act in support of, or against, but rather, in collaboration with the state – along with other elite non-state actors in governance networks. They focus their energies on the building of networks and reflexive political communities that respond to issues, rather than structures. For the Expert Citizen, these networks are formal and professionalised, whereas, for the Everyday Maker, they are loose and informal (Bang, 2005). The way that Expert Citizens and Everyday Makers mobilise in relation to networks and partnerships between private, public and voluntary organisations challenges the authority of the state, but also engages with it. By contrast, the 'self-actualising' drive that Bennett has identified (2007) is incongruent with the state whose institutions and actors are characterised by tradition, rigidity and hierarchy. So whilst young people experience the state in various ways – such as, civic education that emphasises models of Dutiful Citizenship – they are not reacting against it, but rather looking past a model of government that they see as irrelevant to their lives. Bennett would argue that the self-Actualising citizen favours loose networks of community action and that these are most likely - though perhaps not actively – to exclude the state and its representatives.

As such, both Bennett and Bang argue that young people are not so much acting against, or turning away from the state, but are looking beyond it to shape the kind of society they want to live in. Both these perspectives suggest that the state has been replaced by identity, 'lifestyle' and networks as primary influences on political identity. Whilst it may well be the case, that young people's political identities are no longer formed consciously in support or opposition to traditional political actors and institutions, Marsh et.al. (2007 have argued that the state continues to play a significant role in shaping young people's ideas of the political and participation.

Though Marsh et.al. (2007) concur with Bang in his observation that Everyday Makers do not relate to concepts of left and right and are critical of politicians and

parties, and that they prefer to participate in concrete, short term projects, they challenge his view that young people see the state as increasingly irrelevant (Marsh et.al., 2007: 215-216). Although they find that their research participants were not involved in formal politics, they identified examples where young people engaged in informal, 'everyday' forms of participation that were connected in their minds to the state and its representatives, agencies and services. The research respondents who were disadvantaged (mostly on the basis of class), felt their lives were constantly determined by the state via social security and welfare-to-work policy (Marsh et.al., 2007: 217; 151)

Marsh and colleagues also conclude that the young people in their study felt inefficacious and unimportant when it came to politicians and politics. Many felt that politics was something that was 'done unto' them and that those who had less economic, cultural and social capital felt their lives were determined by the state (Marsh et.al., 2007: 211-212). So whilst youth political identities may not be founded on loyalty to institutions and processes of democracy, Marsh et.al. argue that the sense of being both marginalised and controlled by the state demonstrates that the state still plays a significant role in shaping young people's views of politics and participation.

Coleman (2008) presents a slightly different view in that he looks at the relationship between the state and young people through policies for e-citizenship. In his research on e-participation initiatives in the United Kingdom, Coleman identifies a number of binary perspectives commonly used to examine young people as e-citizens:

- young people as apprentices or catalysts;

- the internet as anarchy or enclave;

- democracy as existing or aspirational.

(Coleman, 2008)

These positions, he argues, reflect the 'two faces' of democracy: one where the internet can extend the existing system of democracy which is undermined by (young) citizens who are failing to engage; and, two, where democracy is viewed as a political and cultural aspiration 'most likely to be realised through networks in which young people engage with one another' (Coleman, 2008: 192). As described in Chapter 2,

Chapter 3. Young People as Political Agents

Coleman's typology of Managed and Autonomous Citizenship reflects empirical evidence that these two perspectives on citizenship are being reinforced through e-citizenship projects. Dutiful Citizen behaviours are promoted through Managed citizenship projects, whilst self-Actualising Citizens are fostered through Autonomous Citizenship projects. However, Coleman suggests that Autonomous Citizenship is a reaction against the state and that the role is an oppositional one. Coleman retains the state as a central influence in the political identities of young people by suggesting that a 'productive convergence' between Managed and Autonomous Citizenship is possible (This is described in Chapter 2). This convergence would be more akin to a network view of state/citizen relations as argued by Bang. There are doubtlessly opportunities to use the interactivity of the internet to bring young people and decision makers together in processes of agenda-setting and debate (Coleman and Rowe 2005; Bennett, 2007). For example, in the United Kingdom, the Hansard Society's *HeadsUp (*www.headsup.org.uk) initiative brings together students and members of parliament in online discussions on political issues. The debates are timed to coincide with related events and inquiries of parliament. Members of parliament report back to participants following forum discussions, drawing attention to parallels between the parliamentary outcomes and the conclusions of the HeadsUp forums (Ferguson 2007). Indeed, there are many possible ways for the internet and other information communication technologies to transform citizenship by revolutionising conventional processes and institutions of democracy (eg. Coleman & Spiller, 2004; Gibson, et.al. 2004; Ward et.al., 2006; Chen et.al. 2007). However, the challenge is for the internet to link young people with political institutions and actors in whom they have lost faith.

The point here is that young people's experience is still largely framed by citizenship policies which afford young people little agency and which are oriented towards institutions and processes which they see as either antagonistic or alien (Bennett, 2007; Coleman, 2008). As we shall see in the next section, such strategies conflict with young people's desire to be agents and authors of citizenship.

Rather than being irreconcilable, I find that the positions outlined above demonstrate the diverse ways that the state affects young people's ideas of politics and participation.

3.2.2 The coming together of social and political life

I have established that there are sound arguments for why we should understand lived experience as being at the centre of youth political participation. A second consequence of this shift is that social life and political life are increasingly coming together. Vromen (2003) has called for the redefinition of participation. She argues:

Participation need not be bifurcated into acts that are labelled 'political' and those that are not; rather, participation can be seen broadly as acts that can occur, either individually or collectively, that are intrinsically concerned with shaping the society that we want to live in. This kind of approach necessarily sees political institutions, and actions aimed at shaping those institutions, as embedded in broader societal processes.

(Vromen, 2003: 82-83)

This means social research must search for and acknowledge new arenas or settings for political participation. Here I consider the internet as a setting where social and political lives converge.

The internet as a setting for political participation

With the development of communication technologies social and political life is increasingly occurring beyond the limitations of geography and place, and identity is ever more produced through action and performance (Giddens 1991; Castells 1997). The implications of the internet for identity production, and the formation of communities online are of significant interest to scholars, though diverse technologies have been viewed in distinct ways. For instance, research on gaming initially explored the positive effects on creativity and learning, but has shifted in recent times to focus on the perceived negative impacts, particularly anti-social behaviour (Buckingham 2006). Conversely, research on the internet has looked at how the web can facilitate creative expression and provide new opportunities for young people to explore and experiment with identity through email, chat rooms, blogging and the production − as well as consumption − of online content (eg. Coleman and Rowe 2005; Montgomery 2007). Studies have also explored the way that young people use the internet to explore and express their identities through the challenging and performance of dominant discourses of, for example, gender (eg. Harris 2004) and sexuality (eg.

Hillier and Harrison 2007). Subculture analysis (Harris, 2001), studies on how politically engaged young people use the internet (Dahlgren & Olsson, 2007) and case studies on youth-led or youth-oriented web-based services (Vromen, 2007) have provided unique insights into the nature and forms of young people's online participation.

One of the key theoretical questions shaping the study of information communication technologies and youth identity relates to the changing boundaries between public and private. Scholars argue that the internet is making young people's private lives increasingly public (Harris 2004; Livingstone 2006; Boyd, 2008). The focus is now on understanding the nature of political identity and how young people enter and behave in this new public landscape. Harris has argued that authoring oneself online is manifest in 'confessional styles' that transform 'intimate details and experience into material for popular consumption' (Harris 2004: 128). In this way, she argues, the distinction between the private and public is blurred – perhaps inverted. As such, by 'living large' online (Harris 2004: 128) through membership of online communities and the authoring and publication of online content, young people construct and claim new, legitimate spaces in the public sphere. However, there are doubts that simply creating a website, blog or MySpace page are enough to engage young people in political processes or institutions. Boyd argues that for technology to engage people in democracy individuals must be able to negotiate their identity, relationships and community as part of the political process (Boyd 2005).

Using ethnographic research to examine social networking sites such as Friendster (www.friendster.com) and MySpace (www.myspace.com), Danah Boyd has theorised that by chatting on each other's profiles, young people are holding previously private conversations in new public spaces (Boyd, 2008). Moreover, she argues that the emergence of *networked publics* signals a new kind of public (social formation) and space (locality). These *networked publics* are distinguished from other kinds of publics by being: persistent (permanent); searchable (individuals and their personal information can easily be located); replicable (information, comments and multimedia can be copied and disseminated); and populated by 'invisible audiences' (Boyd, 2008: 120). As a result, she argues that traditional notions of membership must be rethought.

Chapter 3. Young People as Political Agents

Additionally, degrees and expressions of agency and the structures that young people must negotiate are changing as interactivity enabled through bulletin boards, instant messenger and online chat is surpassed by 'open systems' technology of social networking sites, public publishing and virtual gaming environments. Boyd's work demonstrates the importance that young people place on agency in forming ideas, communities, responses and action. If we take a broad view of political participation then the meanings and activities of young people on social networking sites can be analysed using different criteria. For example, to what extent do they:

- use social networking sites to promote participation in one off activities (such as Earth Hour; vote for Obama) which do not require formal membership or ongoing commitment?

- use these sites to promote issues within their peer networks?

- connect informally to campaigns and groups?

- publish or share content that blurs the distinction between cultural and political expression?

There is also the question of whether or not social networking sites, blogs and other Web 2.0 functions play a key role in point-in-time events that lead to an increase in participation, such as the 2004 United States election (Montgomery, 2008: 29). Although focused on voting, campaigns such as Rock the Vote, The Hip Hop Summit Action Network, Citizen Change and Voces del Pueblo provide compelling examples of the way that culture and politics have been linked in the production of new political acts (Montgomery, 2008: 30). If we view culture and social relations as implicitly political we can begin to explore how young people develop and express their political views in non-institutional ways.

Bennett's work finds that young citizens are looking for forms of political participation that can be personalised and overlap into other aspects of their lives (such as friendship groups) and which transcend geographical, communication and temporal barriers associated with traditional media and forms of organising (Bennett, 2007: 62). In this context, Bennett argues that the internet plays a crucial role in facilitating participatory repertoires that achieve this:

Various uses of the Internet and other digital media facilitate the loosely structured networks, the weak identity ties, and the issue and demonstration campaign organizing that define a new global politics.

(Bennett, 2003: 164)

He has observed the way that the internet facilitates wide, shallow networks for action and the way that 'hyperlinked communication networks enable individuals to find multiple points of entry into varieties of political action' (Bennett, 2003: 144). This provides 'resource-poor players' with the means to access information and support and it acts as a setting in which to develop 'political strategies outside of conventional national political channels such as elections and interest processes' (Bennett, 2003: 144). Bennett suggest that the shift from a group-based society to a 'networked society' has resulted in individuals becoming 'more responsible for the production and management of their own social and political identities' (Bennett, 2008: 13).

The role of the internet for enabling young people to 'author' citizenship is well demonstrated in the work of Coleman and Rowe (2005). In their study, *Democracy and Young People's Use of the Internet,* Coleman and Rowe (2005) take a youth-centred approach to researching the role of the internet for young people's democratic citizenship in Britain. Young people were asked to visit specific websites and then respond to questions about them in online and offline forums. Coleman and Rowe found that young people express themselves politically online through cause-related networks. They want to engage creatively with politics and to 'remix citizenship' – define for themselves what is 'political' and what kinds of participatory acts they should engage in. Importantly, their research found that the internet itself is not enough to ensure engagement – young people want to be agents of change who have real power to influence decisions. Participants were adept at distinguishing between online spaces where they are able to exercise both creativity and influence – and those where they cannot. As argued in Chapter 2, Coleman's research has found that the more sites are 'managed' and controlled the less inclined young people are to engage with them (Coleman, 2008). Instead, young people want to be taken seriously as producers and partners in processes of online deliberation and engagement (Coleman & Rowe, 2005).

73

This discussion raises several points of note. Firstly, young people experience – and expect – high levels of agency online. This means they are seeking out ways to express themselves, connect with others and take action in ways that bring together dimensions of their lives that were previously held distinct. Secondly, in the convergence of social and political life, networks play a critical role. Though Bang does not really explore the role of the internet or informal networks for project-oriented identities, Bennett demonstrates that the internet is integral to the politics of the ordinary which are at the core of both Everyday Makers and self-Actualising citizens. This highlights a tension between network-oriented political identities and hierarchical systems of government and it is this tension that I am interested in exploring in the remainder of this thesis.

3.3 A question of structure or agency?

In this chapter I have laid out some of the central debates in the study of youth political participation, focusing on the benefits of using a definition of political participation that is rooted in everyday political experience. This is a well argued position of many scholars and most would agree that this view of political participation as lived experience requires treating participation as the result of individual agency. Bang and Bennett would certainly agree with this proposition. However, as noted throughout the discussion, there is much evidence that participation and political attitudes are shaped by structural factors – particularly class and gender. Here I return to the issue of exclusion discussed in Chapter 2.

Bang maintains a concern - one which I will investigate in this study - that the professional political participation of Expert Citizens further alienates ordinary citizens from the processes of democracy, diminishing trust in representative political institutions and exacerbating political exclusion. According to Bang, this problem of exclusion applies to those who cannot, or will not, participate in governance networks (Bang, 2005: 173). Though Bang's theory is that 'everyday making' is a reaction against the new authority of Expert Citizens who operate within governance networks and partnerships, the dilemma posed for youth participation policies is how to recognise forms of participation that fall outside of formal, structured and often managed participatory activities. In other words how do – or how could –

organisations recognise the 'politics of the ordinary' (Bang, 2005: 173) through participation policies?

As illustrated above, whilst Marsh and colleagues (2007) acknowledge the role of agency, they demonstrate the importance of examining how young people's understandings and responses to the political are structured by their experiences of gender, class, ethnicity and age. Here I outline their argument for conceptualising political participation as *structured* lived experience because it has significantly influenced my own study and I hope to contribute to the discussion of youth political participation which they have opened up.

Marsh et.al. (2007) argue that positivist approaches to the study of political participation – even those which take a 'broad view' of participation – are limiting. Instead, they take a critical realist approach to the study of political participation. This approach rests on the following logic:

- individuals are constituted through experience;

- this experience is neither self-evident, nor uncontested, and is an interpretation of the subject;

- furthermore, social research requires the researcher's interpretation of the research subject's interpretation of social reality (the double hermeneutic);

- these interpretations are shaped by 'real world' processes. We use theory to make sense of how this 'real world' impacts on our understandings of it, and our behaviour; and, therefore,

- the real world is characterised by inequality and privilege which shape, but do not determine the lived experiences of people.

(Marsh, et.al., 2007: 27-29)

This means that age, gender, ethnicity and class shape 'lived experience' in ways that influence – but do not determine - people's understandings and experiences of politics. Furthermore, their approach does not view these as fixed categories and their research aimed, in part to develop an understanding of what meaning young people attach to such concepts (Marsh, et.al. 2007: 29).

Whilst my research is significantly different in terms of purpose and methodology, I accept their arguments for a critical realist approach given that the existing evidence suggests that it is necessary to incorporate the subjective experiences of youth into analyses of the roles of young people in society whilst emphasising that '…life chances and processes of social reproduction remain highly structured" (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997: 2).

3.4 Conclusions

Throughout this discussion of key themes have emerged which I place at the centre of my study on youth political identity:

- The relationship between young people and traditional institutions of democracy;

- The relationship between the internet and young people's political participation; and,

- The role of structure and agency.

More broadly, I find that the enduring problem for youth citizenship – which is both explicitly and implicitly implied in the work of Bennett, Bang, Coleman and Marsh – is one of recognition.

The work of Marsh, O'Toole & Jones (2007), Bang (2005), Bennett (2007) and Coleman (2008) has advanced our understanding of youth political participation and the role that the internet and participation policies play. However, their work leaves three critical questions unanswered which I engage with directly in this thesis.

Firstly, they do not sufficiently explore the role that policies and organisations play in shaping young people's views and experiences of participation. Whilst they examine the impact of welfare programs (and find that these adversely affect young people's views, experiences and sense of efficacy [Marsh et.al., 2007: 216 – 217]), these are ostensibly about promoting young people's participation in education, training and employment – not in community or government decision making. Similarly, Coleman's work engages with the intent of participation policies, but does not engage with young people's experiences of them. However, policies for youth participation

create a discourse and actual mechanisms and their role in the development of young people's political identities needs to be more explicitly examined. Some research on young people's engagement in formal participation mechanisms has been undertaken (Matthews, 2001; Roker & Eden, 2002; Kirby et.al., 2003; Saggers, et.al. 2003; Wierenga et.al., 2003; Tisdall & Davis; 2004), but this form of participation is not integrated in general studies of youth attitudes and experiences. Given the rise of the youth participation agenda and the uptake of principles of participation in government and community organisation, it would be valuable to consider how this shapes young people's participatory views and experiences. Secondly, though Marsh et.al. provide a rich and detailed study of Everyday Makers, they only briefly look at the emergence of Expert Citizens and, by their own admission, leave a deeper consideration of this new political identity to further studies (Marsh et.al., 2007: 117, 216). I attempt to do just that. Thirdly, the ideas presented by these scholars have not been applied to the Australian context so there remains the question as to whether or not their key findings are likely to be reflected in other country settings.

Therefore, in this thesis I have two broad goals, one empirical and one theoretical. The empirical goal is to contribute the pool of data on how young people actually conceptualise and respond to politics and make a unique contribution through comparative analysis of the empirical data. In the next chapter I discuss my methodology and provide justification for using a qualitative, comparative case study approach.

The theoretical aim is to understand the relationship between participation policies and political identity. I also look at the internet as a setting where social and political communication takes place. I look at how we can move beyond viewing the internet as simply a tool which extends offline social and political processes consider the ways in which the internet is implicated in the transformation of political identity and practice.

To do this I bring together the work of Bennet (2007), Bang (2005), Coleman (2008) and Marsh, O'Toole & Jones (2007) in order to make sense of the relationship between youth participation policies, the internet and youth political identities. I argue that these are complimentary frameworks which contribute to developing a deeper understanding of how young people conceptualise and respond to politics and the role

of policies and organisations that implement them. Whilst Bennett (2007) provides an over-arching framework for exploring new political identities in a networked and online society, Bang (2005) provides a deeper level of detail on what kinds of political identities are emerging, particularly in the context of network governance and new elite roles for lay-people to contribute to the policy process.

I also argue that youth participation policies must be seen as contributing to processes of network governance and should therefore be considered in studies of youth political participation. Coleman's (2008) theory on the role of participation policies as operationalised in projects for youth e-citizenship guide my analysis of the role of policy contexts and organisations. A significant limitation of the work of all three of these scholars is that they treat young people as a homogenous group. For this reason, I employ the notion of politics as 'structured lived experience' as put forward by Marsh, O'Toole and Jones (2007) as a way of analysing how processes of inclusion and exclusion affect youth political identity.

Chapter 4. Methodology

My research responds to calls from within the literature to use qualitative methods to explore both individual attitudes and forms of participation, but to also examine sites and trends in online activities that may signify new forms of individual and collectively-oriented participation (Vromen, 2007: 52). I seek to contribute to the limited existing qualitative evidence (eg. Harris, 2004; Coleman & Rowe, 2005; Dahlgren & Olsson, 2007; Marsh, O'Toole, & Jones, 2007) by exploring the attitudes and experiences of young people in Australia and the United Kingdom.

In conducting empirical research I also examine the relationship between young people's participatory experiences, and the structures and processes of policy implementation in organisations and beyond. By assuming a critical realist perspective I am arguing that there is a dialectical relationship between the structures and processes that give form to youth participation policies, and the individual agency of participants (Marsh and Furlong, 2002: 31). As such, I employ the qualitative method of in-depth interviewing and use content analysis to examine policy documents, organisational practice and young people's personal perspectives on participation. In doing so I am not seeking to reveal broad trends or make generalisations on the nature and frequency of youth participation. Rather, I'm hoping to expose some of the meaning and practice that result from particular discourses, as well as the structures and processes that shape young people's participation within, and beyond, organisations and traditional political institutions.

The broad methodological framework is comparative and below I provide greater detail on the empirical approach.

4.1 Youth-centred research, comparative approach and case studies

4.1.1 Youth Centred Research

A 'youth centred approach' seeks to avoid research design that can generate misleading conclusions about the nature of political participation (O'Toole et.al., 2003: 48). In most research on youth political participation, the terms of reference are determined by adults. As such, research utilising quantitative methods imposes the

researcher's own beliefs about what constitutes politics and political participation on the participants (O'Toole, et.al 2003). Youth-centred research serves not only to disrupt normative assumptions underpinning concepts relevant to my research, such as 'youth', 'citizenship' and 'participation', but provides the impetus for new methodologies and research tools. Several recent studies have disrupted traditional orthodoxies in child and youth research by focusing on the unique perspectives held by young people and the ways they engage with concepts of citizenship and politics and use technology (Coleman & Rowe, 2005; Smith, et.al, 2005; Harris et.al., 2007).

Organisations act as sites within which to locate and engage with young people through this research. The voices of participants and organisation executives can be interwoven to explore young people's perspectives on participation within particular environments. This approach also responds to recent calls for the need to examine the relationship between participation theory, methods and practice amidst concerns that some participatory practices are isolated instances (have no broader impact) or are harmful and, or, manipulative (Cooke and Kothari, 2001: 2; Wierenga, 2003: 43; Bessant, 2004: 400).

4.1.2 Comparative Research

Most studies of, youth citizenship and youth political participation are focused on individual country settings (e.g., Henn et.al. 2002; Lister et.al. 2003: Marsh et.al., 2007; Vromen, 2003; Saha et.al. 2005). There are relatively fewer comparative studies of youth citizenship and political participation and those that have been conducted tend to be quantitative and look at attitudes and conventional political participation (for example Flannagan et.al. 1999; Takala, 2002). Research on young people's use of the internet also tends to be country specific (Vromen, 2003; Livingstone & Bober, 2004; Lenhart et.al., 2005) creating a dearth in knowledge on how young people in different countries use the internet to participate using the same analytical framework. There is some interesting research that looks at how young people from around the world use online portals to connect to others and take action (Bennett, 2003; Raynes-Goldie & Walker, 2008), but this provides limited comparative analysis of users from different countries. My research pushes against these tendencies in the literature by conducting a qualitative investigation that provides deep, rich data whilst considering the implications for broader, international

trends by undertaking a comparative study in two countries. The benefit of using a qualitative comparative study is that phenomena can be studied in context and considered with relation to a complex combination of variables (Hopkins, 2002: 261). As such, though I search for common themes in each country context, I am also open to the idiosyncrasies and contradictions that enable an expanded understanding young people's approaches to political participation. In other words, by taking a qualitative comparative approach I have explored factors which are unique to each case while also drawing broader inferences regarding the relationship between policy contexts and participation (Landman, 2003: 79).

Australia and the United Kingdom have been chosen as case studies for critical comparison due to their considerable similarities. In both countries the political, social and economic status of youth is similar across themes that impact on youth participation as policy and practice. These relationships have not been examined using an international comparative case study approach before. In taking a comparative case study approach my study adds a new dimension to our understanding of the relationship between policy, the internet and youth participation.

Australia and the United Kingdom are similar in many ways that directly impact on the experience of youth: access to formal processes of government (age of majority: 18); education systems (compulsory education to age 16), employment environment (both countries have introduced youth wages and, or, removed wage protection from low paid jobs and have welfare states which are in decline) and access to the internet (Australia: 40% of young people under the age of 25 regularly access the internet [Bill and Lloyd, 2004: 23], United Kingdom: 41% use the internet daily [Livingstone & Bober: 10]). In both countries scholars have sought to address theoretical and empirical questions relating to youth participation and citizenship (Cleaver, 2001: 39; Tisdall & Davis, 2004; Bessant, 2003). However, there have been significantly different trends in policy and practice in each country setting.

In the past ten years, the Australian federal government has actively scaled back policies and funding for youth-specific involvement, whilst some state governments have demonstrated an increased interest in pursuing mechanisms for supporting youth participation. Comparatively, the United Kingdom has a well developed policy framework which includes principles of participation in much government policy. A

comparative study between these two countries will enable in-depth analysis of existing theories and exploration of current policy frameworks and practice. The comparative approach also suits the kind of in-depth investigation required to consider the relational impacts of theories and policy on youth participation (Burham et. al., 2004: 54).

4.1.3 Case Study Organisations

Denscombe argues that the case study approach has a number of strengths in that '…it allows the researcher to use a variety of sources, a variety of types of data and a variety of research methods as part of the investigation' (Denscombe, 2003: 31). Within political behaviour research there have been calls to move away from purely quantitative research on the basis that it is totalising and easily excludes minority experiences (Dunleavy, 1996: 281). My project responds to calls for research to explore the way that young people define and engage with issues by locating the research in actual sites of engagement and by taking into account young people's everyday lives, (Dunleavy, 1996: 288; Cleaver, 2001: 42; Vromen, 2003: 82). Organisations that employ participation policies are pertinent sites from which to begin this analysis for three reasons. Firstly, they provide an environment in which to study power relations, both between young people and organisations, and between organisations-as-agents and social structures. Secondly, given the increased role of non-government organisations in policy development and service delivery, methodologically organisations constitute actual spaces where the impact of policies can be observed. Thirdly, organisations constitute environments where particular social strata are typically reproduced (Clegg, 1989: 198). Locating this study within organisational settings enables me to look at whether certain social structures (such as gender, class and ethnicity) are reproduced or challenged. Furthermore, as the public, private and community sectors become increasingly inter-dependent (Bell & Park, 2006: 65), there is a need to understand the role of youth participation policies in the non-government sector and the impact of these policies on young people's participatory experiences and political identities. As such, I look at how youth participation is viewed by adults by interviewing both young people and executive staff and board members of the case study organisations.

Chapter 4. Methodology

Organisations are treated as setting from which to respond to Dunleavy's call to map '…those interactions, processes and linkages experienced as important by citizens themselves, whether or not they issue in immediately efficacious political consequences' (Dunleavy:1996:290). In the context of my study, this is achieved by focusing on what young people themselves consider as political participation.

Case Study Organisations Selection

Case study organisations were selected according to three main criteria; their services sought to benefit young people; they explicitly used the internet in some way to engage with young people; and, young people contribute substantially to the strategic decision making in the organisation. I removed from the list organisations whose main goal was to promote youth participation. This was primarily because I am interested in examining how youth participation policies (or lack-there-of) shape the attitudes and experiences of young people generally – not only in relation to the issue of 'youth participation' itself.

The Australian case study was already previously known to me. I had been employed at the Inspire Foundation for a period of three years and had an insider's understanding of the organisation and its approach to youth participation. In selecting an organisation in the United Kingdom, I conducted a website search and drew on Montgomery et.al. (2004) in developing criteria that could be evidenced on a website to guide case study selection (Montgomery, et.al., 2004: 15). These were refined down to:

- young people are portrayed on the organisation's website as primary beneficiaries of the organisation's work, AND are referred to as 'partners' or participants in organisational decision-making

- the organisation uses the internet to facilitate young people's participation

- the organisation is mid-sized (an annual operating budget of between AUS$1 – 2m).

In addition, I sought an organisation in the United Kingdom that had a similar profile to the Australian case study organisation including purpose and size. Table 3 outlines case study organisations and characteristics relevant to their selection.

Table 3 Case study organisation

Organisation	The Inspire Foundation	The Youth Action Network
Country	Australia	United Kingdom
Type	National not-for-profit	National not-for-profit
Year Formed	1995	1995
2005 – 2006 expenditure	AUS $1,900, 965	AUS $1,021,977
Purpose	Uses ICTs to address the social determinants of health in young people.	To promote youth led practice in community development and volunteering.
Primary Audience **Secondary Audience**	16 – 25 year olds (around 2.8 million in Australia). Youth service providers, health professionals and educators.	Services and volunteering organisations. Young people 16 – 25 years old.
Approach to youth participation	Formalised youth policy. Youth participation mainly at program level, but some cross organisation involvement (ie. staff selection). Commitment to appoint young people to the board of directors.	Culturally embedded, but largely ad hoc. Youth participation in most projects, but not expressed in formal policy or structures. Young people on the board of directors and on project steering committees.
Main vehicle for service delivery	Internet, partnerships with existing youth services in the community, face to face.	Face to face. Also uses online and mobile technology.

A key difference which will enable some comparative analysis is that there are formal mechanisms for youth participation in decision making at the Inspire Foundation, but young people do not sit on the Board of Directors. Comparatively, at the Youth Action Network, young people do sit on the Board of Directors, but youth participation in decision making at other levels of the organisation is largely ad hoc. Both organisations are national and attract participants from a range of backgrounds and geographical locations. Below is brief description of each organisation and its approach to youth participation.

The Inspire Foundation

The Inspire Foundation is a national non-profit organisation which uses information communication technologies to deliver three national programs for young people aged

16 – 25 years of age. The organisation was established in 1996 to address high rates of youth suicide in Australia. Founder, Jack Heath, had personally lost a family member to suicide and was motivated, through his work as a policy advisor to the Keating government, to use the internet for social justice. The foundation aims to have a positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing of young people by utilising the internet. By addressing the social determinants of health, the Inspire Foundation seeks to promote the social inclusion of all young people through access to information and support, technology and skills development and civic engagement. In the past seven years the Inspire Foundation has focused on the delivery of three national programs:

- www.reachout.com.au: **Reach Out** provides information, support and resources to improve young people's understanding of mental health issues, develop resilience, increase coping skills, and facilitate help-seeking behaviour.

- www.actnow.com.au: **ActNow** increases civic engagement and social connectedness by creating opportunities for young people to find out more about their world and take action on the issues they care about.

- **Beanbag**: Inspire partners with 15 youth agencies around Australia to create Beanbag Centres, providing creative technology initiatives to engage young people, improve their technical skills, self-confidence and social connectedness. Through the Beanbag program, the Inspire Foundation targets young people at risk of marginalisation by working with organisations in under-served metropolitan areas.[5]

(www.inspire.org.au)

Youth participation is a central tenet of the Inspire Foundation and has underpinned the work of the organisation since 1999. The Foundation has five guiding values: compassion; responsibility; fun; generosity; and inclusiveness. Youth participation is seen as an expression of inclusiveness, but is also central to the other four values. The Foundation approach to youth participation is based on:

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[5] In 2008 the Beanbag program ended. The Inspire Foundation continues to work with organisations that serve young people in marginalised metropolitan areas, but does not deliver hardware and software, or training to those organisations as it did under the Beanbag program.

- a whole of organisation commitment to youth participation embedded in internal policies and practices,

- involvement of young people in the development and implementation of these policies and practices,

- provision of appropriate resources and opportunities for young people and staff to work collaboratively.

(Inspire Foundation Annual Report 2006-2007)

Young people have worked with the Inspire Foundation since 1999 through specific participation programs and informal, unstructured mechanisms across the Foundation, though these have been predominately operationalised through the Reach Out and ActNow programs. In the Beanbag program young people were program participants.

Table 4 provides a brief description of how each mechanism operates online and offline.

Table 4 Youth participation mechanism at the Inspire Foundation

	Online	**Offline**
Formal		
Youth Advisory Boards	Contribute to a ten week online discussion relating to development of Inspire programs Reach Out and ActNow. Produce content for websites.	Face to face workshop in Sydney with Inspire Foundation staff.
Youth Ambassador Program	Contribute to online discussions with peers and staff on development of Inspire Foundation and Reach Out program. Produce content for Reach Out website; peer researchers; develop marketing and communications messages; community forum moderators.	Variety of activities include: speaking and promoting Inspire at fundraising events; sitting on interview panels; presenting or running workshops on Reach Out for schools and other audiences; strategic planning of organisation.
Community Builder Program	Welcoming new members and moderating content on ActNow website	Variety of activities include: speaking and promoting Inspire at fundraising events; sitting on interview panels; presenting or running workshops on ActNow for

		schools and other audiences; strategic planning of organisation.
Internships	Connect with other young people via the Inspire Foundation initiative pages on social networking sites and	Develop content for websites; work on special projects in Inspire programs, research and policy and marketing and communications.
Informal		
General site user	Can send through feedback to Inspire staff about Inspire programs; participate in staff-initiated polls.	
Site membership	Can create site content (ActNow), contribute to online discussions (Reach Out; ActNow) participate in staff-initiated polls.	
Social network site members (ie. MySpace, Facebook, Bebo)	Send through feedback; respond to staff-initiative polls; interact with other young people around issues and the Inspire Foundation initiatives.	

Formal mechanisms include acting as youth advisers, youth ambassadors, project partners and interns. Informal participation occurs via interactive features on the web-based services run by the Foundation and social networking sites, such as www.bebo.com and www.myspace.com. Websites utilise user-generated content, online public forums and feedback mechanisms including polls to facilitate youth participation in the development and delivery of Inspire services. Forms of participation and young people's experiences of participation are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 and 6.

Fieldwork on the Inspire Foundation was carried out between July 2006 and February 2007.

The Youth Action Network

The Youth Action Network began in 1995 with the first National Residential Conference for young people and workers from 16 different local Youth Action Agencies. The Network was conceived by two youth workers who were passionate

about making a step-change in the way that youth workers and community organisations in general engaged young people in community development. The Youth Action Network vision is for all young people to have the opportunity to participate in Youth Action volunteering and develop their own solutions to community needs. It was officially founded as a federation in 1995, bringing together agencies that adopted the Youth Action Approach to volunteering. This approach is underpinned by nine principles:

1. Youth Participation

Young people are in the driving seat – they decide what happens.

2. Benefiting others

Young people don't just do it for themselves! Others benefit too!

3. Fun & rewarding

No one wants to do something that's boring – it has to be fun!

4. Flexibility

It should be when, where and how young people want it.

5. Support

Young people aren't just 'left to it,' they're supported in their aspirations and efforts.

6. Recognition

Say thank you! Young people's efforts should be celebrated.

7. Progression & leadership

Young people want to develop – they enjoy a challenge – and this should be built in.

8. Diverse & inclusive

Anyone should be able to do Youth Action. Think creatively to break down those barriers.

9. Developmental & educative

Youth Action is a journey with learning and education an important part of the experience.

The Youth Action Network provides services, training and capacity building, networking opportunities, competitions and awards, and funding to young people and voluntary organisations that support young people to develop their own volunteering opportunities. It also conducts research and advocates for youth participation at a

national level. Youth Action Network services and programs are delivered face to face and online. These include:

- **Project Re:action:** a participative research project looking into the effects of volunteering on young people and their communities.

- **The Stream:** a web-based peer mentoring project. It aims to promote Youth Action volunteering and active citizenship by enabling users to share experiences, address issues and inspire creativity in local or global communities for action.

- **Tread**: an online training program to support member organisations to facilitate youth action projects. It has ten modules including youth participation, impact measurement, government and policy and diversity.

Young people participate in the development and delivery of these services as described in Table 5.

Table 5 Youth Action Network Youth Participation

Mechanism	Offline	Online
Board Trustee	Fulfil board duties including attending meetings and events.	
Trainers on Youth Action Model	Co-facilitating training at conferences and workshops with YAN staff.	
Project Re:Action Steering Committee	Provide feedback to project team on research framework, methodology and tools.	Provide feedback to project team on research framework, methodology and tools.
Project Re:Action peer researchers	Develop research methodology and tools. Conduct research (focus groups); analysis;	Liaise with other project researchers (ie. on project methodology, tools, analysis).
Youth Action Media Ambassador	Write media content for the YAN (newsletters, case studies); act as a spokes person for Youth Action;	Create and maintain a MySpace, Facebook or Bebo page or blog
The Stream: Online mentees, mentors, project coordinators.	Young people are funded to promote e-mentoring and recruit mentors in a local community area.	Participants in e-mentoring providing and receiving advice on youth action volunteering.
Tread program development	Advisers to Tread program.	Advisers to Tread program.

The Youth Action Network promotes youth participation in member organisations, but does not consider its self a Youth Action organisation. As such, there are few formal participation mechanisms. However, as described in Table 5 there are many ad hoc and project-based forms of participation (Bang, 2005) in decision making, planning and project realisation. Young people have always played a role in the development of the network, attending the national conferences (where the network was originally formed) and taking part in planning groups for different network activities and projects. Young people participating in these ways contribute to agenda-setting and decision making on organisational, programmatic, research and evaluation matters as well as at a community level – both local and national. The forms and experiences of young people of participation are discussed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Field work on the Youth Action Network was carried out between June and August 2007.

4.2 Methods

4.2.1 Document Analysis

The experience of youth is highly structured by government policy in both Australia and the United Kingdom. However, in Australia and the United Kingdom, few scholars have examined youth participation policies as frameworks in which the experience of youth takes place (Evans, 1995; Bessant, 2003, 2004; White & Wyn, 2004; Tisdall and Davis, 2004). Some studies emphasise the importance of analysing the discourses that frame youth policy, particularly those that advocate participation as a 'solution' or 'remedy' for 'youth issues' and the problems associated with the construction of 'youth at risk' (Bessant, 2003: 87). Other studies of policy and practitioner documents have looked at evaluations of programs or initiatives (Kirby et.al, 2003), but do not explore the relationship between the policy discourses and youth experiences of participation in organisations. In this project, 'policy' is understood as a process involving networks in which non-government organisations, peak bodies, individuals and interest groups contribute to the production of policy (Hendriks, 2008: 1009). For this reason, key reports on youth participation authored by non-government actors have been included in my analysis. Policy documents have

been analysed in order to understand the underlying concepts and theories underpinning policy objectives. Approaches to youth participation are critiqued in relation to the views of executive staff and board members in case study organisations and young people's direct experience.

Policies which shape the social, economic, cultural and political experience of youth are distributed amongst different areas of government in Australia (White & Wyn, 2004) and the United Kingdom (Bell & Jones, 2002: 3). In addition, in the United Kingdom, there is no clear level of government that is responsible for youth policy and departments responsible for key issues affecting young people, such as education and training, sit in the devolved Governments of Scotland and Northern Ireland. As such, I've selected policy documents that address how youth policy is formed and administered across departments, rather than looking at youth policies within, for instance, health or transport portfolios. Whilst these policies are part of the context in which youth participation policies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are formed, they speak most directly to the English context. Consequently the case study organisation and all interview subjects were based in England.

In Australia and the United Kingdom, Federal, State and non-government organisation policy documents have been examined. As case study organisations were about 10 years old when this research commenced, I have considered most important those policy documents salient in their lifetimes. In Australia, I've chosen to examine key documents from both the federal and state level in order to draw out some of the clear inconsistencies and conflicts that exist in policy discourses. I posit that the often conflicting discourses in state and federal policy have an impact on the approach adopted by organisations and young people alike. I analyse policy documents according to key concepts emerging from the literature: 'youth', 'citizenship', 'volunteering', 'political participation', 'community', 'civic education'. Documents are listed at Table 6 and a more detailed description of the documents is presented in Chapter 5.

Table 6 Policy documents included in this research

Australian Government policy documents
Footprints to the Future. Report from the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce 2001.
New South Wales Youth Action Plan. The Way Forward: Supporting young people in New South Wales. 2006
Future Directions: An Action Agenda for Young Victorians. Victoria Department of Communities, 2006.
United Kingdom policy documents
Learning to Listen: Core Principles for Involving Children and Young People. Children and Young People's Unit, 2001.
Youth Matters: Next Steps. Department for Education and Skills, 2006.
The Russell Commission: A National Framework for Youth Action and Engagement, 2005.
Non-Government policy documents
Sharing a New Story, The Foundation for Young Australians, 2003 (Australia)
Power Inquiry, The Joseph Rowetree Foundation, 2007 (United Kingdom)

Overview of policy documents

Here I provide a brief description of the policy documents used in this analysis.

Australian Federal Government – "Footprints to the Future" (2001)

In 1999 a task force was established by the then Prime Minister, John Howard, to investigate strategies to 'help young people and their families negotiate the transition from school to an independent livelihood' (Prime Minister's Task Force, 2001: 1). This taskforce was comprised of representatives from the community, academic and business sectors as well as state, territory and federal bureaucrats. Released in 2001, this report aimed to identify ways for ensuring children and young people's transition to adulthood.

Australian State Government – NSW and Victorian Youth Policy

Both the New South Wales and Victorian state governments have produced youth policies that lay out the government's approach to addressing youth affairs in each state. I examine two documents: the New South Wales government's youth action plan, *The Way Forward: Supporting young people in New South Wales* (Department of Community Services, 2006)*,* and the Victorian government's youth policy, *Future Directions* (Department of Victorian Communities, 2006)*.* These plans lay out the

state governments' priorities for young people and the strategies that the government will use to deliver on their commitments.

British Government – Learning to Listen, Youth Matters and the Russell Commission

In 2001 the British Government committed to designing policies and services around the needs of children and young people (Children and Young People's Unit, 2001). *Learning to Listen* is a guide intended to support government departments to include young people in decision making. It defines children and young people's participation, aims and benefits of participation, core principles, case studies, and a guide to action for government departments.

Youth Matters: Next Steps (Department for Education and Skills, 2006) is the Government policy on young people and aims to 'transform the life chances of young people' (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 4). It was developed from a large-scale community consultation by the British Government in response to a green paper on improving outcomes for 13 – 19 year olds. There were 19,000 responses from young people received during the consultation phase. The policy aims to deliver to young people aged 13 – 19 outcomes laid out in Every Child Matters. These are: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and economic wellbeing (http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims/).

The Russell Commission (2005) was commissioned by the Government to develop a national strategy for supporting youth action and civic engagement. The aim of the framework is to increase the level of community participation by young people across the United Kingdom (Russell Commission, 2005: 13). The inquiry was supported by 20 young people aged 16 – 25 through a youth advisory board. In addition, 6000 responses to the consultation were received from young people.

The Non-Government Sector – Sharing a Different Story and the Power Inquiry

In 2002 an Australian non-profit organisation, The Foundation for Young Australians commissioned the Youth Research Centre at the University of Melbourne to explore the issue of young people in decision making. The report *Sharing a New Story* (Wierenga, et.al., 2003) provides research insights into barriers and enablers to participation, makes policy recommendations and a tool kit for best practice in youth participation in community and government decision making. The project team

included four young researchers. A qualitative methodology was used involving in-depth interviews and case studies.

The Power Inquiry was established by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust to look at issues of disengagement from formal politics in Britain. The *Power Inquiry* (Power Inquiry, 2006) reports on this large-scale multi-dimensional project which included a major review of the literature and qualitative research including online and offline group consultations, a telephone survey and case studies on innovative democratic practice around the world, a practical experiment in community budgeting and many citizens panels to discuss issues of participation and democracy. In addition to the final report, the commission produced eight 'Theme Books' which looked at different dimensions of democratic participation.

Organisational annual reports were also examined. These cover the period July 2005 – July 2008. The purpose of examining annual reports is to consider the representation of young people and the conceptualisation of key concepts listed above by organisations as compared to policy documents, and interviews with young people.

4.2.2 Semi structured, in-depth interviews

Between November 2006 and August 2007 I interviewed thirteen young people in Australia and twelve young people in England. I also conducted four interviews each in both countries with executive staff and board members of the case study organisations. One young person was also a board member of the Youth Action Network. The purpose of the interviews with young people was to explore their subjective experiences and attitudes towards participation both within and outside of the organisation. Interviews with executive staff and board sought to explore the beliefs and assumptions that underpin the organisation's approach to youth participation, as well as the structures and processes that articulate a youth participation policy. These interviews explored the following issues:

- reasons for involving/being involved; expectations, and reflections on the experience of being involved

- purpose of youth participation at the organisation

Chapter 4. Methodology

- purpose of participation generally and the meaning of youth citizenship

- influence and decision-making; for self, groups, society

- the role of technology – particularly the internet − for participation

- government policy and strategies for youth participation

Appendix A. presents the interview schedule which was used as a guide, rather than a list of questions to be answered. Interview questions were broken into four themes through which the above issues were explored:

- Definitions and experiences of participation

- Use of the internet

- Organisational practices in youth participation

- Governments and politicians: attitudes and strategies for youth participation

All interviews were recorded on a digital recorder, fully transcribed and then analysed manually according to the key themes (discussed in 4.4)

Sample

I used interviewing strategies consistent with *key informant interviewing* (Blee & Taylor, 2002: 105). Both young people and executive staff and board members were selected according to their roles in the organisation and the length of time they had been involved. Few existing studies examine the roles of individual staff for youth participation in organisations. Research in the United Kingdom has argued that an internal champion is a necessary catalyst and driver for establishing a culture of participation across the organisation. They have identified four key conditions necessary for effective inclusion of young people – senior management support, dedicated funding, a vision for youth participation that is integrated in the broader mission and values of the organisation, internalised (whole of organisation) and institutionalised change (in processes and policies) (Kirby et.al., 2003: 7-8). Previous studies have demonstrated that exploring staff and board members' subjective views provides insight into the overall role and value of young people in organisations, services and programs (Kirby et.al. 2003: 5). As I was interested in examining how

the organisational approach to youth participation had changed since the organisation's inception, I interviewed long-term staff and at least one founding board member (other than the founder and executive director).

Interviews with young people were used to explore their subjective experiences of participation and assess the extent to which the organisations achieve their goals, produced a culture of participation and supported diversity. A purposive sampling approach, such as that used by Marsh et.al., (2007), was employed to create samples in both countries. Young people's connections with the organisations through youth participation activities was considered the most important criteria, followed by gender, geographical location and length of time involved with the organisation. Class and socio-economic status (represented by level of education) were explored as factors that might constrain or promote participation, but were not used in the selection of interview participants. Table 7 provides a broad snap shot of the youth sample:

Table 7 Characteristics of young people interviewed

Characteristic	Australia	United Kingdom	Total
Male	6	6	12
Female	7	6	13
16 – 18	0	4	4
19 – 25	13	8	21
Metropolitan[6] (Australia)/ City (United Kingdom)	10	7	17
Regional (Australia)/ Town (United Kingdom)	1	5	6
Rural (Australia)/ village (United Kingdom)	2	0	2
Early school leaver	0	5	5
Tertiary Educated	13	3	16
Employed	13	8	21
Neither employed nor engaged in education	0	1	1
Parent o/s born or from non-English speaking background	3	6	9
Total participants	13	12	25

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[6] Geographical location refers to where young people identify as having lived for the longest part of their lives.

Participants came from a broad range of backgrounds, but analysis has been conducted - and was interpreted – with regard to particular characteristics of the sample. In Australia young people were interviewed in the state capital cities of Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, and the Victorian regional centre of Bendigo. In the United Kingdom they were interviewed in the cities of Leeds, Birmingham, Leicester, Bristol and London, and the town of Chester-le-Street. All interviews are listed in Appendix 2. In an effort to protect the anonymity of participants, quotes are referenced only by pseudonym, age and country.

4.2.3 Participant Observation

For the duration of this project (July 2005 – July 2008) I spent two days per week at the Inspire Foundation and I spent ten weeks from June – August 2007 at the Youth Action Network. With the consent of participating organisations, it was possible to observe everyday organisational activities, such as meetings, discussions and workshops, in which information sharing, discussion and decision making was carried out. These activities provided an opportunity to observe how youth participation is articulated in the organisation and to consider the relationship between the operationalisation of youth participation, organisational policies, the broader national policy discourse and direct experiences of adults and young people. In the process of collecting data for the case studies I attended meetings, workshops and observed the everyday operations of the organisations. These were captured in a field diary over a period of one year from January 2007 – December 2007 using the following guide:

Date	Activity	Staff Participation	Youth Participation	YP Role	Format	Reason for YP	Barriers (observed)	Enabling Factors

Observation of the actual practices of the organisation is important for seeing how youth participation operates as a process. It is also a way of listening to the everyday use of language in the organisation, therefore accessing what Phillips and Hardy refer to as 'naturally occurring texts' (Phillips & Hardy, 2002: 70).

4.3 Data analysis

The conceptual framework for my empirical research examines youth experience in relation to structural factors and draws on perspectives of power described by Fincham (1992) as, as *Institutional, Organisational* and *Processual,* which I will refer to as *Individual.*

In the context of my research, the *Institutional* perspective relates to the social, economic and political structures that frame youth participation. These include laws, polices, policy networks, and practitioner and youth discourses. Institutional factors of interest include approaches to 'youth', 'participation' and 'citizenship' and structural inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, disability, and class. The *Organisational* perspective is concerned with the systems, internal policies and procedures within government departments and offices, and organisations, that give life to participation policies. The *Individual* perspective refers to the experiences and actions of individuals. Using this framework I have conducted a relational analysis of structure and agency whereby organisations can be viewed as institutionalised structures (in relation to individual agents) and as agents acting as vehicles for collective forms of decision making in relation to social, economic and political structures (Clegg, 1989: 187). Table 8 indicates the relationship between these three perspectives, my research questions and the methods used.

Table 8 Research perspectives, questions, methods and tools

Perspective	Research Question	Method
Institutional	What is the policy context?	Analysis of policy and practitioner documents.
	Who participates?	In-depth interviews with young people (participants)
	Why do people participate?	In-depth interviews with young people (participants)
Organisational	What is the aim of youth participation in the organisation?	In-depth interviews with young people In-depth interviews with executive staff and board members Document analysis
	What specific organisational arrangements and practices are associated with involving young people?	In-depth interviews with young people In-depth interviews with executive staff and board members Document analysis
		Document Analysis: Annual Reports; Organisation website content; newsletters (or comparable public communication tool); and, annual strategies.
Individual	How do individual agents experience youth participation?	In-depth interviews with young people, program coordinators, upper management and members of the board.

In addition I drew on O'Toole et.al. (2003) to construct a method that would draw out young people's conceptualisation of the political as well as capture acts of political participation. Using this approach I compared youth attitudes and activities with policy frameworks and organisation goals as laid out in Table 9 below.

Table 9 Conceptualising and mapping participatory activities

	Young people	Organisation	Policy (framework)
Conceptual notion of (political) participation			
Types of participatory activities			

These were then explored through thematic analysis with a particular focus on the distinctions or commonalities between different conceptualisations of youth participation in policy and young people's own views and experiences. Table 10 provides a summary of the empirical research.

Table 10 Empirical research summary

Research Site	Focus of Inquiry	Texts	Themes
Australia and the United Kingdom	Policy discourses	Policy documents	
Organisations that involve young people (online and offline)	Policy discourses; Adult attitudes towards youth participation.	Annual reports, Interviews with executive staff and board members Participant observation	Youth Citizenship Participation ICT (particularly the Internet)
Individuals and groups of young people	Youth attitudes and experience of participation	In-depth interviews	

While I have not undertaken discourse analysis, I have drawn on the thinking of Bevir and Rhodes (2002) who utilise key concepts to explore different narratives of a particular topic of inquiry. In the case of my research, I look at the dominant traditions for each theme. For example, I considered how the *developmental* and *contextual* accounts of youth as explored in Chapter 2 underpin different 'narratives' of youth participation. Similarly, I considered to what extent notions of citizenship reflected *rights-based, duty-based* or *participation-based* approaches. Policy documents, the annual reports of case study organisations and interviews have been analysed according to the five key themes. Table 11 presents the thematic analysis schedule, developed by drawing on key frameworks from the literature.

Table 11 Data analysis framework

Analysis Framework	Analysis Themes	Analysis Questions (primary)	Analysis Questions (secondary)
Developmental, Contextual, Subjective	Youth	What is the theoretical framing of youth? Who else is referred to?	ie. How are young people referred to in the text? Who are the young people that the text refers to? How are these actors seen as different to young people?
Liberal, Civic republican, radical. Dutiful or Actualising, Being v Becoming	Citizenship	How is youth citizenship defined in the text?	What language is used to describe/define citizenship? How is it distinct from the citizenship of non-youth?
Mobilised in relation to the State or Issues?	The Political	How is youth political participation defined in the text?	Is it linked to institutions, parties, voting, themes/issues or politicians? What language is used? How are young people positioned in relation to politics?
Education, Work, Volunteering, Activism, Decision Making (adult-led, youth-led)	Participation	What does 'participation' mean for the purposes of this document?	What other concepts is participation tied/related to?
Education, Work, Volunteering, Activism, Decision Making (adult-led, youth-led)	Independence	How is 'independence' conceptualised'?	Is it important? What other concepts are related to notions of independence?
Access to, skills in use, use of technology	Role of ICT	Is ICT referred to in the document? In what way?	What is access/use of ICT assumed to contribute/facilitate?

4.4 Critical considerations

4.4.1 Subjectivity and consistency of comparative data

There are several critical challenges in conducting this research that will affect the quality of data accrued and which will be important to reflect on in the process of data analysis and theorising.

Marsh et.al. (2007) refer to the use of the double hermeneutic in research of this kind. This involves a recognition that interview and focus group responses are the respondent's *interpretation* of ideas, which were in turn being *interpreted* by me, the researcher (Marsh, et.al.2007: 84). Indeed, my interpretations of the research questions, the context and the data are also shaped by my own subjectivity.

I attempted to develop a research design that would enable policy documents, organisations and respondents the opportunities to 'speak for themselves'. Without imposing my own definitions of concepts and themes of interest to the research, I attempted to extract and interpret what meanings different texts (for example, policy documents, organisation annual reports and interviews) might ascribe to concepts such as 'participation', 'citizenship', 'young person' and so on. Nevertheless, there were many times when respondents, particularly in the Australian case study, had to be pushed to describe what they considered to be 'assumed knowledge'. This is discussed in more detail in the next point.

4.4.2 Position of the researcher

As an employee of one of the case study organisations, I had a unique opportunity to access people and materials relevant to the experience of youth participation in the organisation. In particular, I was known and trusted by the gate keepers and many of the young people who participated in my study. I was knowledgeable about the organisational structure, culture and processes which made it easier to 'prospect' for experiences and information not evident on 'the surface' of the organisation. I have been cognisant that this advantage of being an 'insider' may also produce some bias. Nevertheless, it has been my intention to examine both case studies without bias, to be self-critical in my collection and assessment of the data and rigorous in my

construction of research tools. My proximity to my Australian case study was something that I disclosed with the Youth Action Network.

My position as an insider-researcher at the Inspire Foundation also presented some challenges during the interviews with young people. Several interviewees inferred it was not necessary to describe their experiences in detail because of my prior knowledge of their activities. The following extract from an interview in Australia demonstrates this:

> *PC: What sorts of things have you done?*
>
> *Belinda: ... Ah –* [pause]
>
> *PC: Tell me more. I know this is a bit weird, because you know me and you know that I know what you've done. But I'm really interested in hearing about your experience in your own words. So please, assume I know nothing.*
>
> *Belinda: Ah, oh god. Um -*
>
> *PC: So, like I mean, what are some of those things that you've done – the things that have been significant to you?*
>
> *Belinda: Well, creating the information – researching it, writing it up, making sure it's appropriate, sourcing interviews, trying to track down people and making sure that we get* [an interview] *– ah, I can't really think of much else.*
>
> Belinda, 22, Australia

In these instances I used more probing questions and emphasised the importance of hearing in interviewees own words what their experience had been. In the United Kingdom, the reverse was occasionally true. Young people referred to events, groups, issues, or used language that I was unfamiliar with and for which I sought clarification. For example Kathryn had to explain to me what a 'Chav' was.

4.4.3 What about 'non-participants'?

By virtue of their participation in the Youth Action Network and the Inspire Foundation, the young people in this study were 'participants' by any traditional measure. Therefore, their views on participation are views of young people who have

had positive experiences and feel involved and valued by the case study organisations. I acknowledge that this research cannot shed light on the views and potential sites of engagement of young people who would traditionally be categorised as 'non-participants'.

4.5 Conclusions

By taking a largely qualitative approach to the study of participation, and exploring the attitudes, beliefs and actions of young people I draw on arguments within the social sciences for empirical research to investigate political behaviour beyond institutional measures. The research will be framed by young people's own perceptions of what constitutes (political) participation but it is not only a study of attitudes, but also of action.

In the following chapters I present my analysis of the empirical data, beginning with looking at the policy contexts for youth participation in Australia and the United Kingdom.

Chapter 5. Policy Contexts: Citizenship, Governance and Organisations

> *… good things can happen when ideas are valued more than power.*

<div align="right">Executive Interview, #2, Australia</div>

In recent years, across western democracies, there has been a noticeable individualisation of politics and a shift away from conventional forms of collective participation through membership of political parties and big voluntary organisations (Norris, 1999). This shift is not limited to, but is most evident amongst younger people (Norris, 2003). At the same time, a rights-based discourse on child and youth participation has gained unprecedented influence in government and non-government policy (Harris, 2006: 3). In most cases, youth participation policies aims, amongst other goals, to better engage young people in civic life (Kirby et.al., 2003: 11; Harris, 2006: 223). However, the adoption of youth participation as a principle and objective of policy making has in fact been influenced by a range of approaches, including developmental approaches, participant centred approaches, and the new sociology of youth (Reimer, 2003; Sinclair, 2004; Bell et.al., 2008). Youth participation has come to mean different things in different contexts and central to this area of research is the still unresolved question 'what do we mean by participation?' (Sinclair, 2004: 108 - 109).

As such, questions of young people's political participation and citizenship – how, why and to what effect? - have been of increasing interest to scholars and policy makers. In both Australia and the United Kingdom the rights of children and young people to participate in decisions that impact on their lives has been enshrined in legislation (for example, The Children and Young People's Plan [England] Regulations 2005; Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act [New South Wales] 1998). However, the depth and nature of these statutory obligations vary across jurisdictions and according to the type of public body concerned and the community of children and young people affected. In addition, a range of policy documents have been produced by non-government organisations which have influenced the approaches to youth participation in the community sector. Whilst these documents lack the binding obligations that statutes carry for public institutions,

they nevertheless influence and shape the approach taken to youth participation in the community and non-government sector. Despite this increase in activity around youth participation, research has continued to focus largely on young people's attitudes and behaviours. Although 'youth participation' has achieved unprecedented prominence in government and non-government organisation policy in recent years, few studies have examined discourses of youth participation in policy and considered the impact of these policy discourses on notions of youth citizenship.

In this chapter I analyse policy documents produced at the federal and state government level, as well as those produced by non-government actors. (These are listed in Table 6.) I search for consistencies and differences in discourses on youth by examining how the following themes were treated in each of the documents:

- youth

- participation

- citizenship

- role of ICT (particularly internet)

Following policy document analysis I present the two case study organisations and examine how these non-government organisations respond to the policy discourse.

In the first instance, I examine the purpose, audience and beneficiaries of youth participation across sectors (government and non-government) and country settings as expressed in policy documents. In doing so, I build on the work of Judith Bessant (2004) who finds that youth participation policies in Australia have little to do with the politics of democracy on three counts. Firstly, they fail to acknowledge the barriers to economic, social and political participation experienced by young people (Bessant, 2004: 397). Secondly, she argues that the conventional view that young people are not developmentally ready for suffrage until age 18 undermines efforts to facilitate true political participation of young people (Bessant, 2004: 399). Thirdly, mechanisms used to operationalise youth participation policies are non-democratic as young people are neither elected, nor representative and it is most often unclear how their ideas feed into official agenda-setting and decision-making (Bessant, 2004: 400-401). However, I question Bessant's assertion that all youth participation policy,

across different levels of government and in distinct sectors, are the same in these respects. I explore whether, in the context of network governance, there is opportunity for counter discourses to be forwarded which influence both policy and practice.

White and Wyn (2004: 100) argue that there continues to be a gap in understanding of the role of practitioners for youth policy development. I address this need in this chapter by deliberately exploring the views of policy makers in non-government organisations. Specifically, I analyse key policy documents that have been produced by the non-government sector, as well as interviews with executive staff and board members of the Inspire Foundation and Youth Action Network. These organisations are not presented here as typical but as exceptional case studies that have unique ways of approaching youth participation. Coleman's typology of citizenship is particularly useful here. Although he has developed this through an analysis of organisations that run youth e-participation initiatives, I argue that his typology is a useful one for looking at policies for youth citizenship in general and can be extrapolated to look at both government and non-government policies – as well as programs – and online and offline strategies. I use Coleman's categories to make sense of the discourses of youth and participation in policy contexts and the approaches of my case study organisations and examine: what type of young person; what kind of participation; and, what sort of citizen is being promoted in these texts?

In Chapter 3 I have argued that mainstream studies of youth participation do not consider the role of the internet for participation. For this reason I have considered the use of and attitudes towards the internet and e-participation and applied Coleman's theory of managed and autonomous e-citizenship (Coleman, 2008) to my analysis. Here I look at the way the internet is considered in policy documents, as well as in the perspectives of executive staff and board members of case study organisations produced in organisational texts and interviews conducted for this research. The main purpose here is to address two central questions: Do youth (e-)participation policies inevitably:

a. Create groups of young people who are either 'at-risk' (and in need of regulation), or 'expert citizens' who perpetuate existing power structures by assuming roles within adult/government-led participatory processes?

    b. Lead to the co-optation of young citizens through managed forms of participation?

What emerges from this analysis is a series of observations on political and organisational contexts in relation to which I examine the lived experiences of young people in the following three chapters.

Below I look first at the policy contexts of Australia and the United Kingdom with a particular focus on what kind of citizens the policy promotes. I then present a discussion of the case study organisations, exploring how each responds to the policy context and how. In Chapter 5 I go on to provide detail on how young people have actually participated in these organisations.

5.1 Policy contexts: Australia and the United Kingdom

This section examines the policy contexts in Australia and the United Kingdom by looking at the history of youth participation in government and non-government and community organisations. I then examine how and what kinds of youth citizenship are promoted through policy, and in section 5.2 I go on to look at the response of the Youth Action Network and the Inspire Foundation to these policy contexts. The analysis in each country setting is presented in two sections, each one exploring a key dimension of the policy context: location and operation of youth affairs in each country; and, notions of youth and participation as defined in the policy documents. Throughout I consider the role of the internet and the section concludes by considering the comparisons between the two country settings.

5.1.1 Australia

5.1.1.1 Policy Context

The story of youth participation policy in Australia occurs within a broader tradition of social policy on issues affecting youth and has a number of dimensions. It is a story riddled with tension between youth as a 'special interest group' and broad policy areas of government (education, health, transport, defence, etc.). This is reflected in the shifting ideas about the need and purpose of Ministerial representation for youth affairs and a cross-sectoral Office for Youth. In 2004 the Federal Minister for Youth was replaced by a Parliamentary Secretary, and in 2006 that position was

discontinued. In 2008 following the election of a Labor government, a Minister for Youth was reinstated.

Consequently, the representation of youth affairs at a federal level has been impermanent and the Office for Youth − when it has existed − itinerant (Maunders, 1996). A Federal Office for Youth Affairs has existed at various times over the past three decades. Its purpose has been ostensibly to research the range of government action on youth issues and to support the planning and coordination of policy and services that impact on young people (Ewen, 1995: 30). This Office for Youth has been shuffled between different government departments, including Employment and Industrial Relations (during the 1970s), the Department for Prime Minister and Cabinet (during the 1980s), the Department of Education, Employment and Training (into the 1990s) and then to the Department of Family and Community Services (and its later iterations as Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (Ewen, 1995: 34). In 2008, following the election of the Rudd Government in November 2007, the Office was moved to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. According to the Department website:

> *The Office for Youth will identify opportunities for better integration of policy and program settings across the Australian Government and monitor the impacts of these on young people. Through early engagement in the policy development process, it will ensure that the Government's considerable investment in young people is evidence-based, strategic, coherent and effective.*

(http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/youth/)

Whilst some commentators argue that the departmental location of the Office for Youth plays a major part in determining its level of influence (Ewen, 1995: 33), others argue that location is not a significant factor (Maunders, 1996: 44). In general there is continuing discussion around the effectiveness of the Office for Youth at a federal level with some writers suggesting that its symbolic power has been greater than its structural power (ability to actually shape and implement policy) (Ewen,1995: 34). Additionally, the location of the Office for Youth in departments with specific sector functions (such as employment and training) has raised concerns about the

ability of the office to input into other areas of policy affecting youth such as transport, housing and health (Ewen,1995: 34).

Over the last ten years there have also been significant changes to the way that youth affairs are represented in government. As discussed in Chapter 2, the National Youth Roundtable which ran between 1999 and 2007 under the Liberal Howard Government was a highly managed, elite mechanism over which young people had little control and to which the government was not accountable (Bo'sher, 2006).

Another dimension of interest is that youth policy is a multi-layered policy area across Federal, State and local levels of government. Little research has been done on the role of state Offices for Youth, though a recent review found that the location and approach of Offices for Youth across Australia differs widely (Bell et.al., 2008: 35). Although youth policy with regards to education and training has been overseen by the inter-governmental Ministerial Committee for Education, Employment and Youth Affairs, youth participation policies have not been designed and comprehensively introduced across all jurisdictions. As such, a series of fragmented youth policies and programs across federal, state and local government aimed at young people have been developed with very little coordination in approach (Maunders, 1996: 44; Bell et.al, 2008: 35). It has also been argued that being cross-sectoral and lacking any substantive budget or other resources, state-based Offices for Youth are often ineffectual (Beresford & Robertson, 1995: 17-18). However, most analysis of State Offices for Youth focus on the institutional limitations of these offices and give little consideration to the question of youth participation in policy development. Whilst other scholars acknowledge the commitment to youth participation made within youth policy documents at a state level, they criticise such commitments for not ensuring that young people can contribute to policy development (White & Wyn, 2004: 85). At the level of local government, one study finds that youth councils and other formal participatory processes are common. However, the study also raises concerns that these forms of youth participation are often inappropriate and can obscure or silence the opinions of many young people (Saggers, et.al., 2004: 105).

The third point to note is that youth participation policy has a strong tradition in the non-government and community sector. Non-government and community organisations have played an increasing role in youth policy production and

implementation. In terms of youth participation policy, organisations such as the Create Foundation, Plan Australia and The Foundation for Young Australians have advocated for a youth involvement approach (Bell, et.al., 2008: 33). These organisations have argued broadly for the inclusion of young people in government and community decision making, but have also highlighted that particular groups of young people are excluded from mainstream mechanisms. They argue that a youth involvement approach must be underpinned by principles of equality and justice (Kaplun, 1995; Hart, 1992; Ewen, 1994) and identify the structural barriers to young people exercising their rights to participate in decision-making processes that affect them (Bessant, 2003). For instance, the Centre for Multicultural Youth runs a youth participation register to promote inclusion of newly arrived young people and those from culturally diverse and refugee backgrounds in decision-making, the Foundation for Young Australians has a number of initiatives available specifically for indigenous young people and the Create Foundation has been focused on ensuring that young people in out of home care are able to participate in decision making. Several organisations, such as Beyond Blue and Orygen Youth Health, seek to encourage young people who've experienced mental health issues to participate in organisational decision-making. Additionally there are also a number of youth-led organisations, such as Vibewire.Net, a youth media site that has argued consistently for the inclusion of young people's views in the mainstream press and policy debate.

Youth peak bodies in the Australian states and territories have also played a critical role in promoting youth participation in government and community decision making. Many state peaks work collaboratively with state governments to support youth participation (eg. the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and the Youth Action Policy Association of New South Wales). The New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People's 2002 publication Taking PARTicipation Seriously and the *Taking Young People Seriously* handbooks, produced in 2004 by Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and the Office for Youth, Department for Victorian Communities have supported the implementation of youth participation strategies in government and non-organisations and in particular, on boards of directors.

Both the government and community sector has also promoted youth participation as a strategy for delivering youth development programs for 'young leaders' and interventions for young people identified as 'at risk'. AusYouth, GreenCorps and

Work for the Dole utilise participation as a strategy for youth development – with a particular focus on employment skills. Though these programs have been pitched as 'volunteering' programs, research with young people finds that they view these policies as coercive and controlling of young people. (Warburton & Smith, 2003).

Overall, this shows that in Australia there is considerable contention over what youth participation means, who it is for and for what purpose.

4.1.1.2 Discourses of Youth and Participation

Youth

In the Australian Federal Government youth policy document, *Footprints to the Future (2001)*, youth is constructed as a transitional stage between childhood and 'adult life'. This transition to adulthood is intrinsically linked to acquiring 'independence' which is defined '…not (as) a state reached at a single, identifiable point in time, but rather a gradient, a gradually enhanced capacity to exercise judgement and make choices' (Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Task Force[7], 2001: 4). This raises the question, at what point on the gradient, therefore, are young people considered to be adults? Nevertheless, the policy identifies developmental milestones that must be achieved for young people to successfully transition to adulthood. These are defined as:

- an enhanced sense of individual empowerment;

- active participation in social and economic life;

- active and responsible citizenship; and

- the capacity to be adaptable, flexible and resilient.

(PMYPTF, 2001: 110)

Successful transitions are thereby marked both by individual characteristics and behaviours for which the individual is ultimately responsible. Furthermore, this policy categorises young people as either those who are successfully becoming adults or those who are not:

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[7] Because of the very long title for the author here I will use the abbreviation: PMYPTF.

...those who do succeed but could experience smoother transitions; for those at risk of not making effective transitions; and for those who are not engaged with their community.

(PMYPTF, 2001: viii)

These three 'types' of young people essentially represent two groups of young people: those who are 'engaged' and those who are not. Engaged, in this context, means in some form of education, employment or training (including work-for-the dole programs). There are a number of implications associated with this view of young people.

In the first instance, it positions young people as deficient and requiring intervention in order to 'successfully transition' to adulthood. Secondly, it emphasizes the role of agency in determining outcomes for young people. Though young people may face structural barriers it is the individual 'life experiences or the circumstances of their families' (PMYPTF, 2001: 78) that are viewed as responsible for inequalities in youth experience. Thirdly, it fails to acknowledge diversity and the spectrum of factors and experiences that shape a young person's life. This is reflected in youth policy in general which often fails to recognise diversity or address specific experiences of exclusion (Bell, et.al.2008). *Footprints to the* Future gives tacit acknowledgement of diversity stating a concern for understanding and responding to the particular barriers that indigenous young people, young people with a disability and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds face to participation. For example one of the recommendations is to provide these specific groups with targeted and culturally appropriate support. These groups are effectively constructed as 'special' and for whom different interventions are required. Beyond such general proposals, the report "recommends that the appropriate agencies undertake additional work to ensure equitable outcomes for those young people" (PMYPTF, 2001: ix). In general, this policy assumes a developmental approach to young people where they are valued not for what they contribute to democracy here and now, but for the citizens they will become. The policy is focused on 'preparing young people for the future' and enabling individuals to maximise their 'life choices'.

At the state government level, the discourse is somewhat different. Young people are discussed both in terms of their current and future contribution to society (Department

for Victorian Communities, 2006: 2). State government policies also acknowledge diversity, often as a guiding principle (to 'not treat young people as a homogenous group'). A greater level of detail is provided on how understanding and responding to diversity will be achieved to facilitate the participation of a wide range of young people. Nevertheless, there are only a few targeted initiatives or explicit examples of priority access (such as creating two positions specifically for young people from 'culturally diverse backgrounds' on the NSW Community Relations Commission). As is the case at the federal level, young people are identified as either unproblematic achievers, or as at risk and requiring special interventions.

<u>Participation</u>

There have been some significant differences in approaches to youth participation between different levels of Government. Table 12 compares the Federal Government, and New South Wales and Victorian State Government approaches as outlined in policy documents. These states have been chosen as they represent illustrative (New South Wales) and exemplary (Victorian) cases.

Table 12 Youth participation in Australia – Government perspectives

	Federal Government	**State Governments (NSW and Victoria)**
Purpose	Develop youth leaders; and, deal with young people at-risk of non-participation in education, employment and training.	Cross sectoral involvement of young people in policy making and service delivery Youth leadership
Domains	Education and training	Policy
Mode	Formal and structured	Formal and structured
Number of young people involved	Limited	Wide ranging at local level, more limited at state level.

Despite a stated broad commitment to youth participation in federal government policy (Footprints to the Future, 2001; Stepping Forward Action Plan, 2002; Living Choices, 2003; Contributing and Changing, 2004) there are limited tangible examples of where young people are able to participate directly in decision making processes at the federal level. Although the policy itself drew on some direct consultation with young people (via a survey of 2147 young people and in case studies with an

unspecified number of young people from a range of Australian communities [PMYPTF, 2001: 1-2]) the report makes only token mention of youth participation. Furthermore, young people are the subjects, not the audience of this policy document.

Notions of young people as being either 'successful' or 'at-risk' are perpetuated through models of participation in decision making that are proposed in the federal government policy examined here. Young people who succeed in appropriate transitions to adulthood are expected to put themselves forward for inclusion in adult structures of community and government decision making. Specifically, youth participation is defined as:

- Leadership opportunities in government agencies, schools, organisations, local government and services

- Volunteering and community service

- Being mentored by an adult

- Enrolling to vote

(PMYPTF, 2001: 7)

However, young people identified as disengaged or 'at risk' are targeted for inclusion in programs, not decision making processes. They are conceptualised as a sort of sub-second-class citizen and who require specific interventions in order to be successfully politically socialised. It is assumed that because the face challenges in the attainment of education or employment, have complex home lives or special needs that they are not suitable or able to participate in 'mainstream' youth participation activities.

As indicated in Table 12, leadership is also a key concept in the policy. The National Youth Round table was the only mechanism to support young people's direct input into policy development and decision making between 1998 - 2007. Around forty four young people were appointed annually and the selection process sought to create a group 'where possible, members will reflect the diversity of young Australians in their experiences, education, occupations and backgrounds. Indigenous Australians, people with disability and people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are encouraged to apply.' (http://www.thesource.gov.au/involve/NYR/get_involved.asp).

The key aim of federal policy is to 'integrate' young people into 'society' (PMYPTF, 2001: 7). The policy positions young people as external to the wider community – which includes schools, businesses, governments (PMYPTF, 2001: xi). It focuses on outlining strategies that socialise young people to behave appropriately within these environments and is therefore institution-centred, as opposed to youth-centred. Consequently, this construction of youth and young people's place in the community fails to acknowledge where young people are participating 'outside' of formal institutions. Because young people are constructed as deficient and requiring development, participation is something to be undertaken primarily because it benefits the individual young person. Whilst Recommendation #5 of the report implies that effective partnerships require that young people are involved in decision-making, the main beneficiaries of this participation are young people:

> *Opportunities for young people to participate actively in decision-making and develop leadership skills are an important part of youth and community development.*

> (PMYPTF, 2001: 37).

Though benefits to the community are implied, they are not explicitly laid out and additional references to youth participation in decision-making are buried in a single recommendation for the creation of a national body to guide the 'cultural change required to empower local communities to develop effective partnership' (PMYPTF, 2001: 43). The proposed national body is aimed at supporting the sectors and institutions that work with young people, not increasing youth participation in decision-making.

In federal level policy in Australia, the internet is considered a tool to help to manage 'youth transitions' from childhood to adulthood. These transitions are located in spheres of young people's lives. For example, the transition from school to work corresponds with spheres of education and employment; the transition from dependence to independence corresponds with spheres of family and 'society'. The internet and other digital technologies (such as computer games) are discussed in *Footprints to the Future* in the context of curriculum products to assist in the

transition from school to employment (PMYPTF, 2001: 34). In case studies, the internet is recognised as a mechanism to link young people to programs and opportunities for skill development (PMYPTF, 2001: 152, 163, 189, 192).

The federal government youth portal – http://www.thesource.gov.au/ - was the government's online youth participation strategy from 1998 - 2007. This website provided youth-related information, but did not enable online participation. Opportunities to 'get involved' were advertised but these were limited, infrequent, offline and referred to leadership opportunities, such as the National Youth Roundtable and Ship for World Youth or youth development programs such as GreenCorps (a youth development program structured around environmental education and action that is part of the mutual obligation Work for the Dole program), Mentoring Marketplace (youth mentoring) and Reconnect (program for young homeless people). The internet used in this way is a tool for communicating *at* young people, not *with* young people.

State government policy documents contain a more explicit commitment to the participation of young people in policy making. The Victorian and New South Wales governments have all have released recent policy explicitly outlining their commitment to increasing youth participation (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006; NSW Department of Community Services). The policy aims for New South Wales and Victoria are listed in Table 13.

Table 13 Policy goals for young people in New South Wales and Victoria

New South Wales Policy (2006)	Victorian State Policy (2006)
Belonging to family and community	Contributing and making a difference
Education and Employment	Achieving potential through informed life choices
Feeling good and staying healthy	Having resources and making connections
Engaging in culture, sport and recreation	Managing healthy, active and diverse lives
Feeling and being safe	Being safe and promoting safe behaviours

(Sources: New South Wales Department of Community Services, 2006; Department of Victorian Communities, 2006)

In Victoria, youth participation in community and government decision making is listed as an explicit goal of government policy. Victorian state government policy includes a stated commitment to create advisory mechanisms to various decision making bodies, including Government, school councils and cultural institutions such as Arts Victoria (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006). The New South Wales government suggests that youth participation is a principle which underpins the way it forms and delivers on youth policy. Both plans state that young people and communities had input to the policy development and that young people's participation is a principle which underpins the development and delivery of the activities proposed in the policy. State government youth participation policies emphasise participation in government and community decision making as the starting point for deeper participation in education, training and employment.

Promoting opportunities for youth leadership is a significant part of a policy commitment to youth participation in the Victorian and New South Wales state government policy (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006: 19; New South Wales Department of Community Services, 2006: 13). They both propose a range of mechanisms to involve young people, but these are still essentially adult-led (policy maker) not youth-led. Young people's contribution to policy development is contingent on adults asking or inviting young people to contribute ideas and adults interpreting these ideas and making decisions on how they should translate into policy. Although more diverse forms of participation are presented in the state and local level documents, the 'standard' approach across all levels of government is to create advisory boards and youth advisory positions that feed young people's views up to adult-led decision making bodies. For example, the New South Wales Office for Youth establishes a Youth Advisory Council every year. Victoria is the only state or territory that does not have a youth council, preferring instead to run a state-wide network to which people volunteer. The Victorian government also holds one off events called *Young People Direct* to consult with young people on particular issues. It is not clear from publically available information how effective this innovative approach is, though in 2008 the Victorian government announced that it would be creating a ministerial advisory committee to communicate the outcomes from *Young People Direct* forums to the Minister for Youth.

State governments emphasise the duties and rights of citizenship, but largely assume that rational young people will get involved and that all young people are equally positioned to act on their rights to participate. In New South Wales, youth leadership is espoused as both necessary and desirable, as it acts as a measure of successful socialisation of young people as 'active citizens' without actually conferring agenda-setting or decision-making power on young people. In Victoria there are interesting participatory mechanisms in place which, according to the youth action policy (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006) have directly contributed to the government's youth agenda.

Young people had input into the development of these policies which are promoted to young people via government websites. Significantly, state level policies explicitly outline areas for action across government departments. Most recently, the New South Wales government announced that it would begin implementing its newly released Youth Action Plan by supporting the New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People to conduct workshops with senior managers in the New South Wales public service on involving young people in the implementation of the State plan. The Victorian action plan outlines concrete steps, including specific programs, resource allocation and support and training required to ensure that young people are involved in community and government decision making.

Participation mechanisms in the Victorian and New South Wales policies include structured processes, such as youth advisory boards, councils and reference groups, participation registers (Department of Community Services, 2006: 7; Department for Victorian Communities, 2006: 18) and unstructured mechanisms, such as online chat and consultations, email alerts and working in partnership with youth-serving organisations are also proposed. These are effectively strategies to enable young people to have their say, or participate in programs. The extent to which these mechanisms open up opportunities for young people to set agendas or take part in actual decision-making is less clear.

State and local level policies examined here often reflect community development and consumer-led policy models. The policies view young people 'in the context of their whole community − where they live, their family situation, their culture and to whom they are connected' (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006: 16). Whilst young

people benefit from participating in government decision making (particularly in the context of 'leadership' initiatives), these documents reflect the view that policy responses will be more effective if the community (in this case, young people) is consulted. These state level policies acknowledge that young people's lives are affected by a whole range of policy frameworks and that their participation in determining the government's approach will contribute to successful outcomes for the whole community as well as young people themselves (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006, 2006: 8). In New South Wales the youth policy *Working Together, Working for Young People 2006* includes a commitment that the Premier to issue a directorate to all government departments to 'apply best practice youth participation principles in their dealings with young people'. One concrete example of where the policy proposed this could occur is in the area of health policy: by committing to the establishment of a Health Clinicians and Consumer Engagement Policy in which young people would take part.

At the state level, there is more awareness of the role of the internet as a setting for participation. State government policy documents analysed here acknowledge that young people are increasingly online and that the internet provides new ways for young people to engage with each other and their communities (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006: 13; New South Wales Department of Community Services, 2006). Victorian policy acknowledges the relationship between information communication technologies (including mobile phones) and social and civic interaction (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006: 13), though there is no mention of the challenges or opportunities that this presents to government. This is reflected in the way that the role of information communication technologies is presented in the policy: www.youthcentral.gov.vic.au is pitched as a web based youth participation initiative, though the focus of future policy is to '…further develop its role as the 'first stop shop' for young people when seeking information about courses and study options, accommodation and jobs and career planning tips' (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006: 21). YouthCentral engages young people as 'roving reporters' who produce content – text, audio, video and graphic - for the website although this content is moderated by adult staff within the Office for Youth. This enables the Victorian government to hear from young people about issues that matter to them, but there is no mechanism for multi-party discussion and limited. In terms of

participation, the site is highly managed and predominately for communicating information to young people.

Apart from commenting on young people's use of the internet, the New South Wales policy does not discuss opportunities to engage with young people online. The New South Wales state government youth website is http://www.youth.nsw.gov.au/. Its main function is to deliver information to young people though the it has discussion forums and feedback forms.

State and Federal Government e-participation initiatives promote 'managed citizenship' (Coleman, 2008). Though state governments promote a capacity-based approach to youth participation, e-participation is restricted both in the identification of 'youth issues' by government, and by the way content is created and used. There is no scope for young people to autonomously define what content should be created – and how that content is produced online. Government websites serve primarily as vehicles for information and resources. This is because the models for online participation are based on adult interpretations of what young people tell them is important and relevant (via offline consultation mechanisms). These Australian examples indicate that Government imperative to control online agendas mimics that in offline contexts.

Although there is some promising, innovative practice in the Victorian context, participation is adult-led and managed by governments at both state and federal level. Whilst young people are able to feed into policy at particular times, this is determined by government departments and bureaucrats, or by young people who sit on elite advisory councils. Furthermore, youth participation in government decision-making continues to be about consultation – something which has been highlighted by Wierenga, and colleagues over five years ago (2003: 28). It would seem that in terms of actual power to determine agendas and make decisions, policy has not advanced very far. The absence of recognition of autonomous youth-led forms of participation is the clearest indication that government policy in Australia continues to be oriented towards Coleman's notion of managed citizenship (Coleman, 2008).

5.1.2 The United Kingdom

5.1.2.1 Youth Participation in the Policy Context

Youth participation emerged as an explicit element of public policy in the United Kingdom during the late 1960s (Carnegie Young People's Initiative, 2007: 3). A range of youth policies and programs incorporating participation were developed over the following two decades as calls for greater youth participation were recognised and responded to by central and local administrations (Carnegie Young People's Initiative, 2007: 3). Contemporary campaigns to include children and young people in policy development have drawn strength from the convergence of the consumer rights movement, the new sociology of youth and the child rights movement (Sinclair, 2004:107). Additionally, with the election of New Labour in 1997, youth participation policy and practice increased as central and local administrations and agencies came under statutory obligations for increased public consultation, for example, in the area of community planning (Carnegie Young People's Initiative, 2007: 5). In just over a decade of New Labour government, a number of apparatus including Children and Young People's Commissioners, the Children and Young People's Unit and policy such as *Tomorrow's Future: Building a Strategy for Children and Young People* (Children and Young People's Unit, 2001) and *Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People* (Department for Employment and Skills, 2001) have led to the increased presence of youth participation in government and community decision making.

However, the United Kingdom has not had a codified set of 'youth policies' in which to locate youth participation. Rather, youth policy has been dispersed across different government departments resulting in inconsistent and haphazard uptake of principles of youth participation. Since 2001 there has been a more concerted attempt to promote youth participation across areas of government aided by the establishment of the Children and Young People's Unit in the Department for Education and Skills. This unit was created following the recommendations of the report of the Policy Action Team on Young People, Policy Action Team (PAT)12: Young People (2000) (Bell & Jones, 2002) and in 2001, the unit released a policy paper 'Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People (DfES, 2001). The forward to the document outlines its purpose:

> *The principles in this document are designed to give all government departments a solid framework on which to base their plans to increase the*

> *involvement of children and young people in policy and service design and delivery.*

(Children and Young People's Unit, 2001: 1)

The unit has actively coordinated youth policy development across government departments, characterised by the following policy priorities across government:

- Better co-ordination of policies affecting young people

- Further measures to widen access to post-16 education

- Targeting of those perceived to be at greatest risk of social exclusion through early interventions

- Management of anti-social behaviour through families

- Greater focus on participation and active citizenship

(Bell & Jones, 2002: 'Current Policies')

Youth participation has subsequently been incorporated across government departments with eight government departments publishing action plans for youth involvement (Children and Young People's Unit, 2001b: 9; Bell & Jones, 2002: 'Current Policies'). Making participation and active citizenship a priority policy area has increased both the practice and profile of youth participation in government decision-making at the central and local level. This has resulted in a positive shift in the structures and processes of government and the public service to enable youth participation at local levels of government. Youth participation is a key strategy of the social inclusion agenda for addressing other child and youth issues such as poverty and disadvantage. For example, *Youth Matters (2006)* was developed to support policy across government to address inequality and social mobility of young people.

> *Youth Matters seeks the same overall aim as those in the 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper and the subsequent implementation plan 5 and in the Better Schools White Paper 6 –the transformation of the life chances of young people.*

(Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 4)

In early 2006 the British Government reinforced its commitment to promoting 'active citizenship and community engagement by young people' by including participation principles in the Government plan *Respect Action Plan (2006)* and setting up a ministerial committee to support the Russell Commission Implementation Body (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 17). The *Respect Action Plan (2006)* – the Government strategy for addressing anti-social behaviour – takes action on youth participation proposals outlined in *Youth Matters, 2006,* including supporting young people to make decisions about how local funds for youth activities and resources should be spent. In addition a number of Government funded commissions have produced reports on a number of dimensions of citizenship resulting in some significant policy outcomes. The two most notable examples from the past decade are the Crick Report (1998) and the Russell Commission (2005). The Crick Report explored what is needed in order to support young people's participation in democracy. It led to introduction of citizenship education in English and Welsh secondary school curriculum in 2001 (Coleman, 2008: 189). Whilst the report acknowledged that young people are mobilised in relation to issues, it nevertheless focuses on making the case for citizenship education to focus on 'social and moral responsibility…community involvement and political literacy' (Crick Report, 1998: 38 – 39).

In the United Kingdom the discursive relationship between volunteering and citizenship is marked in two particular ways: by the introduction of the Millennium Volunteers project, where volunteers can receive certification according to the number of hours undertaken in formal volunteering; and, the creation of the 'V' charity to administer government and private sector funds to support volunteering. The Russell Commission (2005) was formed to review and propose a framework to increase youth action and volunteering in order to support community and social change, strengthen opportunities for young people to learn and develop and promote active citizenship and wider participation in society. The report resulted in a massive commitment by the government and corporate sectors to establish a new body to provide support and funding to promote youth volunteering in the United Kingdom (www.wearev.com). 'V' was launched with £50 million committed by the Government and intended to attract match funding from the private sector.

Consequently, volunteering is linked primarily with notions of citizenship that emphasise community service and participation in education and employment.

The non-government and community sector has played a major role in the promotion of the broader youth participation agenda in the United Kingdom through research, advocacy and practice. The Carnegie Young People's Initiative and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in particular, have committed significant resources to researching youth participation and funding research on practice and impact (e.g. Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Coleman & Rowe, 2005; The Power Inquiry, 2006; Butler et.al., 2005). In the area of advocacy the National Youth Agency, National Children's Bureau, British Youth Council and Children's Rights Alliance for England have all played key roles in advancing the rights of young people to participate and supporting governments and community organisations to involve young people through provision of training and resources. Additionally, UKYouth, Changemakers and YouthBank are examples of organisations that provide resources and funding directly to young people to develop projects and campaigns that address issues they care about. A large body of resources including research, evaluations, guides, best practice manuals and networks have been generated by the non-government and community sector during the last decade and culminating in the creation of Participation Works (www.participationworks.org.auk) – a network of organisations promoting participation of all sectors of the community, with a focus on children and young people.

4.1.2.2 Discourses of Youth and Participation

The *Youth Matters* policy takes a broad approach to 'youth'. Young people are defined by age (14 – 19) (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 2) but the policy also acknowledges that diversity and structural as well as individual barriers to participation influence young people's participation (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 7). For instance, the policy states that some young people are at a disadvantage due to backgrounds and personal circumstance (disability). It also claims that some young people chose not to take advantage of the opportunities available to them – evidenced by engagement in anti-social behaviour.

In the United Kingdom, youth participation as 'leadership' or a strategy for addressing 'risk' is tempered in the policy texts by a focus on the role of volunteering

for promoting 'active citizenship'. According to the policy, volunteering makes possible such a wide range of civic engagement possibilities that all young people have an opportunity to participate – be it through service to the community in conjunction with traditional charities, political parties or community organisations. Through the provision of local and national level mechanisms primarily delivered through volunteering programs, the policy claims to support all young people to 'make a contribution'. At the local level, a proposed Youth Opportunity Fund will enable young people to make decisions about how local councils spend funds to deliver services to young people (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 15). At the national level, the main approach to enabling youth citizenship is by supporting the recommendations of the Russell Commission. These proposals are focused on expanding opportunities for volunteering and joining these up with models for youth participation in government decision making through Children's Trusts.

Whilst the *Youth Matters* policy provides less detail about the mechanisms that should be used to facilitate youth participation, it does state a commitment to both universal (general population) and targeted (particular group) approaches. There is strong recognition of the barriers that certain groups of young people face to participation. The policy identifies the social processes that create barriers for young people who have a disability, who are same-sex attracted, who are homeless or who live in temporary accommodation and those from Black and minority ethic groups (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 7). It also makes a commitment to legislate the obligation of local authorities to support young people from all backgrounds to influence the activities and services available to them (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 7).

The concept of participation is also closely aligned with partnership in United Kingdom policy. Policy proposes to bring young people, youth services, local authorities, educators and parents together to plan and implement policy that affects young people (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 8). Young people are considered to be part of a community and are listed as stakeholders who should be involved in decision making through a number of policy initiatives, such as children's trusts. These trusts are a framework for collaborative policy and service delivery at a local level that involve providers, statutory bodies, councils, parents, educators and

young people in processes of local planning (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 26).

There is a strong commitment in this policy to creating opportunities for young people to contribute to the development and delivery of policy and services that affect them (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 6). However, the main commitment to youth participation relates to youth volunteering. For example, the Youth Matters: Next Steps policy commitment to youth citizenship refers exclusively to the Russell Commission and pledges to support 'more young people to volunteer and become involved in their communities' (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 17). This is reinforced by the focus on 'active participation' in government policy (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 2). 'Active participation' is frequently used to describe the aim of involving young people in community and government decision making – the implication being that participation doesn't currently happen and this is the fault of the individual. Though in many respects the Youth Matters policy reflects notions of maximal citizenships, young people's citizenship status is still something referred to in the future tense – as something that this policy will deliver *to* young people.

> *The Youth Matters proposals provide a balance of opportunity, support and challenge to ensure a successful transition for every young person to adulthood. We want young people to thrive and prosper, and to mature as active, healthy and responsible citizens.*

> (Youth Matters, 2006: 5)

In this sense, maximal notions of citizenship also act as a strategy for delivering normatively 'good' and 'active' citizens. Government policy discourse on active participation implies successful democratic socialisation whereby the normative notions – and practice - of 'minimal' citizenship go unchallenged. In other words, the participatory agenda does not include actualising forms of citizenship described by Bennett (2007). In many ways, the invocation of 'active participation' reinforces the ideas of minimal citizenship and, more importantly, managed – not autonomous - forms of citizenship (Coleman, 2008).

According to the British policy paper *Youth Matters: Next Steps (2006)*:

We will only achieve lasting and positive change for young people if we place them at the centre of our policies and services.

(Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 6)

This policy argues that involving young people in government and community decision making is a core part of achieving this change. It refers to other policy instruments that demonstrate the value of participatory approaches for the effective design and delivery of local services (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 8). This point is reinforced throughout the document and young people are regularly referred to as valued members of their communities. It also states that participation benefits young people who are empowered, feel supported and trusted to make decisions and who want to take on opportunities to 'act responsibly and to assume an active role in decision-making and leadership in their communities' (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: 6).

As volunteering is a key part of the Government's approach to strengthening youth participation there is a clear belief that young people's contribution benefits the wider community:

Volunteering by young people makes a significant contribution to our national life – in the voluntary sector, the arts, sport, conservation, health and care, politics and many other areas, domestic and international. Young volunteers form the lifeblood of many organisations, and their energy, enthusiasm, commitment and leadership can create positive change in their local communities and environments.

(Russell Commission, 2005: 15)

The benefits are achieved through the promotion of:

- learning and skill development

- active citizenship

- participation of young people in wider society.

(Russell Commission, 2005: 15)

Non-government policy in the United Kingdom highlights the opportunities for extending democracy and recognising new and innovative forms of participation (Coleman & Rowe, 2005; The Power Inquiry, 2006). These reports also argue that the internet must not only be used by Members of Parliament to contact their constituents or be used to extend traditional forms of consultation, but also to facilitate two-way communication between the citizenry and elected representatives (Power Inquiry, 2006: 222). To a lesser extent, there is recognition that the internet is also a setting in which young people are discussing issues of social and political consequence on forums such as www.myspace.com and that online they exercise forms of political expression such as ethical purchasing and undertaking various forms of cyber activism which target a range of political actors beyond the state and politicians (Power Inquiry, 2006: 107).

In the United Kingdom there has been a concerted effort to understand and utilise the internet to facilitate youth participation. Several policy documents in the last decade have pointed to the opportunity to build engagement with information and online deliberation (Citizens Advisory Group, 1998: 68; Russell Commission, 2005; Power Report, 2006). The Russell Commission recommendation was for a national volunteering portal to be created online. The report states:

> *The youth portal should maximise the potential of new and emerging communications technology. Young people are known to be early adopters of new technology – more than 90% have regular access to the internet, nearly the same percentage have a mobile phone, and well over half have access to digital TV9 Mobile phones in particular have become an integral part of a young person's daily life, acting as a key communication tool between peers and as an important resource for a growing range of information from other sources.*

(Russell Commission, 2005: 26)

Whilst there is little evidence that the government uses the internet to involve young people in government decision making, it does support a number of participation initiatives auspiced by non-government organisations. For example, http://www.headsup.org.uk is an innovative online program designed to bring members of parliament and young people together in dialogue (Ferguson, 2007).

Managed by the Hansard Society, HeadsUp is sponsored by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (formerly the Department for Education and Skills). Russell Commission report notes the centrality of the internet to young people's everyday lives, and their preference for communicating with other people as well as searching for information. The Russell Commission resulted in the commitment of government funding for the establishment of the 'V' charity to champion youth volunteering in the United Kingdom. 'V' is primarily delivered online (www.wearev.com) and enables young people to search for offline volunteering opportunities and contribute to an online community where they can chat, share multimedia content and blog about their experiences. Young people cannot, however, search for online volunteering opportunities.

5.2 Case study responses to policy contexts

Chapter 3 provided a brief account of the case study organisations: the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network. In this chapter I contextualise the youth participation approach in each organisation by looking at their policy positioning on youth and participation.

5.2.1 The Inspire Foundation

At the time of its launch the Inspire Foundation did not deliberately involve young people through formal processes although it did attract many young volunteers who assisted in raising funds and developing the first iteration of the Reach Out website (www.reachout.com.au). The formal involvement of young people in the development of the foundation's initiatives began in 1999 when a young staff member argued that if the services that the foundation provided were intended to be used by young people, then young people should be involved in setting the direction that these services took. That same year, the very first Reach Out Youth Advisory Board brought together 10 young people from around Australia. These young people engaged in discussions, sharing ideas and creating content for the site over a period of 12 weeks. Most discussions took place online via asynchronous discussion boards, and they also came together in Sydney for a three day workshop. The Inspire Foundation has since brought together three groups of young people per year to contribute to the work of the foundation in both Reach Out and ActNow (launched in 2006). In 2002 a 'youth

participation program' was formally created after young people lobbied for formal opportunities to continue their work with the foundation. Young people and staff developed a model whereby young people who had participated in a Youth Advisory Board could continue to volunteer for the foundation in the capacity of Youth Ambassador. These young people were resourced to contribute to discussions on strategic development, to create content, engage in awareness and fund-raising activities and to present to academics, health and education professionals, donors, sponsors and government. Participants were aged 16 – 25.

The implementation of the youth participation model at the Inspire Foundation has included:

- Appointing dedicated staff to coordinate youth participation in Reach Out and ActNow programs;

- Committing 'inclusiveness' as an organisation value under which requires that staff 'involve young people in meaningful ways; are open to other people's views and experiences; and, collaborate with those who share our dream and aspirations' (http://www.inspire.org.au/about-us-our-values.html); and,

- Involving young people in staff recruitment.

A draft internal policy paper on youth participation at the foundation states:

A commitment to youth participation means that young people have the right to be involved in discussions and know that their views are heard and acted upon. This ensures that the work of the Inspire Foundation is relevant to young people, meets their needs and reflects their talents, skills and points of view. Our partnership with young people operates across all levels of the organisation. Key to the success of our approach is:

- *A whole of organisation commitment to youth participation embedded in internal policies and strategies;*

- *Young people's involvement in the development and implementation of these policies and strategies; and*

- *The provision of appropriate resources for young people and staff to work collaboratively.*

(Internal policy paper, The Inspire Foundation, 2007)

Youth participation has historically been operationalised through two of the Foundation programs (www.reachout.com.au ; www.actnow.com.au). Between 1999 and 2007, four hundred and eight young people took part in formal participation programs through Reach Out and a further two hundred and one participated through ActNow.[8] However, since 2005, there has been an increasing interest in enabling young people to participate across the organisation in operations, development, marketing and communications and research and evaluation. Young people can participate via formal and informal mechanisms. These are described in detail in the following chapter.

The Inspire Foundation has been recognised as a best practice case study in youth participation (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2004: 25; James, 2007: S58). Since 2000 Inspire staff have been appointed to a range of government, corporate and community sector advisory boards and committees addressing a range of policy areas including mental health and suicide prevention, drugs, youth access to technology and child abuse and neglect (see: http://www.inspire.org.au/research-and-policy-sector-involvement.html). In particular, foundation staff and young people have been appointed as advisors on youth participation in a range of settings including national and international conferences and state and federal health policy.

The Inspire Foundation is a well-resourced non-profit organisation which has been predominately financed by corporate, foundation and individual philanthropic grants. For example, of the $1.8AUS raised in 2002-2003 donations from corporates, foundations and individuals accounted for 84%, with a further 15% received from government (Inspire Foundation, 2003:31). As overall funding has increased so too has government funding and although in 2006-2007 only 9% of funds raised came from government (from a total of $3.6 million raised), this represented an increase of 375.3% (Inspire Foundation, 2007: 55). A significant proportion of this funding is dedicated to youth participation including staff who coordinate youth participation in

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[8] Details of these mechanisms are included in the methodology section.

Inspire Foundation programs, funds to run training and workshops and activities undertaken by young people. Staff across the organisation are encouraged and resourced to work directly with young people (Inspire Foundation, 2007: 18-19). Increasingly, the Inspire Foundation is undertaking paid consultancies in youth participation and web strategy development - specialising in youth-centred research. For example, in 2007-2008, Inspire conducted research and professional development on youth participation for local and state governments, for academic institutions and other non-profit organisations (http://www.inspire.org.au/research-and-policy-consultancy.html).

Initially created to address high levels of youth suicide in Australia, the Inspire Foundation was not conceived as a youth driven organisation. According to executive interviewee #1:

> *There was a sense to which we wanted to ride in on white horses and save young people and in the initial stages I think I was more prescriptive about what we'd do for young people…*

(Executive Interview #1, Australia)

This perception of young people being 'at risk' was challenged from within the organisation by staff who argued:

> *Young people were better placed to make decisions about content and content areas and should be given the opportunity to directly contribute.*

(Executive Interview #2, Australia)

One interviewee describes the Foundation's approach to youth as:

> *… the belief in young people's ability to change their world, to get through tough times or take action on issues that they care about. So it's like, like the opposite of deficit?*

Executive Interview #1, Australia

This reflects a capacity-based approach which emphasises young people's capabilities and appreciates young people for what they can offer in the present. The belief held by Inspire executives that young people can impact on the organisation and its

services was the catalyst for involving young people and has continued to be the main driver of youth participation at the Foundation.

> *And then you've still got people like Create and Inspire doing innovative models of engaging young people because they believe that the experience of young people will add to the broader result, which will be a better result.*

<div align="right">Executive Interview #3, Australia</div>

Youth participation is valued because the unique perspectives, experiences and ideas that young people bring to the organisation are valued. According to one executive interviewee:

> *There's an acceptance of young people having a say about stuff and that's my thing: staying close, listening and responding. If we ever lost that then we're up shit creek. As long as we stay close, we listen and respond - and that's about building a sense of trust with young people –*

<div align="right">Executive Interview #1, Australia</div>

Over the last 10 years the non-government sector in Australia has largely been focused on promoting principles of youth participation (Wierenga, 2003: 51). This has most often led to the promotion of mechanisms that bring people to existing (adult-led) organisations and institutions and insert them into existing (adult-led) processes and structures. Where this is the dominant approach to youth participation, young people who are already equipped with the economic, social and cultural capital to participate engage effectively – and one opportunity leads to another (Wierenga, 2003: 30). Similarly, youth development programs exist to socialise young people – particularly those who are seen as 'at risk' or problematic. Young people were invited to share their personal ideas for how to strengthen Inspire services and contribute by producing content for Inspire initiatives. They were not recruited as 'representatives' or 'experts' - on anything except their own experience. One executive was particularly cautious about the value of more limited, youth representative positions in other organisations:

> *Some young people get token opportunities to go and sit on heavy boards around stuff because somebody at some point says, well we should have a*

young person who is involved so that we get the young person's input from the youth of Australia. Which is insane, because you only represent yourself.

Executive Interview #3, Australia

Though they provide excellent opportunities for individual young people, these positions are viewed as elitist and highly limiting in terms of opening up opportunities for broader youth participation. Executive interviewees felt that such roles often have little influence or challenge broader attitudes towards young people's role in government and community decision making. Reflecting on her own experiences of being a youth representative on a policy board in the 1970s, one executive interviewee commented:

The people who designed the model and delivered it were the biggest corporate heads at the time, and government, and that was it. They had a token young person, which was me. It doesn't mean that I didn't get the most profound experience and benefit out of that, because it was huge. Did I contribute to the outcome? Absolutely not.

Executive Interview #3, Australia

Whilst maintaining that different mechanisms are more or less useful depending on the situation, the Inspire executives erred away from talking about youth leadership, preferring to focus on the need for the organisation to be looking to where young people are already acting and speaking from in the everyday lives.

I mean for instance, I think focus groups are a good example in that people only use focus groups when they don't actually involve young people in an ongoing way. Myspace is another classic example in that we ran focus groups, but we also spoke to interns and got other young people involved in the discussion in other ways. So the interesting nuggets of information didn't come out of focus groups – that's where they were tested. The interesting nuggets came out of ongoing discussions with a range of young people. So the smart stuff often comes out in the informal bits of the model.

Executive Interview #2, Australia

This 'informal bit' of the model (for instance, engaging with young people via www.myspace.com) is viewed by interviewees as an important strategy for engaging with a range of young people – including those who would not ordinarily see themselves getting involved in 'youth participation opportunities'. For the organisation, accessing young people in their everyday spaces (online and offline) is the best strategy for engaging with a diverse range of young people – a claim I will critically engage with in Chapter 8.

Though the Inspire Foundation has been quite structured in terms of the role of youth participation, it has always taken a collaborative, partnership approach to its work with young people. This has meant that over the last few years, youth participation has become less structured with an emphasis on both formal *and* informal participation mechanisms. A strong theme ran through all executive interviews of the importance of senior management, and particularly the founder, in setting a culture of collaboration. The views of health and education professionals, as well as young people, were widely sought by an executive that valued the input and views of others:

> *Australian Executive Interviewee #2: A lot of CEOs would be quite threatened by the idea of youth involvement. Many times he, or they* [the board of directors]*, could have put a stop to all this* [youth involvement]*. I just don't think that he has been threatened by the idea. He's much more interested in consensus and I think he thinks that if youth involvement is a good way of bringing about consensus and bringing greater input then it's something that should happen.*

> *PC: Do you think it's also about sharing power?*

> *Australian Executive Interviewee #2:Yeah, but I also think the fact that he didn't come from a mental health background meant that he was really open to the idea that other people would know more than him, and therefore seemed entirely logical that people using the services would also know some things that he wouldn't. So again, there was something about the philosophy of the organisation that allowed it to happen in that way.*

This philosophy has meant that valuing young people's views and actions is more important than the methods or mechanisms for participation. Though the Inspire

Foundation has utilised formal, structured mechanisms, such as youth advisory boards, youth participation is less a policy or set of activities in which young people come to the organisation and 'engage', and more a process of relationship building in which all stakeholders including young people are encouraged to engage in dialogue. Whilst an acknowledgement of child and youth rights underpins the commitment of the organisation to facilitating young people's participation, initially the impetus was more akin to a consumer-involvement model: engaging the target audience in order to better understand and therefore meet their needs. Interviewees described a commitment towards a culture of participation and were less concerned about the structures and processes that facilitated young people's participation. All executive staff and board members from the Inspire Foundation felt that as long as everyone involved in the organisation was committed to involving young people, then the ways young people were involved was relatively unimportant. This has created an organisational culture that is open to young people determining how they want to participate and signals a commitment to autonomous citizenship.

As the organisation became increasingly successful and the role that youth participation played in ensuring that the Foundation's initiatives responded to young people's needs, interests and cultures, the organisation became more self-consciously and philosophically youth-centred:

> *I think what's changed is that the shift from an operational relationship to a philosophical relationship (of young people to the organisation). As an operational one it was very much where young people can continue to be involved – as long as they continue to deliver results. As a philosophical one we recognise that they have a right to be involved and therefore we have to make sure we deliver results through that model [of youth participation] – we have no alternative but to deliver it through that model.*

> Executive Interview #2, Australia

According to this approach, the organisation views young people as agents of change who determine the form their participation takes. This is an action-focused approach described by one executive staff member in the following way:

> *Our commitment is to providing opportunities for people to be involved – not to providing 'the model'. So the more you think about opportunities for involvement, the more you find ways to do it.*

<div align="right">Executive Interview #2, Australia</div>

The program has developed almost entirely based on the views of young participants, from relatively unstructured, to quite structured and, more recently, a combination of both formal and informal mechanisms. For example, following young people's enthusiasm for social network sites, in 2007 the foundation scaled back its formal youth participation process and engaged young people in developing an online participation strategy leveraging sites such as Bebo, Myspace and Facebook. The internet has therefore transformed the way the organisation engages with young people, shifting it from using the internet to extend organisation-led participatory mechanisms to youth-centred spaces. One executive staff member described the thinking behind this shift:

> *So given our commitment to creating opportunity to participate, then it's logical to use that* [internet] *functionality to extend opportunities to contribute and participate. It's a second point of involvement – for general users out there to be able to create content for our services* (via user generated content functionality). *So for me it's about keeping your eyes open for ways to extend that opportunity. Young people will take it where they want to. The fact that young people are going online all the time to create their own content has nothing to do with us – it's not something that we instigated – it's just something that we're responding to and I can only see that it will increase… I think about how we're considering Myspace and just the mechanisms that are open to those at Inspire to consider that challenge.*

<div align="right">Executive Interview #1, Australia</div>

The organisation's model for youth participation is being shaped by the way young people use the technology. Interviewees described what they saw as young people's increasing comfort communicating online presenting an opportunity to move away from formal, structured and organisation-led processes. At the Inspire Foundation this means the youth participation model is increasingly being shaped, not only by what an

elite group of young people involved directly in projects at the foundation have to say, but by what young people who have relatively little direct contact say and do online in places like Myspace, Bebo and Second Life, where www.reachout.com.au and www.actnow.com.au have a presence.

So while young people were not involved in the board of directors at the Inspire Foundation, they were clear that the main function of the board was financial management and governance – but that decisions critical to the success of the organisation were take at the programmatic level:

> *It's of young people, as opposed to for young people. And the older contribution is merely organisational, structural, financial, to facilitate young people to help themselves. The board doesn't do much about the content. It has an oversight role to make sure it's run well, but our job is really to raise money to make sure the organisation is sustainable financially, is organisationally coherent, is well managed.*

> Executive Interview #4, Australia

This interviewee felt strongly that the respect for young people's views meant that the absence of a young person on the board of directors did not mean that young people did not shape decisions at the executive level:

> *We take advice from staff, who in turn take advice from the young people around them. As long as it seems coherent to us as an overall view for the organisation then it's signed off on.*

> Executive Interview #4, Australia

Young people are involved in order to ensure that the organisation delivers the most relevant and effective programs that it can. All executive staff agreed that the approach was a participant-centred one and, therefore (because it is a youth-serving organisation) a youth-centred one. The purpose of youth participation in the Inspire Foundation is to ensure that the organisation's initiatives are of benefit to young people. Though participation has a positive impact on individual participants, the purpose is not to provide youth development. The organisation provides resources and training to ensure that young people can 'do their job' as a contributor to the work of

the foundation. By focusing on the views and needs of young people themselves, a commitment to participation was defined by the issues that mattered to the participants – rather than the structures and processes that would fit in with the operation of the organisation. Consequently, the commitment is to ensuring that young people are able to set agendas within the organisation as well as make decisions and take action. Executive staff at the Inspire Foundation hold attitudes that reflect Wierenga and colleagues' contention that young people should be seen as having unique knowledge, skills and experiences to contribute, but that they should not be expected to do this without resources or in isolation from other communities or groups (Wierenga, 2003: 13).

5.2.2 Youth Action Network

The Youth Action Network's vision is for all young people to have the opportunity to participate in Youth Action volunteering and develop their own solutions to community needs. The Youth Action Network seeks to develop and promote the Youth Action approach to empowering and supporting ever-greater numbers of young people to take action that is of benefit to themselves and others. The organisation both delivers support to organisations to take a youth action approach to volunteering, and also advocates at a policy level for young people's rights to participate. For instance, the Youth Action Network Executive Director was on the independent advisory group to the Russell Commission.

Key aims of the Youth Action Network are to:

- promote the Youth Action approach and good practice in youth volunteering

- develop the capacity of Youth Action agencies

- provide policy level representation for Youth Action

- provide Networking Opportunities for Youth Action agencies and Youth Action volunteers

- undertake evaluation and research into the impact, numbers and extent of Youth Action.

The organisation was initially established to provide support for youth workers to implement the youth action approach. In the early days the network did not consciously involve young people, although young people were involved in network development activities such as conferences and at times member of the board were young people (though not appointed for that reason). In 2002 the network received a grant of £30,000 from the Carnegie Young People's Initiative to employ a Youth Participation Support Worker to develop youth participation in the management of the organisation. At this time a youth participation strategy was written, but due to lack of resources, was not implemented. Instead, young people have been recruited on an 'ad hoc' and needs basis. They have typically been appointed from member organisations according to: the nature of the project (and therefore, those organisations that are involved); the member organisations who are most active; or, their proximity to the organisation. In 2002 the Youth Action Network formalised the 'fluid' nature of youth participation by appointing a Youth Participation Officer. This position has not always been a permanent, full time role though in July 2007 a Participation Officer was appointed who will be responsible for developing and implementing a participation strategy.

A detailed breakdown of the funding arrangements of the Youth Action Network was not made available, however, the Network receives most of its funds from trusts and foundations, government and membership fees. Because there are no formal structures – or staff (until July 2007) – for youth participation it was also not possible to gauge the amount spent on youth participation.

The Youth Action Network promotes youth participation in member organisations. However, there is some contention as to whether or not it should itself be a 'Youth Action' organisation. This is partly due to disagreement within the organisation about the nature of youth participation. On one hand it is seen as a part of youth work (which is professionalised in the United Kingdom). For others it is an approach and is a logical way to ensure that the Youth Action Network is effective in delivering on its aims. Despite this, the Youth Action Network has a high level of youth participation and is committed to promoting youth participation beyond volunteering. Though, at the time of this research, young people were not participating via formal mechanisms they had taken part in decision making, planning and project realisation. Young people have always played a role in the development of the network, attending the

national conferences (where the network was originally formed) and have been on planning groups for different network activities and projects.

At the Youth Action Network, participation was broadly defined with no formal structure. Young people are involved in decision making across the organisation and at a deep level in certain aspects of its work. For example, young people have participated as: members of the board of trustees; advisors in project development (Tread[9]); trainers for project delivery; members of a steering group for a major research project; peer researchers; and, media spokespersons. According to one executive interviewee this was partly due to lack of dedicated resources for implementing the youth involvement strategy. But she also argued that the lack of structure provided opportunities for the organisation to be flexible, offer a broad range of opportunities and avoid tokenism or attracting 'youth representatives':

> *That's why I think it's better to try and - I don't know if infiltration is the best word or way of putting it - but to try and offer as many different avenues and opportunities for young people as possible so they don't feel like they're there as a young person, that they feel they're there as a media ambassador or working on this particular project.*

> Executive Interview #7, United Kingdom

This interviewee also felt it was important to distinguish 'youth participation' from 'youth action' saying:

> *So a young person who is on a youth forum is wanting to influence -and make thing better for themselves and for young people - but it is mainly about influencing, having a voice. Whereas youth volunteering and particularly youth action it's about doing something new and different that doesn't exist at the moment, is it from your own ideas. So with participation you join something that's existing, whereas with youth action you kind of create your own.*

> Executive Interview #7, United Kingdom

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[9] Tread is an online training program provided by the Youth Action Network to its member organisations to support them in facilitating youth action projects. It has ten modules including youth participation, impact measurement, government and policy and diversity.

Chapter 5. Policy Contexts: Citizenship, Governance and Organisations

The clear distinction was that youth participation is seen as limited, adult-led and managed, whilst 'youth action' was youth-led and young people held power and resources to implement their ideas. Furthermore, several interviewees felt that the discourse of 'youth participation' in the United Kingdom implied that young people are disengaged:

> *... actually young people are participating. Labelling* [activities] *as youth participation can make it sound like it's something new.*
>
> Executive Interview #5, United Kingdom

> *It's not a term that I tend to use, purely because it makes young people... it sounds like it's something new for young people to participate.*
>
> Executive Interview #6, United Kingdom

At the Youth Action Network, the beneficiaries of youth participation[10] were primarily the organisation – which was then able to better support community level organisations to facilitate youth action. As one interview described it:

> *...in order to understand how* [member organisations] *operate and the kinds of issues they face means that we need to try and understand the kinds of issues that young people face and what they're thinking and what their thoughts might be and what would appeal to them.*
>
> (Executive Interview #7, United Kingdom

There was a very clear consensus that youth participation benefited the organisation and individual Youth Action agencies. This in turn was seen as beneficial to the communities in which young people undertook youth action projects.

> *But also, to show other people and inspire other people, to think differently about stuff to change their worlds on whatever scale it might be.*
>
> Executive Interview #6, United Kingdom

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[10] Despite the different meanings for youth participation in each country setting, I continue to use the term youth participation here for the sake of consistency. In doing so I adopt a broad definition and it is not intended to imply exclusively formal, adult-led processes.

For this interviewee, young people's participation in the Youth Action Network had the power to be transformative, to effect social change. She also felt that young people's participation had a positive influence in the general community, inspiring others to take action.

Youth Action Network interviewees also recognised there was a benefit to young people:

> *I think they've all gained in confidence and therefore have been able to achieve more of what they wanted to achieve…*

> Executive Interview #5, United Kingdom

This included developing technical (for instance, using the internet), project management, interpersonal and communication skills. However, interviewees only referred to the personal benefits when prompted.

The Youth Action Network executive interviews revealed that in working directly with young people, the internet must be seen as one of many setting in which young people act out their lives. One interviewee felt that whilst young people enjoyed connecting with others online to socialise, they could more easily be involved in decision making via face to face processes (United Kingdom Executive Interview #1). Other United Kingdom interviewees were sceptical of the use of the internet to 'solve' issues of youth participation:

> *I don't know the jury is out with me on the Internet to be honest because I think it has massive potential and I think as adults we have a tendency to think that we can understand how young people use the Internet and I think it is a bit presumptuous to be honest.*

> Executive Interview #7, United Kingdom

This interviewee suggests that online mechanisms can replicate the tendency for adults to interpret young people's needs or aspirations, and create processes and opportunities that primarily convenience adults and which perpetuate normative ideas about how young people should participate. This interviewee's attitude was that online participation will be most effective if, as with offline participation, it is driven by the young people themselves.

> *I would rather kind of wait until a young person said, "I want to set up a Youth Action Network MySpace page" because then you would probably have other young people, the networking would happen. I think that's what we do we have a tendency to just assume that if we set something up - it's like if you build it they will come; well no they won't actually.*

Executive Interview #7, United Kingdom

Thus interviewees felt that the role of policy makers in the non-government sector is to create the spaces for this to take place, and to advocate for a culture of participation within existing structures of democracy so that online participation is recognised and respected. One interviewee explained how this had worked in practice:

> *Within in two weeks, young people who'd put up the* [Myspace page]... *They went from having seven friends who were in bands that wanted to be involved, to 150 young people in bands in County Durham who wanted to take part in this event.*

Executive Interview #5, United Kingdom

Interviews with executive staff and board member of the Youth Action Network demonstrated a belief that young people ensure the organisation is relevant and responsive to their views and needs. The network is made up of over one hundred and thirty organisations that work with a diverse range of young people. Using the network to draw on all kinds of different young people to participate in decision making was seen as a real advantage.

> *They're actually using the network to make sure that every young person does have the chance to do stuff.*

Executive Interview #6, United Kingdom

This interviewee did not distinguish between different kinds of young people and felt it was important that all young people had an opportunity to be involved. Executive interviewees from the Youth Action Network consciously attempt to move away from models that promote either leadership or a youth-at-risk framework. This is sought by thinking about how to move beyond notions of youth or adult-led processes to collaborative and partnership-based approaches:

> *I've been thinking for a long time: the sort of steps towards youth-led but then beyond youth-led is actually a thing that they call natural cooperation or something like that or collaboration which actually I think is the place where you really want to be.*

<div align="right">Executive Interview # 4, United Kingdom</div>

This partnership approach reflects a broad appreciation for what young people have to offer and a belief that young people and adults can work together effectively to achieve positive outcomes. They felt this delivered on a wider government agenda to promote social inclusion amongst young people and to address power imbalances between young people and adult decision-making structures. In response to the question 'what do you think Governments mean when they talk about youth participation?' one interviewee said:

> *I think it stems from a very genuine belief that people -* [those] *in a minority or who lack power- should have access in some way to power and influence. It's the shift from representative democracy to participatory democracy.*

<div align="right">Executive Interview #4, United Kingdom</div>

In this case, those people who lack access to power and influence are young people. However, this interviewee had concerns that in practice, governments expected young people to either 'achieve everything or achieve nothing' and that in reality all people needed resources and support to be able to achieve. The Youth Action Network approach see a significant role for organisations in resourcing young people to participate. They held a capacity-based view of young people and supported autonomous forms of citizenship. However, they were focused on how this was operationalised via youth-serving organisations.

5.3 Conclusions

I have used Coleman's typology to summarise the approach to youth and citizenship in the policy contexts in each country and case study organisation. This is described in Table 14:

Table 14 Policy contexts analysis using Coleman's citizenship typology

	Australia		United Kingdom	
	Government	**Inspire Foundation**	**Government**	**Youth Action Network**
Youth	Apprentices	Catalysts	Apprentices	Catalysts
Citizenship	Managed	Neither	Managed	Neither
Citizens	Dutiful	Self-actualising	Dutiful	Self-actualising

From an Australian perspective, the youth participation agenda has been promoted haphazardly across levels of government and non-government sectors. One of the central challenges to the embedding of youth participation in policy development in Australia has been the differences in approaches to youth and participation at different levels of government. Despite advocacy from the non-government sector for a capacity-based approach, at a federal level, citizenship is constructed as something that young people will attain in the future providing they can successfully achieve educational and employment status that signifies a transition from childhood to adulthood. Additionally, young people can prepare for citizenship by participating in normatively good activities such as volunteering. In state government policy, young people are considered to have capabilities and views that are valuable to the community and for which they should be afforded an active role in government decision making. However, opportunities to participate are adult-led and are often limited to 'having a say'. The commitment to listen and respond to young people's views maintains power in the hands of adults so that while new horizontal forms of governance are being promoted, old hierarchies of government are reinforcing the legitimacy of adult participation and the apprenticeship of youth. Discourse on youth participation in the policy documents examined here provide clear examples of what White and Wyn refer to as 'futurity' (White & Wyn, 2004: 83) where youth participation is conceptualised as a method for achieving 'youth development'.

In the United Kingdom, there has been significant investment in youth participation across government. In a pro-community consultation policy environment, the deliberate effort of the New Labour government to better coordinate youth policy across areas of government has combined with increased pressure from proponents of youth participation in the non-government sector to have these policies mainstreamed. Nevertheless, young people are still largely constructed as apprentices and policies

promote managed forms of citizenship. The relationship between youth participation and citizenship is largely framed in civic republican terms with a strong focus on volunteering as 'good behaviour' that promotes and represents, rather than recognises citizenship.

In both countries, youth participation as a concept refers to adult-led processes that enable young people to engage with adult-led institutions. The government policy documents examined here focus on creating opportunities for youth participation in policy production and implementation. In doing so, these policies frame participation in a way that promotes new forms of network governance without challenging the structures and processes of government - which are constructed as normatively good. Although the proposals in some policy documents in Australia (Better Directions) and the United Kingdom (Youth Matters; Russell Commission report) were developed with some youth involvement, they are still largely top-down policy instruments whereby the onus is on how to 'get young people involved' through institutions, programs and volunteering – including the curious proposal to investigate opportunities for young people to volunteer in public services.

The Inspire Foundation clearly presents a counter-discourse to that of the federal government. In response to narrow, managed, deficit-based approaches to youth participation, the Inspire Foundation distinguishes itself by placing emphasis on the role that young people play in defining the issues and playing a hands-on role in the work of the Foundation. Formal mechanisms for participation are provided to ensure that young participants have the resources and access to the organisation that they require. However, executive staff and board do not play an active role in determining how young people participate, but rather act as guardians of a participatory approach.

Comparatively, I find that the Youth Action Network operates in a more compromised position. Although executive staff and board members challenged government discourse that position young people as disengaged, apathetic and lacking the ability to participate as full citizens, they do reinforce government policy on volunteering and deliver this policy into the community. This acquiescence effectively cancels out any oppositional role that the organisation might play in outwardly challenging government discourses. As Marsh et.a. (2007: 221) put it young people are encouraged to participate at the level of 'low' politics, but continue

to be excluded at the level of 'high' politics. The Youth Action Network approach, by emphasising the importance of youth participation at the local level, perpetuates, rather than challenges this.

Nevertheless, I find that the case study organisations presented here both see young people as catalysts (Coleman, 2008), however the form of citizenship that they promote is less clear when measured against Coleman's schema. Firstly, whilst the Inspire Foundation has largely utilised managed processes for youth participation, it promotes a partnership and youth-led approach more consistent with Coleman's notion of autonomous citizenship. The Foundation promotes issues-based, youth-led participation that challenges dominant ideas about young people and power. This suggests that a more nuanced account of the forms of youth citizenship promoted by organisations must include a type which acknowledges the role that organisations can play in facilitating autonomous forms of youth citizenship. This resonates with Bang's notion of project-oriented, as opposed to legitimising/resistant (of state domination) political identities (Bang, 2005). This concept will be further explored in the following two chapters.

Secondly, in the case of the Youth Action Network, although it promotes autonomous citizenship by emphasising youth agency and argues for youth-led responses to community issues, it effectively delivers on government policy by limiting youth participation to volunteering. The barriers to youth participation which are perpetuated by the state remain unchallenged as the focus of youth participation is placed in the relatively 'safe' setting of 'the community', reinforcing the civic republican discourse in policy. Furthermore, whilst the Inspire Foundation is increasingly moving away from structured forms of participation (including membership-based participation) towards informal, fluid, youth-led participation, the Youth Action Network is moving towards more structured forms of participation.

In terms of the role of the internet, there are a wide range of responses in the policy context. To a large extent, the internet is still viewed by governments in Australia as a tool for extending information and government-led processes to young people. It is used to deliver information to young people, but not as a setting in which decision making can take place. In the United Kingdom there is a greater awareness of the potential of the internet to reframe the relationship between young people and

government and to open up more spaces for participation. The non-government organisations studied here presented slightly different views on the role of the internet for youth participation. Whilst the Inspire Foundation is increasingly using the internet to increase autonomous participation there was a sense amongst interviewees from the Youth Action Network that the internet was still largely occupied by adults interpreting young people's needs and views.

The case studies of Australia and the United Kingdom indicate that government participation policies, as a strategy for promoting democratic practice and citizenship, are decidedly undemocratic. (Bessant, 2003; Matthews, 2001:210). Young people are mostly appointed – not elected. They are not representative, though they are frequently asked to speak on behalf of their peers. They have little power and even less accountability. In Chapter 8 I will look more closely at this issue by examining *who* is engaged through these policies.

Chapter 6. Youth Participation in Practice

In the past ten to fifteen years there have been significant shifts in the youth political participation policy agendas in Australia and the United Kingdom. As argued in Chapter 4, liberal approaches to youth citizenship and participation in democracy have dominated youth policy across a range of areas including education, employment and welfare. This has recently been punctuated by civic republican notions evident in the push towards volunteering. In this chapter I explore how young people experience these policy environments. The analysis draws on key aspects of the work of Marsh et.al. (2007), Bennett, (2007) and Bang (2005). Firstly, when a broad view of politics and political participation is taken, young people demonstrate a significant level of awareness and ability to articulate political concepts and issues (Marsh et.al. 2007: 210). As demonstrated in Chapter 2, Marsh and colleagues provide a detailed and unique insight into the ways that young people in the United Kingdom conceptualise and 'live' politics through their everyday experience. I build on this by examining the forms of participation in which young people deliberately engage, in order to address the political issues they care about.

I analysed interviews firstly according to a narrow definition of political participation defined as 'activity aimed at influencing government policy or affecting the selection of public officials' (Zukin, et.al. 2007: 51). Then I looked at the way that young people defined it through the issues they saw as important and the issues they took action on. Drawing on Norris' theoretical claim that the repertoires, agencies and targets of participation have changed (Norris, 2002: 215-216) this involved looking for:

- forms of participation as identified by young people

- what mobilised these young people to participate

- what were young people's perceptions of different political targets and allies?

This responds to the call by O'Toole et.al. (2003) to extend our understanding of how young people conceptualise political participation thus building on the work of Marsh et.al. (2007) and addressing a gap in the literature in Australia. I also consider Bang's notion that many people are no longer mobilised in relation to traditional hierarchies

of government (Bang, 2005), and explore what 'governance networks' might mean for young people.

This chapter is fundamentally concerned with the direct views and experiences of the young people who participated in this study.

6.1 Forms of participation

All the young people in this study were recruited via the case study organisations. As such they met civic republican criteria for citizenship in the sense that they volunteered for a community organisation. Therefore, I explore below the ways in which they participate in the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network, and then look at their views and experiences of participating more broadly. As we will see below, in many cases their participatory actions extended beyond the case study organisations.

The views and experiences of interviewees in this study were framed by − but not limited to − their experiences of participation in case study organisations. Whilst youth participation was embedded in the values of both organisations the actual mechanisms and approaches to youth participation were quite different. Here I provide a brief outline of the mechanisms by which young people participate in the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network before looking in depth at the experiences and views of young people.

6.1.1 The Inspire Foundation

Young people have participated via formal and informal mechanisms. Between 1999 and 2007 youth participation became increasingly formalised as participants asked the organisation to provide more structure and resources to support their involvement. This culminated in a three-tiered model for participation in 2005. During 2008 staff and young people undertook a major scoping exercise to look at how young people could participate into the future. This review of the youth participation model was motivated by an increasing use of informal participation mechanisms, such as feedback, user generated content and sharing opinions and ideas for the development of its services via social networking sites. From 2009, youth participation at the Inspire Foundation will be coordinated through project teams which will focus on

resolving, developing and delivering key pieces of work (for example, new online initiatives, marketing campaigns, research or advocacy) and by focusing resources on informal, online participation via Inspire Foundation websites and social networking websites. However, all the young people interviewed in this research came to participate with the foundation through a formalised process. For this reason here I provided a detailed description of the formal mechanisms used in each of the Inspire Foundation services. These are also listed in Chapter 4, Table 4.

ReachOut

Reach Out www.reachout.com.au is a web-based service that provides information, skills development, support and resources that assist young people to cope with mental health difficulties, manage adversity and find ongoing support in the community. Reach Out provides information about mental health issues and facilitates help-seeking particularly for those who are geographically or socially isolated, not comfortable seeking professional help or unsure about where to find professional help.

Between 1999 and 2008 a Reach Out Youth Participation model supported the participation of young people in developing ideas and making decisions on the program goals and activities, as well as playing key roles in the delivery of the service. Since 1999, four hundred and eight young people have contributed to the service. By 2006 there were three streams in the model: Youth Advisory Boards, a Youth Ambassador Program and the Reach Out Youth Leaders. These streams aimed to increase the capacity of Reach Out service delivery to improve the mental health and wellbeing of Reach Out visitors. The model also reflects the Inspire Foundation's organisational values of responsibility, generosity, compassion, inclusiveness and fun.

Reach Out Youth Advisory Board

The Reach Out Youth Advisory Board was convened three times a year. Each Board involved approximately eighteen young people from around Australia and lasted for twelve weeks. Young people aged 16 - 21 self-nominated online and selection was loosely based on achieving diversity across cultural and geographical backgrounds, and including young people who had experienced mental health difficulties. Youth Advisory Board members and staff engaged in discussions on secure online forums.

Staff took a 'backseat' in Youth Advisory Board discussions, acting as facilitators and moderators who also provided support and advice. Key activities of board members included sharing and developing ideas for service development and delivery, attending training workshops, writing content for the site and promoting the service in their communities.

<u>Youth Ambassador Program</u>

Young people who participated in a Reach Out Youth Advisory Board could become Youth Ambassadors. This program stream focused on young people and staff sharing ideas and working together, online and offline, to help other young people negotiate the Reach Out service. Youth Ambassadors shared decision-making with staff and in some aspects of program delivery set the agendas. They were invited and supported to participate in all aspects of service development and delivery including evaluation and research. Their activities included presenting to donors and sponsors, sitting on interview panels for paid staff positions and writing the Youth Ambassadors' report for the organisation's Annual Report (alongside the Executive Director and the Director of the Board).

<u>Reach Out Youth Leaders</u>

Youth Leaders were trained to be mentors for new Youth Ambassadors and led both old and new Youth Ambassadors in Reach Out-related discussions and projects. Youth Leaders supported their peers to participate by acting as mentors and moderators of the public forums.

ActNow

ActNow (www.actnow.com.au) is a web-based initiative that connects young people with opportunities to learn more about their world and take action on the social issues they care about. On ActNow young people can access and create content on issues (such as climate change, indigenous health in Australia and cyber bullying). They can also find information on existing opportunities to 'take action' (to volunteer, join groups or campaigns), access resources for action (such as fundraising for a festival or developing media messages for a campaign) and build networks and communities by connecting to other with similar interests.

To ensure the relevance and practicality of the social issues, action opportunities and tools offered on ActNow, young people have driven the program at all levels. Young people created the initial website brief, youth participation model and, in partnership with staff, they created all of the content for the site. ActNow's youth participation strategy was based on Inspire's successful Reach Out Youth Participation model (Oliver et al., 2006; Swanton et al. 2007; Burns et al., 2007). Formal roles for young people included:

- **ActNow Incubator Program:** an advisory board of young people that work with staff to share ideas, create content, and solve problems to develop, deliver and promote ActNow.

- **Internship Program:** three to four month–long placements working on general and specific projects for the initiative.

- **Cash for Comments:** young people are trained and then commissioned to write opinion pieces on political and social issues.

- **Action Partners:** graduates of the Incubator, Internship or Cash for Comments programs who stay involved in the direct development, delivery and promotion of ActNow. Many Action Partners work as Community Builders, moderating the ActNow website and working to foster a respectful, action-focussed community.

Between July 2005 and December 2008, two hundred and one young people directed the development of ActNow: one hundred and three participated in the Incubator Program; sixty three completed the Internship Program; twenty-seven were trained to act as Community Builders; and, thirty five were Cash for Comments writers.

Informal participation

Informal participation was distinguished from formal participation on the basis that the activities are wholly initiated and resourced by the young people. These activities were endorsed by the foundation, but were usually ad hoc and un-structured. For example, using web 2.0 features young people created personalised member profiles on www.actnow.com.au , uploaded content (text and multimedia), linked their content to other areas of the website, and connected directly with other members. In this way,

young people defined how the site evolves and what it was used for. When signing up as a member, users agreed to the Terms of Use to protect users and the Inspire Foundation from risks associated with member-based sites and user-generated content. www.actnow.com.au site content was moderated, by young people, according to the Terms of Use. Additionally, young people determined the development of the site by using technical features common to social networking and user-generated-content websites such as www.myspace.com, www.wikipedia.com and www.facebook.com to discuss ideas and contribute content. Furthermore, young people informally contributed offline by undertaking community marketing and fundraising activities. This often involved deciding where, when and how the programs are marketed in local or interest-based communities.

6.1.2 The Youth Action Network

The model of youth participation in the Youth Action Network was very different to that of the Inspire Foundation. Young people connected with the Youth Action Network through member organisations which represent a diverse range of youth and community groups. These included Asian Women and Girls Centres, alternative education centres for early school leavers and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth organisations. Young people were recruited from their member organisation to work with the Youth Action Network. In comparison with the Inspire Foundation, youth participation in the Youth Action Network was very informal and ad-hoc. As indicated in Chapter 4, despite having developed a youth involvement strategy, the Youth Action Network had not dedicated resources to implement this strategy. At the time of field work a Member Development Officer (Youth Participation) had been appointed to design and implement a process for supporting youth participation across the network. However a model had not yet been developed for implementation. Nevertheless, there was a deep degree of youth participation in decision making across the organisation, usually in defined projects or functions of the organisations. Two examples are provided below that illustrate how this worked in practice.

Project Re:action

Project Re:action was a participative research project looking into the effects of volunteering on young people and their communities. It was a joint project of the

Youth Action Network and the Centre for Social Action of De Montfort University and was funded by the Big Lottery Fund.

> *Young people, supported by professionals, lead the research by developing the research questions and analysing the data. The young people's steering group oversees the progress and dissemination of the research. Thus, the whole project hopes to reflect young people's values, principles and understanding of volunteering.*

> (www.youthactionnetwork.org.uk).

The project had a steering committee made up of 7 young people and 2 professional researchers. Young people were also engaged as peer researchers, developing the research tools, conducting field work and analysing data. According to the Youth Action Network website, the project is underpinned by three participative principles:

> 1. *The project is defined by young people (as far as possible)*
>
> 2. *All work should be based on partnership with young people*
>
> 3. *Everyone's unique knowledge & experience contributes to the research process*

> (www.youthactionnetwork.org.uk).

The Board of Trustees

There are ten trustees on the Youth Action Board. Trustees include the Youth Action Network Executive Director, member organisation managers and staff and experts in policy or non-governments organisations. At the time of the research, the Chair was a young person and there was one other member who was 25 years old. These young people were not recruited to the board based on age, but rather, for their expertise in youth affairs and policy. Nevertheless, staff felt that having two young people on the board was advantageous because it ensured that board decisions were guided by the direct input of these two young people. They also felt it gave the organisation a degree of credibility.

Informal participation

Although the Youth Action Network was supportive of informal participation, there was little evidence that this was taking place. For example, though a Youth Action Network profile was created on www.facebook.com there was little evidence that young people used this to generate discussion around the work of the organisation. Similarly, youth-led community marketing and was endorsed by the Youth Action Network, but it was unclear to what extent this actually takes place.

6.2 Distinguishing young citizens

Recent critiques of research on youth political participation have argued that much of the existing literature fails to consider how young people themselves view and practice political participation (Eden & Roker, 2002; O'Toole et.al. 2003: 50; Vromen, 2003: 96-97). I asked participants to tell me about the kinds of activities they were involved in and why. For many, their responses were initially in the context of their involvement with the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network, but then expanded to their participatory activities more generally that reached beyond these organisational settings. Initially I examined the range of attitudes and reported participatory actions using Bennett's typology of Dutiful and Self-Actualising Citizens. In particular I examined young people's views towards voting, political parties and politicians, considered the value of individual agency and the sorts of participatory relationships and communities young people value. I then searched for evidence of Bang's Expert Citizens and Everyday Makers based on the presence of distinctive features of each:

> **Expert Citizens:** have a full-time overlapping project identity; place negotiation and dialogue before antagonism and opposition; have the skills and knowledge, and are prepared to work in structured or managed processes if it achieves an outcome.

> **Everyday Makers:** They participate in short-term, concrete ways that fit in with their lifestyles; they value self-led participation; and, want to engage and disengage at will.

> (Bang, 2005)

These interviews reveal a wide range of activities that were undertaken by the young participants in this study. These activities aimed to address an issue that these young people cared about, or help people in their immediate or wider (interest-based) communities. The role of the internet will be dealt with in the next chapter, and as such, this section focuses on the ways young people participate 'offline'.

6.2.1 Dutiful Citizens

Traditional forms of political participation did not feature strongly in the interviews with young people in either Australia or the United Kingdom and when talking about how they participated, interaction with political parties, unions, members of parliament and other government agencies rarely came up. Not one young person in this study mentioned being a member of a political party or a union. Nevertheless, traditional institutions and actors (such as government and politicians) and processes (such as joining a party or voting) were referred to when talking about participation in the case study organisations. Whilst I argue later on that these young people identified different methods and new allies for influencing government policy, here I present their views on voting and membership of political parties.

The views of interviewees on voting in the United Kingdom represented a wide spectrum of opinion. This may be explained by two factors: the voluntary voting system in the United Kingdom; and, the number of interviewees who were not eligible to vote because they were not eighteen years old or British citizens. Some of the interviewees did not want to discuss their voting intentions and were quite emphatic about voting being a very personal thing which they didn't want to discuss. Others were more open about their views on elections, politicians and political parties. In general interviewees recognised that electoral participation was important.

Evan was extremely passionate about the importance of voting:

> *I think everybody should vote – I actually think it should be law – I believe it is in Australia. If you don't vote you should get fined. I just think that people fought hard and died hard to be able to vote and it's your civic duty to vote – you don't have many* [civic duties]*, it's not hard, it just takes 10 seconds.*

> Evan, 21, United Kingdom

Although Evan was not a member of a political party he had organised events in his local area to try and bring local members and young people together in debate. Despite expressing distrust and disillusionment with politicians and parties he was passionate about bringing together young people and their elected representatives in dialogue. In his opinion, youth disillusionment came, not from lack of interest, but a belief that politicians don't take them – or the issues they care about – seriously.

> *The problem is none of the parties – none of the major parties − are engaging with young people apart from politics students. You'd never see your local MP going for a game of pool at the local youth club. And if you do – it's only because he wants to end up on the front page of the Gazette and has taken the cameras with him.*

<div align="right">Evan, 21, United Kingdom</div>

Cynicism towards politicians and governments characterised the views of many of these young people. Two said they wouldn't vote because they didn't see 'what difference it would make'. After probing for more information, it became clear that, for both these young people, what appeared on the surface to be apathy, was in fact lack of confidence in understanding 'the issues' on which candidates campaigned.

> *I suppose I should - I turned eighteen last year so I've only just been able to vote. My Dad's girlfriend always goes at mad at me for not voting. But I ask her "what's the point?"... But when she spoke about it and how it can change things then I thought it was a good idea. So I probably will vote next time. I don't know if I know enough about the different parties to vote. So I guess I'll have to find out more and then make my decision - instead of just voting on anything.*

<div align="right">Lily, 19, United Kingdom</div>

Lily's initial comment – 'what's the point' – was almost a defensive response to not feeling confident in her knowledge of what party policies were. However, she reflected a strong belief that her work with the local youth agency had a positive impact on youth issues in her area. She had previously had little contact with the local member and saw no relationship between the Member of Parliament's work and the outcomes for her community. Her views were echoed by other young people in this

study who saw their role in different participatory activities as 'filling the gap' created by lack of government interest or action on the issues that mattered to them.

At seventeen, Will wasn't eligible to vote, but he argued that not voting was also a legitimate way to express his political opinions.

> *PC: Will you enrol to vote?*
>
> *Will: I will, but I think if things stay as they are now then I'll probably spoil my vote to make a point. I don't want to waste my vote, but there isn't a political party that I would vote for now.*
>
> *PC: So you'd use it as a protest.*
>
> *Will: yeah – but I don't want to be a statistic, one of those '1 in 3'. They're almost saying those people are lazy and don't want change −but I do – but there isn't a party at the moment who I'd follow.*

Will demonstrated an awareness of what is at stake in protest voting. But he was also deeply committed to the view that you shouldn't vote unless you believed in the individual or party you voted for.

Comparatively, the attitudes of Australian interviewees were more homogenous. Given the compulsory voting laws in Australia it was not surprising that Australian interviewees took for granted that they would vote in government elections. Nevertheless they were very cynical of politicians and governments and were knowledgeable on current issues, policy and election platforms of parties at a state and federal level. Louise discussed in detail the platforms of candidates in an upcoming state election, but emphasised the extent to which she felt the candidates had side-lined issues that mattered to young people.

> *I've got a flyer here for the Labor candidate... and it says "if it matters to families, it matters to* [candidate]*" – but like, I mean, that's great for families and everything, but ... it doesn't seem to me that many of the government* [candidates] *are focusing on the age group that you're researching.*

<div align="right">Louise, 20, Australia</div>

However, Louise did not consider party membership an option for influencing the political agendas of the party. She communicated a strong sense of 'us and them' and indicated that voting was a necessary, but not very inspiring, procedure in the broader political process. When asked how young people could play more of a role in setting the political agenda, Louise pointed to the role of non-government organisations:

> *I think things are changing and more people are starting to listen, but there's still a long, long way to go. And things like Inspire are definitely paving the way and setting the pace, and telling other people to listen up.*

<div align="right">Louise, 20 Australia</div>

Louise reflected a common perception amongst the Australian interviewees that opportunities to influence government decision making through voting and party membership were limited. Belinda argued that voting mattered, but that the real challenge was penetrating the structures of government where decisions were actually made:

> *... [Y]ou just have to look at the federal government, they don't even have a Youth Affairs section. Here (state) at least we have an Office for Youth in a department, but devoting time and resources to* [youth issues] *doesn't seem to be something that governments really want to do, or will readily do. It's all about diverting young people who are in trouble or are at risk away from, say courts or criminal justice. It's not about engaging them before they get to that point.*

<div align="right">Belinda, 22, Australia</div>

Belinda echoed Louise's desire to see political change beyond voting or party membership – but was focused on what she saw as the key challenges that existed within parties and governments. She felt that the construction of youth as 'a problem' and the role of political parties and governments as 'solution finders' created an adversarial relationship between young people and formal political institutions.

Interviews with young people also revealed the forms of participation they are *not* likely to engage in, and why. When I asked one Australian interviewee if she had

thought about writing a letter to her local members about the issues she cared about she responded:

> *Well no, because you just wonder if they're ever going to read it. One time I tried to get in to see my local councillor and the lady was like "he's booked up for the next six months!" So that wasn't very encouraging. And like, he's just the local guy. Why would you bother writing to John Howard when the friggin' man down the road is booked up for six months? I just think they're not accessible. They're really not accessible.*

<div align="right">Ruth, 21, Australia</div>

For Ruth, the challenge of having direct contact with a member of parliament was not only frustrating, but also a waste of time and effort. But despite her total exasperation and strong sense of alienation from formal political processes Ruth acknowledged the importance of voting and belied her peers who she believed to 'donkey vote' for being ill-informed or disillusioned. Nevertheless, she argued that there were significant barriers to politicising people through formal political institutions which kept young people at an arm's length.

The differences in country settings have a clear impact on the views on voting and party membership expressed by interviewees. Firstly, the kind of electoral system (compulsory or voluntary) did play a part in the attitudes of young interviewees towards voting, although it is impossible from this data to state whether or not it affects young people's electoral enrolment and participation. Secondly, the discussion presented here must be considered in light of the greater level of diversity amongst the group of British interviewees. All Australian interviewees were eligible to vote, whereas amongst the British interviewees, there were three under the age of eighteen. Additionally, two British interviewees were non-citizen refugee residents who were not only ineligible to vote, but whose past experiences under violent regimes meant they were actively disassociated their participation from formal political institutions, processes and actors:

> *...when you come from a country where there has been war, you think of politics and you think of war. I don't like to think about politicians or politics*

> *because it makes me think of war and all that. So no, I don't think my participation is political.*

<div align="right">Joseph, 19, United Kingdom</div>

Comparatively, as a group the Australian interviewees were more homogenous in their experiences of politics and political systems. All interviewees had grown up in Australia and few Australian interviewees had overseas-born parents. Nevertheless, across both countries, there were some consistencies in the views and experiences of interviewees. In particular, feeling that they lacked knowledge about the policy platforms of parties, cynicism and distrust of political leaders and a belief that institutional politics is unrelated to their everyday lives affected their attitudes towards voting. Such views reflect existing research findings on young people's attitudes towards enrolment and voting (Print, 2004: 22–23; Pirie & Worcester, 2000: 11–13; Power Inquiry, 2006).

Notably absent from most people's narratives was reference to political ideologies or philosophy. Where they were mentioned, it was in reference to an issues-based activity undertaken by a young person. When asked about politicians and the major parties, few interviewees made a distinction between different candidates, ideologies or political platforms. An exception was Chris, 21, who explained that he felt this was because '*… young people often have more radical – or at least liberal – views. That's part of being a young person, working out what it is that you think'*. In the United Kingdom, Joan, 25, spoke at length about the difficulty in knowing what politicians and parties stand for. She felt that the media played a big role in creating confusing and distracting messages about politicians and parties.

> *To be honest, I mean I'm not really into politics. It's just that when I'm talking about it I do have ideas but – I don't know, because I always see politicians as people who just stand up and want to win and it doesn't matter whether they make a good speech or not, people are just going to cheer and I don't really agree with that sort of* [thing]. *So I'm not actually really into politics that much.*

<div align="right">Joan, 25, United Kingdom</div>

None of the young people described themselves as having 'left wing/progressive' or 'right wing/conservative' politics. And where they did refer to politics it was in the context of an issue. Will told me about his work with a student newspaper:

> *What we try and do is, not dumb-down, but ... explain bigger issues. Like Iraq. Or when we had the race issue on Big Brother we had a feature on that and did a talking heads piece. Also we had a really good article in the last issue on pay for people under eighteen − the minimum wage.*

<div align="right">

Will, 16, United Kingdom

</div>

Will identified political issues but did not discuss them in terms of political ideology. In fact, whether participation was articulated in traditional 'repertoires' of action or aimed at traditional 'targets' (Norris, 2002: 215-216), it was almost always framed by an issue – or series of related issues.

> *I was on the student council for a couple of years and I'd been elected president of the student council. I'd done a heap of stuff around 'LAEP' – local area education planning, or something. It was the education department's way of getting students involved making decisions about the schools in the area… we got a school closed. The committee as a group had a lot of power ... It had some major implications. They went through this period in the late 1990s in Western Australia when they closed about 20 schools and ours was on the hit list and we managed to convince them [the Education Department] to close the school down the road, rather than ours. It actually made sense because the school down the road was about forty years old and the building was really old and decrepit and had asbestos, whereas our school was only about ten years old, new buildings, newer facilities, lots more open space, better designed.*

<div align="right">

Alana, 25, Australia.

</div>

Although Alana was engaging with public officials and politicians, targeting the government and its departments, the issue of school resources and amalgamations was at the centre of her story.

6.2.2 Self-Actualising Citizens

I have established above that the young people in this study did not reflect a dutiful citizen orientation. Instead, young people's views and experiences of participation reflected Bennett's self-Actualising Citizen and Bang's Project-Oriented citizens. Firstly I look at their motivations for participation. The primary reasons why young people got engaged in different forms of participation (in, but not limited to the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network) are presented in Table 15. This small sample reflected a wide range of reasons for participating, in particular wanting to get involved in a project and wanting to take action on an issue. I consider here the sorts of issues they mobilised around. Furthermore, interviewees attached significant value to connecting to others and building relationships and networks.

Table 15 Reasons for participation

Reason for getting involved	British respondents		Australian respondents	
Organisation	2		1	
Issue/cause	0		5	
Project	6		4	
Youth participation/ representative	1		3	
Program	(Millennium Volunteers) 1	(New Deal) 1	(Work for the Dole) 0	(Volunteering program) 0
Friends	1		0	

Projects

Most of the British respondents got involved through projects. For example, Matt, 17, got involved in the organising committee of a youth music and arts event because he played in a band and was involved in a youth theatre. However, he also wanted to contribute to an event that gave young people an opportunity to showcase their talents and that would promote positive images of young people in the community:

> *I personally don't think that young people get enough chances to do things positive. I don't think there are enough things for people to do and the reason there are kids on the street is because there's nothing for them to do… We're*

trying to show that young people do good things. Not just to themselves and their parents, but also to the community and the government.

Matt, 17, UK

Matt saw the event as an opportunity to challenge popular perceptions of young people, particularly those presented in the media which focus on anti-social behaviour of a minority young people. Other young people described projects that included an anti-racism football tournament, a girls group focusing on safety and safe sex and a radio program to challenge media ownership. All of these young people came to participate in the Youth Action Network through grass-roots community organisations.

As indicated in Table 15 one young person was deliberately focused on volunteering through the Millennium Volunteers[11] program. Eliza, 19, was a university student, supported by her parents, who believed it was important to make a contribution to the community. She saw her participation in decision making in both her community organisation and the Youth Action Network as an extension of this obligation to contribute to the community. Eliza's volunteering mainly consisted of work in traditional volunteering areas such as working with the elderly and people with disabilities. At the opposite end of the spectrum was one young person who was initially directed to volunteer through the New Deal[12] program. However, she had reconceptualised her participation in terms of benefits to the community, rather than as a condition of her welfare benefits.

Of the twelve young people interviewed, only two were motivated to participate based on a commitment to an organisation and one young person had gotten involved with several organisations, including the Youth Action Network, because of an interest in issues of youth representation.

By comparison, Table 15 shows that in Australia nine out of thirteen young people stated that wanting to address an issue or cause, or take part in a project were the

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[11] Millennium Volunteers was a national government-funded initiative to promote volunteering amongst young people aged 16 - 24. It offered a wide range of volunteering opportunities, support and accreditation for young people. In 2007 the scheme was absorbed by V charity, set up by the government to promote and manage youth volunteering in the United Kingdom.
[12] The New Deal for Young People forms a key part of the government's welfare to work strategy. Young people receiving Jobseeker's Allowance are obliged to tae part in training and work experience opportunities while seeking paid employment.

167

main reasons for participating. A further three were seeking out youth representative opportunities and one cited a commitment to the organisation as reasons for getting involved. To most of these young people, what was more important than the distinction between 'volunteering' and 'participating, contributing or being a representative to a board, organisation or project' was the nature of the organisations, groups and activities in which they took part. Although in Australia there has been an increase in official volunteering by young people aged 18 – 24 (ABS, 2007) popular press and policy makers frequently argue that young people are less engaged with their communities and more interested in entertainment, having fun and 'self-actualisation'. An examination of the activities that Australian interviewees reported having undertaken and their attitudes to civic engagement suggests these judgements are neither useful nor accurate.

For example, despite not being interested in traditional 'volunteering' roles Harry, 21, wanted to get involved in a project that would make a difference to other young people:

> *Harry: I was looking to do something in volunteering but I never had an opportunity – oh, well, I never found an opportunity until* [Reach Out] *came along.*

> *PC: Was there something specific that you wanted to do?*

> *Harry: I did want to do something that would primarily benefit young people, people my age, so, my friends. I looked at doing Meals on Wheels[13] or something like that, but I didn't really think I'd suit it –*

> *PC: Why not?*

> *Harry: I don't know, I just felt too young and didn't really think I'd be the sort of person who'd be able to do it. Although I do know a few young people who are involved with Meals on Wheels, but I personally didn't feel like I could get as much out of it myself.*

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[13] *Meals on Wheels* is a national charity that supports community care by providing meals to the frail, aged, young people with disabilities and carers.

Contributing to discussions on the development and delivery of services, working or speaking at events, producing multi-media content for websites, participating in research and marketing activities were all examples of activities young people wanted to be involved in. Traditional volunteering was seen by Australian interviewees as rigid, adult-dominated, boring and culturally irrelevant, whereas 'opportunities to participate' were perceived to offer agency and control. Interviewees in both countries indicated that the most appealing aspect of working with organisations such as the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network was that volunteering was youth-led and self-driven. Nevertheless, in the United Kingdom, 'participation' was generally associated with formal policies and structures, whereas volunteering was seen as a way to take action where, when and how they want to. In other words, young people's participation was not driven by 'traditional loyalties' (Norris, 2003) to particular institutions or organisations, but by issues. Furthermore, young people were attracted to issue and project-based opportunities (Bang, 2005) that could be 'personally defined' (Bennett, 2007), where they could play a hands-on role (Bang, 2005).

In the United Kingdom, only Evan, 21, described himself in activist terms: 'I strive for political change'. He listed a range of campaigns and movements with which he associated. For example, he described how in 2007 he worked with UNICEF to develop a response to the United Nation's Report Card #7, a review of the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in countries across the world.

> *So like with the UNICEF work, I know that that's going to influence policy, because we have backing of the government minister and the three big parties are all on board with it. So when I read that they'd all signed up to it, I thought "that's amazing, I did that" - not on my own, but I had a hand in that and anything that comes from it…*

> Evan, 21, United Kingdom

Evan talked about 'addressing injustice' and 'making the world a better place' and whilst he addressed politicians and governments in his actions, he also identified other targets (such as UNICEF, media, communities). He also talked about his work in volunteering and a community-led, peer-support mental health website. Being

politically active and resisting the status quo was an integral part of his identity. When asked if their participation was 'political', the remaining United Kingdom interviewees were split between those who acknowledged the relationship between their actions and political outcomes, and those who de-politicised their involvement, preferring to stress the social or community benefits as 'beyond politics'.

Australian interviewees spoke in more general terms about their participation. Many had been involved with different groups and forms of participation often associated with activism, but didn't expressly identify with being an 'activist'. One young person suggested that this was partly because some forms of participation – particularly those associated with traditional activist or social movement activities were 'de-legitimised' in the current political climate. He felt that governments recognised youth participation that is:

> … *hierarchical and structured and non-political. I don't think they see the young person who's just joined the Greens as 'participating'. And the other thing is that I think they recognise young people 'planting trees' as participation, but not going to a protest about climate change. Or a blog about current affairs or, anything really – climate change or what's happening to refugees.*

> David, 20, Australia

He felt that this was partly due to the dominant political ideology of neo-liberalism underpinned by an official push towards community participation and away from political participation. This had inspired David to seek out new partners for challenging this shift. His resistance to the authority of the state didn't limit the range of organisations and actors he collaborated with to achieve change – including large charities, youth-led organisations, government offices, members of parliament and non-government youth peak bodies.

Underpinning a desire to get involved in a project or organisation were social issues that young people wanted to address. These issues or causes are listed in Table 16.

Table 16 Issues that young people wanted to address

Issues that young people wanted to address	
Australian interviewees	**British interviewees**
Depression	Sexual health
Youth suicide	Teenage pregnancy
Mental illness in young men	Media ownership
Obesity	Artist rights and monopolies in music industry
Violence against women	Refugee rights
Human rights	Child rights
Racism	Racism
Environmental issues such as recycling	Poverty
How politics is taught in schools	Mental health provision
Local politics (related to urban planning)	Democratic process and voting
Indigenous rights	Negative images of young people (in the media and wider community)
Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia	Internet safety
Youth representation in the community and government	Crime and safety (in the local community)
	Care for the elderly
	Youth wages
	Education issues

These issues connected them to organisations, to opportunities for change-making, self-expression, relationship building and creativity. Issues-based participation is the clearest demonstration of how the political has become 'personalisable' and self reflexive, creative, network driven and structured by a perception of 'choice' (Bang, 2005:163). For example, Stevie explained to me that he'd decided to get involved with the Inspire Foundation's Reach Out initiative when a friend of his was going through a tough time:

> *She was going through a bit of shit, and I just, well I didn't so much as feel helpless as want to get out there are find out a bit more about what she was going through...* [Participation] *in Reach Out is just young people getting involved in things that, well, that they're into or passionate about, or see it as a problem with society that they want to fix up.*

> Stevie, 22, Australia

Stevie saw that his friend wasn't getting the help she needed and wanted to do something about it. The opportunity to contribute to change around mental health services through Reach Out was a way for him to address this issue.

For other young people, opportunities to participate mobilised them in much the same way that social issue did – that is to say that *youth participation* was the issue. As David told me:

> *I'd done some work around mental health before and was working with an organisation around youth depression at the time, but that wasn't a hugely motivating factor and I think that the mental health stuff was less important that the youth involvement stuff.*

> David, 20, Australia

Youth participation policies mobilised some of these young people, precisely because they promised a platform, resources and responses to young people's perspectives on social issues. Four participants (three in Australia and one in the United Kingdom) had been seeking out opportunities to participate in decision making. They were mobilised by the issue of 'youth participation' which was about challenging issues of youth exclusion. These were the only young people who talked about processes and structures to access the state and other authorities.

However, whilst issues provided the impetus for participatory activities amongst the young respondents in this study, it did not challenge all the obstacles to participation that the young people experienced. Phillip described conversations that he has had with his peers:

> *I think a lot of the time people don't realise what they've achieved. One of the things which I've picked up over the last year is asking people what issues they care about and what they'd act on if they were going to act. And a lot of people start off randomly naming stuff and get a bit lost and confused. They want to do 'this' and 'that' or they don't care about anything or they just don't know where to go and I think that is partly maybe because they don't see, even if something didn't work, what they'd be learning along the way.*

> Phillip, 22, Australia

There were still significant barriers to participation associated with an issues-based approach. Phillip explained how issues-oriented politics was overwhelming because of the range and complexity of social issues at local, national and international level. The absence of an enduring structure, such as a formalised organisation or association, also contributed to disillusionment, diminished incentive and withdrawal from participatory activities. Though Bang implies that all characteristics of project-oriented identities (Bang, 2005: 163) are equally present in Expert Citizens and Everyday Makers, it seems that amongst young people, particular aspects are more influential or prominent than others. As Phillip suggests, self-reflexivity may emerge out of an association with issues-based participation, rather than something that leads to it.

Relationships

Building relationships was a common theme that emerged in these interviews. Belinda, 22, from Brisbane, Australia told me that she got involved for the 'experience and networks. And um, also there was the extra learning aspect – I think'. In Belinda's experience, getting involved with the Inspire Foundation helped to achieve these goals:

> *It's all been worthwhile. I think most of the expectations – like meeting those people, and actually contributing and being a worthwhile contribution* [for Reach Out] *and again, the networks, making those connections has all been really worthwhile.*

> Belinda, 22, Australia

The notion of contributing to a cause and linking in with an existing volunteer or community organisations featured strongly in interviews with these young people.

However, being a part of a network for action didn't mean that young people experienced the same kinds of relationships in all settings. For young people, opportunities to participate were frequently characterised by unequal power relations, in schools, in the community and in government agencies. In describing the communities that developed through their participation in the Youth Action Network and the Inspire Foundation, one of the important characteristics was that questions of power were being raised and responded to in ways that furthered the interests of all

involved − including young people. For interviewees in both Australia and the United Kingdom, personal and collective gain was attributed to activities and outcomes, but it was also fundamentally shaped by the personal relationships that young people formed with other participants and the organisation. In Australia, Ruth told me that:

> *I think it's just that with the staff there's a real willingness to work with you* [as a young person]. *But, say, like with a lecturer at uni, you'd never want to do that* [speak with them]. *But I don't feel that – I'm not scared. But it's like you know that they're not going to think less of you, or think you're stupid or go "what an idiot, you did what?".*

<div align="right">Ruth, 22, Australia</div>

Ruth's attitude suggests that, respectful inter-personal relationships formed through participation were critical to her continued engagement. Another dimension of this is feeling that they were asked for their opinions and were listened to:

> *... the adults listen to what we have to say. If we've got something to say then we sit down and listen to what each other has to say and respect what each other has to say. We've all got individual opinions and there's no right or wrong answer, there are just different points of view and they try to bring all of that together.*

<div align="right">Anjali, 19, United Kingdom</div>

Listening to others and being heard at the Youth Action Network was a point of difference for Anjali. She noted that in other areas of her life, she was expected to listen but not contribute. Reciprocal relationships were a common theme in these interviews − relationships between 'young people' and 'adults', and amongst peers. Their sense of belonging, of having the respect for others, and feeling as though their colleagues were friends underpinned the sense of commitment and empowerment interviewees felt.

These relationships with peers and adults were tightly woven into the experience of participation and as a consequence, most of these young people did not see their lives broken up into a series of 'activity' or 'setting' silos, such as home, school, the street, or sites of volunteer activity. Rather, participation was an integral part of their lives,

activated at school, university, home or in the workplace, when hanging out with mates (face-to-face or online), participating in sporting or cultural activities. In fact, these young people participated in a particular organisation or event because the activities on offer and the people they associated with were culturally relevant. They pursued opportunities to engage in ways that fit in with their interests and where they engaged with people they liked and felt respected by. These relationships and activities form complex networks for participation.

Personalisable participation

Of critical interest to many researchers are the implications for democracy of an apparent trend towards individualised forms of participation (Vromen, 2003, 2007; McDonald, 2006). Bang finds that many scholars now '…describe how political participation as a collective action has fallen prey to globalising market forces, transforming virtuous citizens into atomised individuals who are exploiting the state as a means to realise their own interests and values' (Bang, 2005: 159). Amongst civic republican accounts of democracy there is a normative assumption that group or collective activities are necessary for strong democracies and that a trend towards individualism must be countered with policies for communitarian renewal. However, as discussed below, I find that what young people describe is a preference for personalisation (Lichterman, 1996), as distinct from individualisation. Respondents referred to the absence of hierarchy and personal choice, whilst still emphasising the importance of community and shared values.

For example, John, 25, at the Youth Action Network felt that everyone could contribute their ideas and opinions about the way the organisation operated, but that decisions were always made by the group:

> *Well I guess because we make decisions collectively it's never just one person's voice. It's not just one person making decisions – things happen collectively. When we make decisions about the way that the YAN is run, it's always done collectively. So people either have to vote or suggestions are put forward and they're acted upon by the CEO. So I think yeah, in that sense I have been effective because we are all involved in making the decisions.*

> John, 25, United Kingdom

Many participants claimed that the experience of being shut out of decision-making processes on the basis of age – or herded into adult-led, structured processes − inspired them to 'take matters into their own hands'. Seeking out spaces in which they could 'own the process' and, to a certain extent, the outcomes of action, led many of these young people to get involved in the Inspire Foundation, or the Youth Action Network and its member organisations.

> *At the time I guess* [the Inspire Foundation] *was one of the few organisations that I knew that was engaging with young people and had opportunities for young people to be involved and it just looked cool and exciting and like something that I'd want to be involved in… And then as I did more and different things I guess I got pretty proactive and kind of did my own thing with Inspire, well, not exactly my own thing, but I guess I did things that I initiated as well as doing Inspire-initiated things.*

> David, 20, Australia

David described the appeal of the Inspire Foundation where young people were able to control how and when they were involved, describing how he was offered opportunities, but also supported to pursue his own ideas and projects. He described an organisation in which he felt young people played valuable roles. Other young people described the Inspire Foundation as a place where they had equal or greater say and provided examples of how young people contributed across the organisation including writing content for the websites, fundraising and promoting the services in the community, deciding on marketing strategies and involvement in recruitment of paid staff at the Foundation. Interviewees repeatedly stated that young people were able to influence agendas and make decisions that had real consequences. In the United Kingdom Anjali described being asked what she thought and having those opinions recognised:

> *PC: If you think about the work that you do with Re:action or* [local youth organisation] *or any of the other organisations or groups that you're involved in, what does participation mean to you?*

> *Anjali: That's a hard question. I think you should be able to have a say and taken seriously… yeah, seeing some kind of change. To see that everyone's views are taken in, because that will increase involvement and participation.*

It also meant being able to contribute when she wanted to, not just when she was invited by the organisation. Feeling heard and empowered was also the result of knowing what was expected of her and where her participation could begin and end. For some, their involvement was short term and finite, but for others it was sustained because it could be constructed as multiple small projects that fitted in with their lifestyle. By not needing to assume a position within, or respond to, a hierarchical structure, young people felt able to participate when it suited them – rather than when they were told they had to by the organisation. In both the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network, this was made possible because young people were positioned as legitimate contributors and were provided with a significant degree of control over both the process and the content of the decisions they made.

According to interviewees, the absence of hierarchy created an environment in which young people had a wide spectrum of choice over the ways in which they participated.

> *They do a lot of things, they engage all the YAs and give them a wide range of areas in which people can be involved. So if someone's stronger at speaking on radio then there's an opportunity to write something and if someone really likes presenting then they'll give them an opportunity.*

Harry, 21 Australia

This was highly valued by Harry who described how the structure of youth participation at the Inspire Foundation responded to his need for flexibility and variety in the range of participation opportunities. His participation was driven by his interests − not the skills or knowledge that he possessed.

In Australia, interviewees indicated that much of the appeal of the kinds of activities they undertook was that they could design and undertake these in their own time and on their own terms. For example, Louise, 22, felt that the way participation was facilitated at the Inspire Foundation provided a broad structure in which they could have a significant choice over what they engaged in, some preferred even more

autonomous forms of participation. Louise, was from a regional part of Australia. She got involved with ActNow because '…it seemed to be this online forum, which I'd never had anything to do with − so that was a personal challenge for me − and it just seemed like this really interesting way to form connections with other young people'. She had previously instigated small projects in her community, for example, researching commercial recycling options and then raising these issues with her boss (a nightclub owner) and the local council. She saw ActNow as an opportunity to link up with other like-minded people, but maintain her autonomy and ability to organise and take action that fit with her interests and lifestyle. Louise disengaged from formal participation with Inspire at the end of her term as a project partner but 'it's not something I've ruled out doing, I'd just like to feel inspired and go "oh! I could put that on ActNow [the website]"'. Louise reflected an Everyday Maker (Bang, 2005) identity in that she wanted to take action herself, when she felt it was opportune, would make a difference and be fun (Bang, 2005: 169).

This particular point was echoed in the United Kingdom. Kathryn told me that in her experience working on a research project with the Youth Action Network, she had been closely involved at times in the steering committee for the project, attending meetings and developing research tools such as surveys. She had also been a peer researcher on the project and conducted focus groups and analysis of data. But at other times she had had to step back due to competing priorities, but she always found ways to stay connected or to re-engage. She argued that the flexibility and commitment of staff to have young people involved made the biggest difference:

> *… they always keep us – what's the word? – keep us, informed. About everything that they're doing at the time and make us feel involved by always giving us things to do – not just telling us what they're doing, but asking if we want to be doing it too. Do you want to help with this – do you want to do this?*

> Kathryn, 19, United Kingdom

Knowing that she could stay involved and that the structures would be flexible to her needs kept Kathryn engaged with the Youth Action Network. If the opportunities to participate had been set, regulated and inflexible, she felt she would not have been able to maintain the commitment due to taking up full time work. Whist some of the

participation opportunities were determined by the organisation, there was also a commitment, reflected in the youth action approach promoted by the Youth Action Network, to facilitate autonomous forms of participation. This was achieved by giving young people a high degree of control over agenda setting and discussions, as well as being given equal weight in decision-making forums. This was a critical aspect of these young people's experience. Kylie explained:

> *Basically it's the young people who's running the projects. Then Alice, Ray and Ben − which is people that are there to support us − they say if it's a good idea or not and then we go through with it. But it's our idea.*

Kylie, 16, United Kingdom

Finding fun ways to take action was a feature of participation for interviewees keen to use their creativity to support causes, campaigns and projects. Phillip, was a university student whose approach to participation epitomised the role of creativity for taking action. Phillip studied multimedia at university and used his skills in communications and media to contribute to the Inspire Foundation and other organisations and causes he was linked up with through ActNow. Phillip had a particular interest in education issues and described how he contributed to the work of an Australian non-profit organisation focused on school-based social action:

> *I worked on a promotional piece for them. It was quite a simple piece using photos [campaign] that they run in schools – and also audio commentary…. So I just intertwined those media and made a nice piece. It was eventually put onto a CD and given not only to schools but also to people who have in put into the program, and their partners as well.*

Phillip, 22, Australia

This was one of several discrete projects that Phillip undertook. He also created a small web-based game to raise awareness about obesity. Phillip was also involved in 'storytelling' at the official launch of the ActNow project and worked with another young person and an Inspire Foundation supporter to develop a creative workshop to run at a national youth affairs conference. Phillip sought out opportunities where he could use his creativity to make a difference.

However, conceptualising participation as cultural practice, or as a pathway to professional goals, doesn't mean that young people fail to understand or value the political implications of their activities:

> *PC: Do you think your involvement in Reach Out is political?*

> *Paula: Not really, I don't know. I think that if something political happens, like funding is cut to mental health services, then we can use Reach Out to stand up for what's right. But other than that, no, I don't think so.*

Paula understood how policies are shaped and believed that the Inspire Foundation could influence government policy. But she distanced her own beliefs and actions from 'the political'. She considered 'knowing as doing' and participation was her way of addressing issues '…concretely and personally rather than abstractly and ideologically' (Bang, 2005: 167).

Although few young people in this study reported participating in traditional forms of collective action (such as rallies, membership of a union, or community clubs and associations) their personalised forms of participation were linked to wider community interests. For young people in both countries, working with other members of the community – young and old – to achieve common goals was a key theme in their stories of participation. In the United Kingdom, Joseph, 19, felt that a strong community is one where '*... people come together to solve problems'.* Interviewees held a broad concept of 'community' − for some it was their local area, for others it was around common interests or experiences. For example, Evan, 21, was an administrator on a peer-support, mental health online community.

> *There are people from England, Ireland, Lebanon and a girl from Australia. We run the site and we have members from all over the world come to talk about their problems with schizophrenia, bi-polar, depression… stuff like that. We don't offer advice because none of us are qualified to offer advice, but we do say what we've done or what we think. We've helped a lot of people and it's amazing that we have no money – we're not even official – and we're doing more than most governments in the world. Mental health service in this country lets people down.*

> Evan, 21, United Kingdom

Evan felt very strongly that the community he was a part of supported those with mental health issues to find help and coping strategies. This was in the context of a perceived failure of government authorities and services to meet the community's needs. In Australia, interviewees also articulated a strong sense of unity and connectedness and a common set of goals that would benefit the community.

Young people in both Australia and the United Kingdom indicated that they thought of participation in terms of projects and issues – not institutions and processes. They formed loose networks that were punctuated by deep, valued interpersonal relationships. It was evident that these young people preferred personalisable participatory opportunities free from hierarchy, whereby they could exercise agency and integrate participation into their lifestyles.

6.3 Participation policies in practice

In Chapter 5 I argued that young people's views and experiences of participation are framed by policy contexts. Here I explore young people's perspectives on participation policies in the context of case study organisations and government discourse.

Not surprisingly, given the policy contexts outlined in Chapter 4 and the purpose of the Youth Action Network, British interviewees referred frequently to their participation in terms of formal volunteering activities. However, as discussed above their reasons for getting involved in volunteering activities were broad and went beyond a desire to volunteer as a normatively good thing to do, or even to make a difference. Comparatively, for Australian interviewees volunteering was considered a 'technical' term to differentiate between paid and unpaid work. While it was used by Australian interviewees, it was more common for them to say they 'are involved in', 'participate' or 'work with' the Inspire Foundation (or Inspire Foundation projects). The meaning that these young people ascribed to policies for 'youth participation' differed between young people interviewed in the United Kingdom and those interviewed in Australia. These tell us something about how young people conceptualise their own political agency. In the United Kingdom 'youth participation' was very much associated with institutionalised, adult-managed opportunities, usually located within existing decision-making structures, whereas 'youth action' or

'volunteering' was seen as a way to undertake more autonomous forms of participation. Similarly, in Australia, 'youth participation' was seen as formalised, adult-managed processes. However, it was also viewed as a strategy for changing the processes of community and government decision making. For example, Chris, 21, lived in a regional centre in Australia. He felt that youth participation policies created a space where new ways of participating and new notions of community were emerging:

> *Chris: I don't think that these days people are as involved in the community, especially in areas like this. Whereas it used to be like really strong social networks through footy clubs, netball clubs and Lions and Apex and stuff like that so people were really connected. But now people are more focused on work so they don't have the same social networks or sense of community that there used to be.*

> *PC: So would it be fair to say that you're interested in reinvigorating that community involvement?*

> *Chris: Yeah, but not in the way it used to be done, but finding new ways to be involved - and a new sense of community.*

He argued that the ActNow Incubator – an online youth advisory board - was an example of how young people could come together in a new kind of community (online) to address issues they cared about.

Despite these distinctions, there was a great deal of commonality in the views of young people in both countries towards participations put forward by government, versus those they experienced in the case study organisations. Table 17 presents a summary of the views of young people in this study and helps to explain why young people are turned off by government initiatives for youth participation, but are engaged by those in the case study organisations.

Table 17 Interviewee perspectives on participation policies

Youth participation policies	
Systems of government	**Youth Action Network / Inspire Foundation**
Old, exclusive, closed decision-making processes, irrelevant.	New, open, discursive decision-making, relevant.
Deficit-based approach.	Capacity-based approach.
Tokenistic and makes no difference.	Makes a difference and is essential to the organisation's success.
Target 'school captains' as representatives or youth at risk of social disengagement – 'not me'.	Target young people based on what they're passionate about – cause oriented and project-based.
Engagement focuses on bringing young people into adult decision-making structures and processes	Engagement is focused on addressing issues

As indicated in Table 17, in both countries there was a strong perception that governments and politicians were old, exclusive and hierarchical. In the United Kingdom, Anjali argued that many young people feel shut out of political processes:

> *To me, they say all these things, but when it comes to actually talking to us, no one wants to actually talk to us…I think they've still got that mentality "oh they're just young people, they don't know much about it"…in my experience the government doesn't really take much notice of us. Certainly not like that.*

<div align="right">Anjali, 21, United Kingdom</div>

Anjali was dismissive of government-led participation mechanisms on the basis that they were tokenistic and ineffectual. Being perceived as irrelevant, incapable and deficient by decision-makers motivated Anjali to participate in community and non-government organisations. This feeling of being 'dismissed' was also common amongst Australian interviewees, as was the belief that young people are ignored altogether:

> *PC: So when governments or politicians talk about young people are they talking to you, as a young person?*

> *Phillip: Ah, I don't know. I don't think I can answer that question because I don't listen to them enough.*
>
> *PC: Why not?*
>
> *Phillip: Because I don't think they're trying hard enough to talk to us and their approach* [to alienate young people] *is working.*

Table 17 identifies that this strong sense of being shut out of policy-making processes had left a lasting impression on interviewees in this study. Though their commitment to social change seems unaffected, many indicated a deep distrust and sometimes complete rejection of government-led participation based on a perception that such processes are highly elite, closed and inaccessible.

> *I think if you're talking about youth involvement, then they have to actually play a role and have some say in everything. Whereas I think with politicians and government they still control it*

<div align="right">Rob, 19, Australia</div>

Rob believed that attempts by government to involve young people are insincere and tokenistic was linked to the perception that Government processes are impenetrable and preclude any real influence or decision-making power. As such, he saw influencing policy through formal channels as slow, disempowering and demoralising. According to interviewees, this was in part due to the fact that young people are usually framed by government as deficient.

> *I think it's often a discourse that involves a deficit approach to young people, "we can help young people contribute" rather than recognising that lots of them are contributing already. I think it's a discourse that is often with a limited goal and therefore limits how young people can be involved – like, 'we want to make this website or promo gear look 'youthy' … so we'll engage with young people on this one occasion. So I think it's often limited and restricted, both in terms of time during which they can participate and the things that they can do when they participate.*

<div align="right">David, 20, Australia</div>

Chapter 6. Youth Participation in Practice

Having participated in a number of different organisations and government youth participation initiatives, David spoke from a place of extensive experience in working with government and non-government youth participation initiatives and displayed a high level of critical thinking around the issues of youth participation. His rich description reflects a number of key elements echoed by other interviewees. They felt that young people were targeted because they needed help to successfully become adult and that government participation strategies were about getting young people – who are often perceived as not participating – to be 'more involved'. For example, Chris, 21, felt that governments were trying to target young people who were 'going down the wrong track':

> *I think they're talking about people who are going down the wrong track. So people who sit around the street all day because they're seen as a blight on society, and aren't productive or whatever. They're a really small percentage of youth but they're the ones who are seen as representing what youth are like. So that's why government focuses on them a little bit.*

> Chris, 21, United Kingdom

The kinds of young people perceived to be targeted by government participation policies were described by other interviewees as:

- 'young people who are in trouble or are at risk away from, say courts or criminal justice' (Belinda, 22, Australia)

- 'Maybe those people who just hang about on the street' (Lily, 19, United Kingdom)

- 'Hoodies[14]' (Will, 16, United Kingdom)

- 'the "poster children" who are from really good backgrounds. I don't think they'd want drug users or anything' (John, 19, Australia)

- 'people who went were from the school councils, the representative councils' (Joseph, 19, United Kingdom)

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[14] Young people who wear hooded jumpers and are assumed to be 'up to no good'!

- 'young people who do get involved in politics and really get into it' (Stevie, 22, Australia)

- 'he ones who are really keen' (Alana, 24, Australia)

- 'high school students' (Louise, 22, Australia)

The two main groups identified were: troublesome, disengaged or 'at risk' youth; and, high achievers and the already 'politically engaged'. The suggestion that high school students are targeted taps into a perception that youth participation policies are about helping young people to 'learn and grown'. Interview participants expressed concern that this limited the possibilities for youth participation based on 'adult' assumptions of what they *should* be doing. As a consequence, such strategies were viewed as highly controlled, tokenistic and limiting in terms of what influence or difference a young person can make.

> *I think they're genuine in so far as they want to fulfil their own agenda. But I don't think they're interested in feedback. I actually don't know when they try and include young people – you hear about roundtables and stuff. But you never hear about what that involvement means – like is it considered in policy? I don't even understand what they do – which I think tells you something anyway.*

> Jade, 24, Australia

The critical point in Jade's statement is that she does not believe that youth participation makes any difference to policy making.

Comparatively, for John, 25, his participation in the Youth Action Network was directly related to creating new spaces for debate, influence and change:

> *PC: Do you think your involvement in this kind of stuff is political?*

> *John: Well, yeah, because I think, well our government isn't doing anything about this stuff so we're gunna.*

Young people see themselves as stakeholders, rather than 'program recipients' and this plays a central role in their experiences and attitudes. In Australia, Phillip, 22, simply stated:

I think you should start a fashion. Start something that everyone wants to do and it's got to have a clear message. So one might say, like the old school approach - which I wouldn't necessarily recommend - graffiti. So putting up anti-war messages. Those things can catch on easily and they can be seen everywhere and they're usually quite blunt and to the point and make people think. It's still a form of vandalism, but there are other ways you can get your point across like music for instance. I'm a fan of the John Butler Trio[15] – some people might think he's a bit of a tree hugging hippie, but I think his lyric are great!

Phillip, 22, Australia

Phillip's view reflects a broad, creative, pluralistic approach to politics. Phillip felt that governments were not the only players in the process of policy production and that people should look to other parts of the social, cultural and commercial world to communicate their beliefs and influence decision-makers. By participating in non-government organisations, young people are creating political realities, rather than mirroring or representing or acting in the name of 'objective interests' (Bang, 2005:165). Interviewees indicated that as well as having a legitimate place either 'inside' or 'alongside' governance networks, they wanted to *determine* the structure of these networks (who is involved and how). By being involved in determining the actual processes, these young people felt they were valued for who they are, not for what they will become. Harry, 21, says, '*I suppose the role is to support and guide the organisation'.* According to Kate, 23, she felt her ideas and views were genuinely valued because '*… I guess there was a genuine interest, compassion and excitement from the staff and they were willing to take time to listen to what I had to say'.* Moreover, Kate felt that the success of the Inspire Foundation was directly linked to the participation of young people in its work:

I think the fact that Reach Out and Inspire have been successful shows that there's something good about what they're providing – and young people have been a part of that.

Kate, 23, Australia

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[15] The John Butler Trio is an Australian group well known for using music to address social injustice.

Chapter 6. Youth Participation in Practice

In comparison, Serger, 21, closely associated 'the political' with politicians, governments and bureaucracy in which he has little faith:

> *PC: Do you think your participation is political?*

> *Serger: No, no not political. I don't trust politicians or any government. I just want to work in the community, to make a difference to the community, so more people have better lives.*

As a refugee, Serger was more dismissive of governments and politicians than most of the young people I interviewed. He made a clear distinction between engaging with government and politicians and working with the Youth Action Network. He conceptualised participation in a way that was 'depoliticised' enabling him to retain personal integrity and assume greater agency and control over local-level social change. Through volunteering, Serger was consciously making claims to citizenship:

> *It's very important to me to volunteer to show that I am wanting to contribute to this country so they will give me a visa to stay*

> Serger, 21, United Kingdom

In his work with the Youth Action Network and other organisations, Serger has in fact met with politicians – including Tony Blair, during his term as British Prime Minister. But he places greater emphasis on the transformational potential of 'everyday' participation than on one-off meetings with powerful decision-makers. Another young British woman, Kylie summed this approach up:

> *Well, I find that the government don't really do a lot for young people. So running 'Creative Daze' and 'Youth on the Green' brings more young people from the streets into a safe environment.*

> Kylie, 16, United Kingdom

Young people, such as Kylie demonstrate an attitude that 'taking matters into her own hands', through tangible, everyday actions, is the most effective way to achieve change and the non-government organisations often presented an alternative institution in which they could access resources.

Despite these strong distinctions between youth participation policies in government and non-government settings, few young people who I interviewed were entirely dismissive of traditional institutions and agents of government. When asked if she'd had any contact with decision-makers, Kathryn explained:

> *Kathryn: Not really cos they don't really take the time out to come and see you. Once, in high school, a MP came down and we spoke with him. But that's the only contact I've had personally.*
>
> *PC: If you had the opportunity to work more closely with people in government would you like to do that?*
>
> *Kathryn: Yeah, to help make a difference to how they see young people. I'd definitely be interested in doing that.*

Kathryn and other interviewees in the United Kingdom demonstrated a higher level of interest in engaging with decision-makers. The Australian interviewees were much more dismissive of formal politics and respond to these processes and perceptions of alienation by reframing what participation means to them. They sought out different spaces to take action on the issues they cared about, 'where they are' and where they think thought they could create the biggest and most immediate difference. For example, despite her cynical view of politics and politicians, Ruth demonstrated a deep sense of commitment to raising awareness of depression and a strong belief that her participation in non-government organisations would make a difference in the lives of ordinary people. For her, taking action through the Inspire Foundation was a logical and strategic approach to creating change.

The young people in this study clearly distinguished between youth participation mechanisms in government or government agencies, and those within non-government organisations, although their responses to questions about participation were strongly flavoured by views on government and politicians. For many young people, participating in non-government organisations was also a response to the 'mixed messages' (Bessant, 2003) that young people receive through a confusing and contradictory matrix of government policies and laws, negative youth stereotypes perpetuated in the media and increasingly complex social economic demands that are

placed upon them. This was commonly expressed in terms of the relationships between the expectations of (absent) adults and the hopes of young people:

> *Adults have their own idea about what young people should be doing, but it's always from an adult point of view. The government always talks about youth participation – but why? What do they want? A lot of the time young people don't understand.*

John, 25, United Kingdom

John reflected a belief that when governments talk about youth participation it is often a one-way conversation, that it fails to reflect the issues that young people themselves believe to be important and is often unrealistic, unreasonable or unclear.

6.4 Expert Citizens or Everyday Makers?

This research reflects theories that young people in both countries are cynical about formal institutions, actors and processes of government. Politics in this sense was viewed as something that is 'done to' young people. Whereas, politics as issues-based participation was something that young people actively co-created and was viewed positively.

As Bang suggests, whether described as individual or group/collective action, project-based participation is not isolated nor does it take place outside the political system. What distinguished the political identities and practices of these young people from previous conceptual models was a rejection of the role of traditional hierarchies, a commitment to action over ideology and valuing of the cultural and interpersonal dimensions of participation. Personal goals as well as 'political' goals featured in these young people's conceptualisation of 'participation' and helped them to make sense of both what they want to achieve, and what they get out of participatory activities. In fact, young people appeared to be motivated by multiple goals that are framed, or achieved, by focusing on taking action around particular issues: meeting new people; generating networks; and, doing something that would provide them with experience 'for the future'. Wyn and Woodman (2006) point out that young people have increasingly high expectations and levels of personal responsibility for their lives. They find young people are incredibly pragmatic and view many aspects of life,

such as school, work and leisure as sites in which they must assume control (Wyn and Woodman, 2006: 508). Activities such as volunteering, spending time in membership-based communities, and other activities such as sport, were seen as mechanisms through which to build resources, networks and skills that help them to achieve their desired outcomes – be they economic, political or cultural. Similarly, Marsh et.al. (2007) have found that young people in the United Kingdom were more likely to be engaged in and express higher levels of political efficacy in relation to local participation, as opposed to that at the national level (Marsh et.al., 2007: 216). My observations would also support this finding – one which I would argue is closely related to the civic-republican discourses which tie youth citizenship to volunteering in the United Kingdom. As several of my interviewees demonstrated, local volunteering was seen as a legitimate way for young people to make citizenship claims by fulfilling the 'duties' of citizenship.

Although I have identified some of the agents, targets and repertoires (Norris, 2002: 215-216) of young people's participation, this discussion answers the more important question of *why* do they value them? It is clear that traditional political targets, agents and repertoires, such as political parties, politicians and voting are seen as elitist, hierarchical and adult-centred. Additionally, these young people believed them to be about structures and processes, rather than the issues which mobilised them to action. Conversely, in describing their participation through the case study organisations, young people demonstrated the way that issues are the foundations on which they build networks for action. These networks were meaningful because they were viewed as effective, but also because they allowed for a high degree of agency through choice and they involved valued and equal relationships between adults and young people and amongst peers.

This exploration of participatory attitudes and actions supports recent arguments that the study of youth citizenship must move beyond paradigms of engaged/disengaged (Bennett, 2008) or participation/non-participation (O'Toole, 2003; Vromen, 2003; Marsh et.al. 2007). A more nuanced account of young people's attitudes and experiences of participation demonstrates that a more valuable analytical framework would examine what mobilises young people and what kinds of environments foster or discourage their engagement. Bennett's typology of the Dutiful Citizen and the self-Actualising Citizen, for instance, can be applied to demonstrate how young

people were not mobilised in relation to the state or government-centred activities but nor they were not content with simply being informed about political issues, or engaging in one-way communication with political elites. They demonstrated many of the characteristics of self-Actualising citizens: a diminished sense of government obligation; mistrust of politicians and government; favouring loose networks for community action that are established or sustained through friendships and peer relations; and, a preference for personalisable forms of participation (Bennett, 2008: 14). Moreover, there is evidence of Bang's Expert Citizens and Everyday Makers and I find his framework useful for exploring in more detail the different political identities that a self-Actualising approach to citizenship reflects.

Here I find that participation policies provided impetus for the emergence of Expert Citizens amongst some self-Actualising young people. At least some of the young people interviewed in my research took part in the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network as a way to access other networks and opportunities to engage with political elites. They clearly articulated political goals and often saw themselves as different to other youth participants who they felt had distinct motivations and capacities to participate. Six of the twenty-five participants from both countries had taken up paid employment within youth-serving organisations − in one case, at the Inspire Foundation. For these young people the *cause* was not only mental health, racism or obesity, but *youth participation.* Being able to navigate the structures of governance networks and hold a legitimate role within these systems was important to these young people.

By contrast, other young people in this study reflected Everyday Maker characteristics. At least half of these young people valued the flexible nature of their participation (not feeling any 'obligations or responsibility') and demonstrated a deeper commitment to the causes and issues addressed by the organisations, than having official positions (of power) within the organisation. They adopted a 'personalised' approach to participation (Lichterman, 1996) and reflected many of the characteristics that Bang identifies in Everyday Makers.

One of Bang's central concerns is how the Everyday Maker can overcome the 'un-coupling of laypeople' from political elites. I suggest that the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network present interesting examples of how organisations and

networks can create spaces for the recognition of Everyday Making – or, as Bang puts it, 'the politics of the ordinary' (Bang, 2004b: 24). These case studies also raise an interesting problem for Bang's model. Several interviewees reflected attributes of both Expert Citizens and Everyday Makers, depending on the issue they wished to address. This suggests that the Expert Citizen and Everyday Maker may not be distinct political identities, but rather, different points on a sliding scale along which an individual may move according to the issue or context.

Chapter 7. Online Participation and Youth Citizenship

I have established in Chapter 6. that there is strong evidence of self-actualising citizens (Bennett, 2007) amongst my research participants. Using Bang's typology to gain more in-depth understanding of what kinds of self-actualising citizens might be emerging, there is also evidence that participation policies have contributed to both the Expert Citizen and Everyday Maker identities (Bang, 2005). The case study organisations not only provided a space in which to take action on issues that participants cared about, they also played an important role in the building of networks for action amongst these young people. In this chapter I explore the way that case study organisations and the young people in this research viewed and used the internet for participation and consider the extent to which there is increased democratising potential in online participation.

First I look at what young people *do* online and what mobilises them in these actions. Drawing on Karakaya Polat (2005), Vromen (2008) has identified three main ways that the internet is used for political participation: as an information source; as a communication medium; and, as a virtual public sphere (Vromen, 2008: 81). I use these different functions to consider the diversity of forms of participation that young people engage in. I then return to consider the role that policy plays in the formation of political identity. As described in Chapter 2, Coleman (2008) has provided a theoretical framework for analysing e-citizenship projects. His analysis of the ways policy makers are looking to the internet to extend opportunities to engage young people has concluded there are two broad approaches. Firstly he finds that some projects promoting e-citizenship are designed to *manage* the participatory activities of young people. Comparatively he finds that other projects facilitate *autonomous* citizenship (Coleman, 2008: 192). Coleman also proposes six principles for e-citizenship that would promote a 'productive convergence' (Coleman, 2008: 202) between these two forms of citizenship. I have synthesised his schema with these principles (see Table 1: 36) to create three modes of citizenship produced through online projects which I use to analyse the way case study organisations use the internet to promote participation.

Coleman's typology is an appropriate analytical tool for exploring the relationship between policy, settings (case study organisations and the internet) and youth political

identities for several reasons. Firstly, there are some interesting parallels with Bennett and Bang's typologies and thus, a useful framework for considering the relationship between perspectives of managers of e-citizenship projects and young people's own experiences. The projects promoting autonomous citizenship in Coleman's study were youth or participant-led. However, both the Youth Action Network and Inspire Foundation initiatives are, by Coleman's definition, led by adults for young people. I interrogated these definitions through an analysis of how decision-making works and perceptions in each organisation about the roles of 'adults' and 'young people' for 'digital democracy'. Secondly, as outlined in Chapter 3, Coleman acknowledges three limitations of the e-citizenship projects in his study. I consider here whether or not the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network respond to these challenges:

- acknowledge and work with everyday and non-traditional forms of participation

- innovative use of the internet to expand the democratic features of e-citizenship projects

- challenge dominant discourses and stereotypes of youth.

Analysis draws directly on the interviews with young people and executive staff and board members of case study organisations. The discussion is organised into two parts. The first presents analysis of the case study organisations in relation to Coleman's schema. The second examines the extent to which these case studies respond to Coleman's three challenges for democratic e-citizenship.

7.1 Using the internet for participation

As discussed in Chapter 6, young people are mobilised around a range of issues. Amongst the young people in this study there is clear evidence that they assume self-actualising citizenship positions and that their perceptions and experiences of political participation are shaped by youth participation policies. Here I look how young people talked about their internet use for participation. Livingstone et.al. ask 'what exactly must young people do online before society will judge them 'politically active' or 'engaged in civic participation?' (Livingstone, 2005: 289-290). This question is most commonly answered by measuring young people's online activities

against normative, adult-centred definitions of online engagement. Below I use the groupings devised by Vromen (2008) to categorise and explore the way young people described their use of the internet for participation without judging whether or not any one action is 'political' or not.

My analysis was guided by the way that young people in this study identified and responded to politics. As seen in Chapter 6, this primarily occurred through the lens of issues, whilst forms of participation were often project-based, fluid, unfixed, not defined by structures and processes, but in the context of the case studies, located within organisations and their related networks. This is further indicated by looking at the way that these young people used the internet for participation.

7.1.1 The Youth Action Network

Young people got involved in the Youth Action Network via grass roots, community organisations. Without a program or structured processes for youth participation, young people's involvement was either ad hoc, or determined by individual projects that they worked on. Table 18 summarises the ways in which the internet was used for participation with the Youth Action Network. It also includes the websites and functions young people referred to in the context of doing something about the issues they cared about. The list was created by identifying where young people linked online activities and websites to their participatory activities both explicitly and indirectly. I used two criteria to determine where a relationship existed based on a) whether the internet was the setting for their activity; b) whether the internet was utilised to enable the activity to take place. These criteria were also applied to the Youth Action Network website.

Table 18 Types of online activity and websites – British interviewees

Ways of using the internet	Youth Action Network	Other
Information Source (sites provide information about political issues, groups and campaigns)	Limited information on issues (text, podcasts) Information on volunteering opportunities	**Culture and Entertainment** www.MySpace.com (information on culture, such as bands, and politics, such as campaigns) Pro-wrestling sites www.imdb.com/ Band sites Film sites An international song lyrics

		website
		Volunteering www.mvonline.gov.uk www.facebook.com
		News and information www.maps.google.com www.timesonline.co.uk www.telegraph.co.uk www.thefa.com www.redcross.org.uk www.savethechildren.org.uk/ www.mvonline.gov.uk/ www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/ researching issues, such as safety
Communication Medium (conversations that are one-to-one; aggregation of many-to-one communication such as polls; broadcast from one-to-many such as blogs; group dialogue such as forums and online chat)	**Youth Action Network sites** Staff moderated website content Feedback forms Polls Online mentoring **Supporting YAN involvement** Skype Email MSN messenger	**One to one / one to many** (on issues or opportunities to take action) www.MySpace.com www.facebook.com www.bebo.com) **One-to-one** http://uk.messenger.yahoo.com/ MSN messenger email **Community forums** http://communitytheme.ibo.org/students www.speakout.biz Pro-wrestling sites www.camelotfoundation.org.uk/ www.fifa.com **User generated content** www.wikipedia.org
Virtual public sphere (platform for rational critical debate rather than registration of individual views through information aggregation tools such as polls or surveys)		International Baccalaureate community site: sharing our humanity music forums www.speakout.biz
Other technologies		Podcasts Mobile phone SMS Online games

The internet as an information source

As an information source, the internet was an important tool for these young people. They primarily used the Youth Action websites to find out information about the Youth Action approach and Youth Action agencies, and to find opportunities to volunteer. It was more common for young people to refer to non-Youth Action Network websites when talking about searching for information on issues they wanted to address. The internet also played an important function for gathering information during the course of a project they were already engaged with:

> *… for instance, we'll get projects from the sexual health worker, like when I was volunteering at [local youth service] she asked me to look for materials, posters and things so I used* [the internet] *for that sort of thing.*

> Kathryn, 19, United Kingdom

The internet was a highly valued resource for these young people's participatory activities, which were often unfunded. Kylie felt that her offline projects would be unviable without access to the internet for the purpose of researching information related to the activity:

> *Well, yeah because we need to research [phone] numbers and things like that – to book people and places and things. So we use it for that. And I'm always on the internet, so I'm used to it, but it's easier to get on the internet than to go through loads of books [looking for information], so it's good for that. It helps us quite a lot.*

> Kylie, 16, United Kingdom

Without access to the internet she said that it would be too time-consuming for the volunteers involved, and that the projects might not be worth doing because people would be too focused on the organising and not on the activities.

The wide range of issues that young people were concerned about were reflected in the diversity of sites they used to seek information. These included cultural and entertainment, sporting, volunteering and news sites as well as sites of other organisations, such as Save the Children, which provided information on issues such as child rights. Social networking sites, such as www.myspace.com were used to find

out what other people were doing in terms of linking up with individuals with similar interests, existing campaigns or disseminating information about their own projects. Will, 17, described how he uses www.myspace.com to search for bands to play on his independent music show on community radio:

> *Will: Yes. Actually I was looking back at music we played for our one year anniversary and then looked at which groups or artists are now big. There's people like Jamie T who is really big now. I want to say – see we told you so! But there are loads of bands that we played way before they had hit singles. Which is not to say that we 'found them'. But we did come across a lot of them before they were big, on MySpace. There are methods you can use to find bands.*

> *PC: So you use MySpace to do research?*

> *Will: Oh definitely. That's the only way I do it really – perhaps initially the radio. But as soon as I hear a song I'll write it down [on my phone] and then look it up on the internet.*

One of his reasons for hosting a community radio show was to challenge monopolies in the media and music industry and promote local and independent music. He used www.myspace.com to find new bands which he then promoted via his radio show. Furthermore, the internet was an important source of information on new music for him due to limited venues for live music and age restrictions on attendance.

In the United Kingdom, John felt that the most powerful feature of the internet was its ability to expose young people to social issues via popular websites:

> *Like, on YouTube some videos are inspiring – like The Night Train. It's about refugees who take a journey – at night, cos it's safest for them – from a refugee camp to school. It's kids and there are loads of them − I think it's in Uganda –and they have to walk but sometimes on the way some of them get raped and kidnapped and made to work as Soldiers. Really bad things happen to them basically. So a couple of guys used video and podcasting to get their story and basically promote the issue and now it's like a massive movement.*

> John, 25, United Kingdom

John rarely utilised the internet for his participatory activities (due to limited access), but he commented on the broader applications and uses of the internet for young people wanting to take action on issues. In particular, he saw the internet playing an important role in connecting people with information and opportunities to address issues of concern.

Other young people talked about staying up-to-date on issues and opportunities via the internet. For example, Serger, 21 was passionate about refugee issues and said he regularly logged onto the websites of certain organisation:

> *Serger: well I use email, also to find out if there are volunteering opportunities, so like with the Youth Action Network and other organisations.*

> *PC: For instance?*

> *Serger: The Red Cross, Save the Children, Millennium Volunteers, Refugee Council and many more.*

This helped him stay involved in existing activities and get involved in new ones. Feeling informed about the issues was important to maintaining involvement and in the process Serger was creating his networks for action via the internet. He described a project that involved bringing together people from different organisations to produce a short documentary film on refugee young people. This suggests that as a function of searching for information, Serger was also connecting on a regular basis with these organisations, the groups and individuals associated with them. In this case, searching for information led to connections and networks which formed the basis for Serger's offline participation.

The internet as a communication medium

As a communication medium, the internet played an important role in two ways: as a mechanism or instrument of communication; and, as a setting for community building. The Youth Action Network sites were used for peer mentoring and posting opinions and sharing experiences – via polls and feedback forms. The Youth Action Network sites were largely for communicating information and incorporated very little interactive functionality. It did host an online mentoring site through which young people were both mentees and mentors. However, interviewees mainly

described communicating with others via other sites or email, MSN or online calling and connecting with online communities via interest groups or social networking sites. Though web 2.0 functions have dramatically changed the ways in which people can interact and work together online (live chat, asynchronous bulletin boards, wikis, video streaming and so on), these young people felt that traditional email also created new 'spaces' for youth participation:

> *I use email a lot – so, like, Jonathan will email me things that he needs doing and I'll try to do it and email it back to him – like with the survey − so even though I couldn't go down to Birmingham, he's been emailing to me and Tara and we've been going through it and we tell him what we think needs to be changed or what we think young people might not get − some of it was worded quite difficult.*

> Kathryn, 19, United Kingdom

Kathryn explained how using email (either one-to-one or one-to-many mailing) kept everyone in the loop and that much decision-making took place over email.

Community forums on websites of interest featured in young people's interviews. Community forums were often used for projects in order to bring people together to discuss ideas and make decisions online. For example, Eliza, 19, described how online forums were used to facilitate young people's participation in a national grant-making body:

> *A group of young people are selected to organise the ceremony and then another group of young people who decided who would win the awards and how much money they would win and so on. I was on the design team and for that there was an online community and you could log on and figure out what the rest of the group was doing and share ideas for how to create the ceremony.*

> Eliza, 19, United Kingdom

Whilst Eliza felt this format worked well and enabled a range of people to be involved, she also noted that face-to-face meetings were an important part of the process.

Matt described how www.myspace.com was used to promote opportunities for young people to get involved in an event he was organising:

> *...if you've got a band and you want to play on the day you can go online, fill out a form and post an MP3. But in the past you'd have to write and post something in. Also stewarding, you can apply online, also for the Y-Factor* [competition]. *You can apply online for that and send it in and we can reply really quickly – like within two days.*

<div align="right">Matt, 17, United Kingdom</div>

Matt and other members of the organising committee utilised www.myspace.com to disseminate information about the event, but also to build a community of young people who could bring the event to life. Online, young people could personalise their roles in the planning and execution of the event. Matt also felt that the profile on www.myspace.com.au helped the event to gain momentum as young people logging on and offering to get involved had the sense that they were part of a movement or group. Matt thought that being able to see other people's views or commitments to the project helped to create a sense of community around the event.

Other interviewees felt that linking volunteering and other participatory acts to social networking sites helped them to get involved and to challenge barriers associated with geographical location, financial resources (for travel etc), to share information and discuss issues with other young people and to get inspired to take part. The internet was used to link up various aspects of their lives as Anjali, 21, describes:

> *Anjali: I think because it's easier to communicate on. For example if you're on Live MSN you can talk about a project you can agree on what needs to be discussed at the next meeting. If you're chatting to friends you can organise to go and see a film or go out to eat or something. And you can talk to many people at the same time!*
>
> *I also have all my uni work on my computer, so it's all there in the one place. It's just about organisation. A lot of my lectures actually happen on the internet.*
>
> *PC: So it's a real point of convergence for these different aspects of your life?*

> *Anjali: Yes! I don't know what I'd do without it. I guess I'd manage, but it's a lot easier with the internet!*

She also felt that it was not the internet per se, but the *intent* and the principles underpinning the interaction (either online or offline) that created a space in which they can genuinely contribute and be heard:

> *... the adults listen to what we have to say. If we've got something to say then we sit down and listen to what each other has to say and respect what each other has to say.*

<div align="right">

Anjali, 19, United Kingdom

</div>

Anjali emphasised that it is not the technology that makes it possible for her to direct the project, but the genuine commitment of the adults involved to *dialogue* and hand over power to the young people. She, like many of the interviewees, felt that the participation of young people in Youth Action Network was part of the constant process of defining and redefining youth participation. She felt strongly that her role was to ensure that 'adults' understood and took into consideration the views and experiences of young people. Nevertheless, interviewees did describe ways in which the internet as a communication medium enabled many-to many communication and facilitated community building.

The internet as a virtual public sphere

Amongst British interviewees there was evidence that the internet can be used as a virtual public sphere. For Evan, 21, online participation was also seen as a necessary response to the perceived lack of an alternative offline spaces for action. He instigated a voluntary online project with other young people he met online.

> *Well it's one for mental health ... it's basically a self-help forum. It's staffed by people all over the world ... We run the site and we have members from all over the world come to talk about their problems with schizophrenia, bi-polar, depression...stuff like that. We don't offer advice because none of us are qualified to offer advice, but we do say what we've done or what we think. We've helped a lot of people and it's amazing that we have no money – we're*

> *not even official – and we're doing more than most governments in the world. Mental health service in this country lets people down.*

<div align="right">Evan, 21, United Kingdom</div>

Evan's belief in the inadequacy of government responses to the issue of mental health created a firm need for a community response that was both accessible and autonomous. Furthermore, he felt the online environment enabled him and his peers to by-pass government and public policy systems that had failed to respond. In this sense, Evan utilised the internet for autonomous citizenship. But like his peers, he was also prepared to engage with adult-led, government funded and state driven participatory projects. The critical difference between seeking – or creating − 'autonomous' spaces, and engaging with existing structures and processes was *the issue.* Via the internet he could choose to respond to an issue that concerned him – whether there were existing opportunities to take action or not.

Few other British interviewees for this research saw the internet as an actual setting for deliberation and action. These young people had many offline opportunities through their volunteering and in general saw the internet as an additional tool or mechanism to enable them to contribute or promote social change. British interviewee online participation was more often undertaken on social networking sites (connecting with peers and recruiting other young people to be involved in youth action), email (particularly for their work with Youth Action Network and its member organisations) as well as linking in with other issues-based online communities (i.e. on mental health, independent music, and refugee issues). Whilst very few reported using 'civic sites' (i.e. Livingstone et.al, 2005) many made explicit links between their participatory activities and their use of these other websites. In this way, broadly speaking, the internet played an important role in their participatory activities.

> *Well, the internet is like, well it's everything. I use it for everything. To do school work, to research,* [to work] *with the Youth Action Network. So it's just, like something that I use all the time.*

<div align="right">Joseph, 19, United Kingdom</div>

For Joseph the internet played a role in all aspects of his life. Without negating the importance of face-to-face contact with people (particularly when discussing

'community issues') he saw many links between the different spheres of his life and the internet. However, he saw the Youth Action Network website primarily as a tool to access information and opportunities to participate, raise awareness of issues and promote youth participation.

7.1.2 The Inspire Foundation

All Australian interviewees had worked online with staff and other young people as part of a formal youth participation program at the foundation. They spoke broadly about a range of activities that they undertook online that illustrated how they 'participated' in the work of the foundation. These ranged from email exchanges to discuss staff recruitment, to engaging in online discussions, to creating user-generated (un-moderated) website content. Table 19 lists the kinds of activities distinguished by whether or not they were 'formal' or 'informal'. As discussed in Chapter 6, 'formal' activities were structured and resourced directly by the Inspire Foundation, whereas 'informal' activities were ad hoc, wholly initiated and undertaken by young people.

Table 19 Formal and informal online participation at the Inspire Foundation

Formal (structured) participation	Informal (unstructured) participation
Email and MSN to: - Work with staff to create text and multimedia content for the websites. - organise activities associated with research, evaluation and policy projects (as peer researchers)	Produce text and multimedia content for www.actnow.com.au via a wiki.
Discuss program development with peers and staff in closed online forums	Contribute to online discussions on www.actnow.com.au and via social networking sites including www.facebook.com , www.bebo.com , www.MySpace.com
Moderate a peer-support online forum. Moderate user generated site content for www.actnow.com.au	Complete online polls, surveys and feedback forms via Inspire websites (www.reachout.com.au www.actnow.com.au) and social networking sites (www.MySpace.com and www.bebo.com).
Online peer mentoring	'Word of mouth' and 'viral' promotion of Inspire initiatives and related issues.
Create and build foundation profiles on social networking sites (www.MySpace.com , www.facebook.com and www.bebo.com)	

The formal and informal modes of participation can be categorised into two kinds of activities: those that create content; and, those that create community. As indicated in Table 19, although youth participation at the Inspire Foundation is ostensibly about

strengthening the outcomes of the Inspire services, young people's participation was predominately focused on activities that built community. In the case of ActNow, this has been argued by Vromen (2008). These modes of participation are further laid out as types of online activity in Table 20.

Table 20 Types of online activity and websites – Australian interviewees

Ways of using the internet	Inspire	Other
Information Source (sites provide information on political issues, existing, groups and campaigns)	www.actnow.com.au www.reachout.com.au	**Culture and Entertainment** www.bbc.co.uk/celebdaq www.facebook.com www.MySpace.com www.bebo.com online shopping www.apple.com/itunes banking **News and Information** www.smh.com.au www.bbc.co.uk www.theage.com.au www.educationfoundation.org.au www.google.com.au www.amnesty.org.au/ youthGAS email list
Communication Medium (conversations that are one-to-one; aggregation of many-to-one communication such as polls; broadcast from one-to-many such as blogs; group dialogue such as forums and online chat)	Email Staff moderated website content Peer moderated website content (User-generated content) Feedback forms Online mentoring Social networking sites Polls (on Foundation-run websites) Online commenting/discussion threads Asynchronous bulletin boards Instant messaging (ie. MSN)	**one-to-one / one-to-many** msn messenger www.facebook.com www.MySpace.com www.bebo.com www.tigweb.org www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au www.generate.qld.gov.au **group dialogue** University websites (class online components) student websites www.aiesec.org yahoo groups email lists (ie. youthgas) www.tigweb.org
Virtual public sphere (platform for rational critical debate rather than registration of individual views through information aggregation tools such as polls or surveys)	www.actnow.com.au Reach Out Online Community Forums	www.tigweb.org

Other technologies	Podcasts	podcasts Massive and multiplayer online role playing games (ie. www.neopets.com)

The internet as an information source

Australian interviewees talked about the role the internet played in initiating participation, as an information source on both issues and opportunities to participate. For Stevie, 22, the internet was an important source of news media as well as a space where he could look for information on the issues he cared about. Because one of these issues was mental health in young men, he used the Inspire Foundation website, www.reachout.com.au to link to information and other organisations. Similarly, the young people who had participated in www.actnow.com.au said they regularly got their preliminary information from ActNow and then linked to other organisations, campaigns, individuals and communities.

Seeking information on opportunities to take action on issues was a common way of using the internet. Andrea, 22, was one of several young people who got involved with the Inspire Foundation after coming across www.reachout.com.au while surfing the net for information on youth issues. Others were actively looking for information on opportunities to participate. This kind of information was also accessed online via an email list to which young people subscribed though rarely, although could, contribute:

> I got involved with the Inspire Foundation through YouthGAS, an online email list, in 2001. I just heard about Inspire Foundation through there and applied to be on a ReachOut Youth Advisory Board and developed my relationship from there.

> David, 20, Australia

This is an example of the way that the internet is used by young people to receive as well as seek out information. Being members of email lists, setting up RSS feeds and other alerts meant that they could receive information without having to actively go and seek it. This is just one of the ways that the internet served to sustain their interest and commitment to issues and participation opportunities as we shall see below.

The internet as a communication medium

As indicated in Tables 19 and 20 the young Australians interviewed for this study utilised the internet regularly and in many different ways as a communication medium. Because of the strong online culture at the Inspire Foundation, and the role of participants in developing the online initiatives, www.reachout.com.au and www.actnow.com.au , these sites also featured strongly in young peoples' experiences of participation. Via these sites they emailed their peers and staff, contributed to online discussions, responded to online polls, created or contributed to social networking site profiles, created site content and moderated the online contributions of site members.

But these interviews with young people demonstrated not only what they did online, but why certain forms of online participation are meaningful to them. For example, interviewees reported that the internet made it easy for them to express their opinions on both the 'issues' and policy and program responses. Being able to control how and when they were involved was one of the ways that young people distinguished between participation in offline and online settings:

> *I thought it was really good, you could get on there any time, day or night, everything was in order and you could just read what others had written and then write what you think.*

> <div align="right">Rob, 19, Australia</div>

In addition to the flexibility and control that the internet offered participants, Kate pointed out that it was about participating 'on her own terms':

> *I could contribute whenever I wanted, whether that was at 2am, or after I'd been thinking about something for 24 hrs to get my thoughts straight and type it so it felt like what I was doing was meaningful. So it was on my own time, and terms.*

> <div align="right">Kate, 23, Australia</div>

Like many of her peers, being able to log on whenever she wanted, to link in with projects and discussions, disengage or re-engage at whim was critical to Kate and was

one of the key reasons why she had remained involved with the Inspire Foundation for over five years.

Not only was online participation in Inspire programs such as Reach Out accessible (in terms of physical and time considerations) but it was less adversarial and more explorative:

> *I was being asked for feedback, so I couldn't be right or wrong because I was giving you my opinion. And then, if I was asked about something I didn't know anything about, well, I wasn't under any pressure to respond then and there.*

<div align="right">Jade, 24, Australia</div>

Jade expressed a strong preference for online participation emphasising that she felt safe to explore ideas and express an opinion in ways she couldn't offline. She made clear comparisons between traditional, offline and new online sites for participation which provide insight into the way both participation and youth citizenship were conceptualised:

> *...being online meant that I wasn't dependent on other people. I guess it was a gentle introduction to volunteering or becoming involved in not-for-profits because it was so flexible and it didn't involve – like, walking into an Amnesty International meeting, there was a formal agenda which, as a young person who'd never come across that stuff, can be quite confronting. And when they ask you a question, at a meeting, in front of people you might have a moment of, you know, 'I've got no idea!' But with Reach Out it wasn't like that.*

<div align="right">Jade, 24, Australia</div>

Jade felt that one of the things she valued about her experience with the Inspire Foundation was that young people were not constructed as either capable of nothing or capable of everything – rather, they were valued and recognised for the ways in which they are different to adults. This was manifest in a youth-led approach where young people were provided with resources with which to define and action participation online. Examples included using the internet to create and host on (www.actnow.com) an online game about obesity, using email to draft a proposal to the Inspire Foundation Board to appoint young people to the Board of Directors and

creating online community forum avatars that promote other issues and campaigns that they were involved in to their peers.

These forms of online participation were important, in part because they represented ways to participate where young people had traditionally experienced exclusion or barriers to participation:

> *I think it's also a great way for young people who don't necessarily have the skills or confidence to get involved in a face-to-face environment. My brother is a great example of this – at school all the teachers were saying "you should get involved in the student council" and he never wanted to. But he did get involved with www.takingitglobal.org and is now doing some work with the Foundation for Young Australians ... he is really great at assessing funding grants online and writing for zines, or emailing ideas back and forth or posting on a discussion board.*

<div align="right">Alana, 22, Australia</div>

Alana's view was that the internet presented clear alternatives for people who felt disinclined (for a range of personal and social reasons) to participate offline or in traditional processes. However, the search for online opportunities to participate was not only fuelled by discontent with, alienation from or in resistance to formal, 'offline' institutions of government and democracy. Rather, interviewees described their pursuit of online participatory activities as a logical extension of much of their 'everyday' online activities. In general, Australian interviewees reported that the internet was a vehicle for achieving multiple goals: doing something about the issues; meeting new people; generating networks; and gaining experience 'for the future'.

Using the internet as a communication medium also meant that interviewees could engage and disengage as often as they liked. They could email, post on a forum, create a piece of content and take on more or less responsibility as, and if, they wanted to. The ownership she felt over the process was illustrated by the way Kate's participation changed over time:

> *I don't have as much time to be online and write content as I used to. But I guess I can provide feedback from a wider angle, try and be involved around*

some of the wider strategy stuff, and use things that I know – like if I've got any ideas then I can just email them off to Reach Out.

Kate, 23, Australia

When not using the community forums, Kate used email to maintain contact with staff. Though this was seen as a good thing for some interviewees, for others the focus on the internet as the primary site of participation meant that lack of internet access could sever their sense of connection:

PC: Could you have been involved in RO! the way you have been without the internet?

Paula: No way. I mean, when I first got involved I was a massive poster on the forums – I was on there every day. But then I moved houses and my connection kind of decreased as my access decreased. Like, I used to post every day... It's kind of disappointing to me that I've lost my connection and now I look on the forums and I'm like, I don't know who they are. I used to know everyone and where everyone was from. I'm like one of those people who was massively involved and has now dropped off the radar because I've lost that connection. But once I get the connection I'll hopefully be back.

Paula, 20, had been highly engaged for many years with Reach Out but when her internet access was cut her sense of belonging and motivation to contribute was challenged. However, her 'disconnection' from the internet translated as a 'disconnection' from the Inspire Foundation.

The internet as virtual public sphere

David felt that interacting online provided young people and Inspire staff with a safe place to share ideas and discuss points of difference:

...it's a really good place to have a liberal discussion – for it not be a face to face discussion is really important for people to be able to talk in online forums and debate ideas because it's perhaps easier to do over the net and you can express yourself much more freely than you can face-to-face.

David, 20, Australia

211

This sense of freedom to express themselves online was a recurring theme among Australian interviewees. As discussed above, this was often associated with the belief that they wouldn't be judged, but Kate indicated that this was also because she felt young people's views were recognised and responded to:

> ...*after being involved I was really amazed at the impact that we had as a group. We'd suggest something and then within a couple of weeks it'd be on the site – so it was quite an instant turn around.*

<div align="right">Kate, 23, Australia</div>

Over the five years that she was involved with Reach Out the site developed from a static text-based to a multi-media platform with a range of interactive components. Kate said that young people's input was evidenced by the acknowledgement of ideas, posting of content recommended or created by young people and the implementation of strategic decisions regarding the service made by participants. In practical terms, online decisions were mediated and actioned online by Inspire staff. However, in the case of ActNow the discussions and debates held either on the closed forums used by members of the Incubator or publically on the ActNow site, could be actioned by users through uploading content live to the site. Content analysis of the site was not part of this study, so it is impossible to comment on the degree to which deliberation actually took place. However, there were clear indications that interview participants felt that deliberation took place. There is a more critical question here about *who* is involved in these deliberative practices. This will be explored in the following chapter.

Nevertheless, there was wide consensus that even on the Reach Out site where staff were ultimately responsible for posting content, making changes to the way the service was delivered, and in advocating for a particular policy position related to young people's mental health and wellbeing, that staff and young people worked online to make decisions together.

This discussion of the way the internet is used by young people for participation demonstrates that there is a wide range of uses and that certain characteristics of the internet promote participation amongst young people. Although there is an indication that deliberation can take place online through Inspire Foundation initiatives, a

cursory glance at the sites suggest that a small minority is currently involved which raises questions of elitism and representativeness.

Furthermore, this discussion demonstrates that a focus on individual types of participation can create the impression that young people engage in a series of distinct activities that correspond with similarly distinct purposes. However, Australian interviewees spoke about the centrality of the internet to their everyday lives. There were differing levels of internet access, but all described how they used the internet for a range of activities including study, work, volunteering and other participatory actions, connecting with others, socialising, getting news and information and accessing music and other hobbies. What's more, these activities were often undertaken at the same time:

> *...it's weird how you actually use the internet, you don't really sit and look at it, you just have it open. So if I'm doing an assignment I'll have two or three pages open, so that when you get bored you can just flick to something.*

> Chris, 21, Australia

With a number of internet windows open, Chris would be chatting with friends, coordinating an activity with the Inspire Foundation, studying and checking out a film site. But not only did interviewees describe the internet as a process and tool by which different aspects of their lives could co-exist, but also as a space that enabled them to easily integrate these different activities, limiting the extent to which their lives were articulated as a series of connected, but ultimately separate silos (such as family, friendships, education, employment, health).

> *Mental illness in young guys is something that I'm really passionate about at the moment. So I'm trying to raise awareness and trying to understand it more than anything. I've got a proposal that I've given Marianne – which I hope she really likes. It's to create a new website called ROBO's Place – which stands for Reach Out Blokes Only – and it's just all the stuff off the Reach Out [web] site but aimed at guys. I did it for uni – we had to create a new service. So I did that and then thought – wow, this is actually something I'd really like to do.*

> Stevie, 22, Australia

Stevie described how he combined a personal interest, study requirement and participatory activity to address the issue of young men's mental health. For Stevie, the internet made participation more viable because he could link up different parts of his increasingly complex life. He described a process of working both online and offline with a range of different people (staff at the Inspire Foundation as well as peers) to turn an area of personal concern into a project for change. Furthermore, Stevie saw the internet as a space where this unmet policy challenge could be addressed − and saw himself as a legitimate and key player in the development of this online solution. His personal relationship with the subject matter was the catalyst for action, driven by the internet which both facilitated and formed the setting for his proposal. The Inspire Foundation then applied and was successful in securing a major grant to conduct research and develop Stevie's proposal. Stevie played a key role in this process and worked online (mostly via email) with Inspire staff to write the grant application.

7.1.3 Connecting to institutions and political elites

Neither of the case study organisations explicitly aimed to connect young people to political elites and institutions, such as government via the internet. In this sense these young people provide a good litmus test for managed e-citizenship sites. In Australia very few young people mentioned government-run youth sites. When young people in the United Kingdom were asked, few even knew of relevant civic or government-run sites to support youth participation. Even those whose participatory activities were specifically online were unaware of any government sites. One interviewee thought he might have heard of www.headsup.org.uk but he wasn't sure. There was some awareness that at a local government level councils were creating profiles on social networking sites as a strategy to reach young people, though this was met with some cynicism.

> *...it's about people connecting with people, not people connecting with institutions. If you wanted to connect with your council you'd whip out the old phone book and ring your town hall. Or visit your town hall or library, I mean, every council has got a website. If you wanted to connect with them then you can through any number of means...*

> Evan, 21, United Kingdom

His point is that young people go onto www.myspace.com to connect with their communities – not to seek out public officials or offices. So the issue may be that there is an inherent incongruence with hierarchical, closed, traditional institutions seeking to connect with young people in online spaces that are implicitly non-hierarchical, user-generated and democratic. According to these young people, the internet, in and of itself, doesn't provide young people with power to influence or make decisions – but organisations, networks and governments can handover some of their decision-making power to young people online.

For example, Australian interviewees felt that the organisation delegated significant responsibility online for setting agendas, participating in decision-making and actioning decisions that were made by the community. Young people felt they had a legitimate right to occupy online spaces and to engage around issues that mattered to them. They expressed a degree of confidence in taking part online – except where they were unfamiliar with technical skills required for certain forms of online interactivity (such as uploading content). This is in stark contrast to the views expressed when discussing participation in (offline) formal institutions and politics. For one interviewee, offline traditional agents and repertoires of political participation were unwelcoming and dismissive of young people and their issues:

> *I don't think they've got an interest in what I've got to say. I think they're interested in being able to say they've talked with young people, but I don't' feel like anything I could say is going to make its way to policy writers.*

<div align="right">Jade, 24, Australia</div>

Jade felt that as a young person she had no legitimate place in more formal or state-oriented participatory spaces – regardless of whether they were online or offline.

Those Australian interviewees who did reflect on government youth sites reflected views to support Coleman and Rowe's observation that young people are not inclined to use sites that 'speak at them' − providing information and communicating policy *to* young people. Interviewees were dismissive of initiatives or sites that restricted the ways in which they could express their views and ideas, indicating a strong rejection of dutiful (Bennett, 2007) and managed (Coleman, 2008) citizenship. Whilst Alana,

22, acknowledged that there was some interesting use of the internet to connect young people to government, she felt this process was highly controlled:

> [A government-run youth web-based initiative] *is a good example of using some online surveying and having young people involved in writing actual content for a website. But it is incredibly limited and there are a lot of restrictions on what young people can and can't have a say on. For instance young people can write opinion pieces but they can't write fact sheets. And when we suggested that young people could write fact sheets that was way too scary, couldn't do it. So, young people could never write a fact sheet on drug use! It was just too risky for government.*

Alana, 22, Australia

Alana clearly distinguished between the use of the internet to facilitate youth participation mechanisms in government (or government agencies) and using the internet to participation through the Inspire Foundation. Table 21 builds on the table presented in Table 17 (Chapter 6: 174) of interviewee perspectives on youth participation policies, by including summary notes on their perspectives on the role of the internet for participation.

Table 21 Interviewee perspectives on participation policies: online and offline

Youth participation policies	
Government	**Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network**
Old, exclusive, closed decision-making processes, irrelevant.	New, open, discursive decision-making, relevant.
Deficit-based approach.	Capacity-based approach.
Target 'school captains' or youth at risk of social disengagement – 'not me'.	Target young people based on what they're passionate about – cause oriented and project-based.
Tokenistic and makes no difference.	Makes a difference and is essential to the organisation's success.
Use of the internet (Australian interviewees)[16]	
Governments control the space and terms of use.	Young people can define the space and terms of use.
Reinforces institutions.	Responds to the 'community'.
Communicate to young people.	Communicate with young people.

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[16] As none of the United Kingdom participants had heard of a government e-citizenship initiative I have not made any comparison between their views on government and the Youth Action Network use of information communication technologies.

Chapter 7. Online Participation and Youth Citizenship

As indicated in Table 21 there was general consensus that governments and politicians viewed young people as apprentice citizens and that their use of the internet to engage with young people reinforced this approach. In Alana's statement above, it is evident that she views government use of the internet as an extension of the control that governments exercise offline over youth participation. Though some of the interviewees engaged with government online youth participation strategies, many were dismissive and cynical about government use of technology to involve young people. Commenting on the difference between government and non-government sites, an Australian interviewee who works for a government Office for Youth said:

> *I've been thinking about that quite a lot lately in terms of the website that we run here. I think the content (on Reach Out) really draws people to the website because there's so much there and it's relevant. Whereas the website we've got here is pretty shite and doesn't have much content. So contributing in that way, being able to write content, and get those interviews – the 'clued-up'* [interviews] - *draw people to the website.*

Belinda, 22, Australia

Belinda felt the Reach Out site reflected the young people involved – it came across as a site produced by young people working together with staff and health experts. Table 21 indicates that the Inspire Foundation was considered − particularly in terms of its use of the internet - as new, inclusive and discursive. Bang suggests that by participating in non-government organisations, people are creating political realities, rather than mirroring, representing or acting in the name of 'objective interests' (Bang, 2005: 165). Interviewees saw themselves as playing a valuable, legitimate role in the Inspire Foundation, rather than as 'program recipients'. According to these young people, democratic citizenship is fostered online at the Inspire Foundation, where young people and staff speak *with* each other. By contrast, government sites are perceived to speak *at* young people, limiting the extent to which these sites are seen as relevant and meaningful. The views of interviewees presented in Table 21 not only suggests that youth participation policies in government are associated with being spoken at, exclusive or elitist processes, and lack of control, but that they are perpetuated through their use of the internet.

Although many of these young people felt turned off by government strategies for e-citizenship, their responses were not to react against the state, but to looked beyond government to influence decision-making. For example, Phillip, 22, described how he started with identifying 'the issue', developing a 'creative' and catchy way to get his message across, and then aligning himself with those he believed would help him succeed. For Phillip, www.actnow.com.au was a site that connected him to these networks, including organisations, individuals and campaigns. He also sought to engage with government, but was turned off by what he experienced as a website that was difficult to navigate and get information from, and a phone conversation in which the public servant was even less helpful. In some instances these were new networks. For instance, via ActNow Phillip had made a new network for taking action. He also described how he used other internet functions such as email and MSN to connect with friends and generate discussion on issues, get feedback on ideas and campaign tools he was developing. As such, the internet was central to the way he engaged with or created networks and reflexive communities for action.

7.2 Managed, Autonomous or Democratic e-Citizenship?

In Chapter 5 I argued that there is evidence that managed citizenship models are being pursued in participation policy by government, but that it is less clear how we might characterise the forms promoted through the case study organisations in this research. This chapter has looked at the ways in which the young people in this study use the internet to participate and their perspectives on why – or why not – e-citizenship is meaningful to them. Here I consider Coleman's 'ideal type' of citizenship which he terms Democratic e-Citizenship. I return to the intent of case study organisations and look at how Coleman's schema can help us to understand what forms of citizenship are being promoted through these case study organisations.

Both organisations received funding from governments, trusts and foundations but contra to Coleman's schema on managed citizenship, neither were primarily interested in establishing connections between young people and institutions and political elites. Whilst both organisations acknowledged that such communication is valid and can be beneficial both for public policy making and for promoting citizenship, both were more focused on fostering horizontal relationships and networks. For the Youth Action Network these relationships were most likely to be

between young people and community and grass-roots organisations with existing participation opportunities. At the Inspire Foundation, the intent was to create opportunities for young people to build online communities and loose networks that transcended the online/offline divide. Both organisations valued young people as citizens and endeavoured to create circumstances in which young people are able to express themselves and define the terms of citizenship. The Inspire Foundation website states:

> *We innovatively use*[s] *technology to reach young people in a way that traditional services can't, we build trusted social brands that are a part of young people's landscape…*

> www.inspire.org.au/what-we-do-what-we-do.html

The work of the foundation rests on three key strengths: youth participation, services that have strong youth brands and the use of the internet (www.inspire.org.au/what-we-do-the-inspire-difference.html). According to Inspire Foundation executive staff, its youth participation policy has evolved primarily through young people's online participation. From an organisational perspective, the functionality of the internet and other information communication technologies (such as mobile phones) provide an opportunity to scale participation and involve as many young people as possible:

> *Our commitment is to providing opportunities for people to be involved – not to providing 'the model' − so the more you think about opportunities for involvement, the more you find ways to do it. So with the web's evolution from an information delivery service to a social networking service more people are creating content all the time. So given our commitment to creating opportunity to participate, then it's logical to use that functionality to extend opportunities to contribute and participate.*

> Australian Executive Interviewee #2

Those in leadership positions at the Inspire Foundation believed that use of information communication technology to facilitate young people's participation was driven by a desire to engage as many young people as possible and to enable young people to lead the model of youth participation employed at the foundation. Via the internet, young people created and shared content, communicated with each other and

staff, formed communities for action, and accessed information relevant to their roles. In this way, the foundation used the internet to facilitate the communication of staff and young people engaged in formal participation processes, and also provided opportunities for young people to communicate with the foundation in informal and ad hoc ways (Table 19: 196). For example, young people who were Youth Advisory Board members, community builders and Youth Ambassadors used email and closed asynchronous bulletin boards to communicate with staff and each other. General site users and members could participate 'informally' via online polls, feedback forms, asynchronous community bulletin boards, contributing content to sites built on user-generated content.

The Inspire Foundation was the more self-consciously 'participatory' of the two organisations and had a structured and complex model of participation that was delivered both on and offline. However, these structures were designed in collaboration with young people and were designed to facilitate their participation – not manage it. Participants shape the evolving form that the model takes and have created 'spin-off' mechanisms for participation via social networking sites and by branching out from the Inspire Foundation to connect with other agencies for participation, such as campaigns, other non-government organisations and state peak advocacy bodies.

The Youth Action Network primarily used the internet to link individuals up with opportunities to participate offline (either in the organisation or the community). It did not expressly use the internet to facilitate youth involvement online − although the internet was utilised in many different ways to connect young people to the organisation and their communities. For example, the Youth Action Network site (www.youthactionnetwork.org.uk) had a number of sub-sites designed to connect young people to information, resources and opportunities to take action. It also hosted an online mentoring site through which young people were both mentees and mentors. One executive interviewee described the Youth Action Network online strategy:

> *I think Youth Action Network as an organisation is very enthusiastic about the use of the web. I mean we've got [some projects] which are totally web-based and the virtual volunteering project for youth action which is totally web-based. We have just redesigned our websites, but probably in the last*

couple of years the internet has been seen as the answer to everybody's problems and I really just don't think it is at all.

United Kingdom Executive Interviewee #7

Whilst the Youth Action Network was pursuing some internet-based strategies for engaging with young people such as online social networking, United Kingdom Executive Interviewee #3 felt very strongly that these online strategies needed to be driven by the young people themselves – and not by the organisation. However, this presented a dilemma in that this approach assumed that young people would take the lead in proposing – or making – changes to the Youth Action Network and its websites. For example, the Youth Action Network encourages young people to create and link their blogs to organisations' websites, but has not developed blog functionality on Youth Action Network sites on the basis that young people should lead the blogging in order for it to be relevant and authentic. Whilst this logic makes sense, it is difficult to understand how young people could lead the way with developing this functionality in relation to Youth Action Network websites given the resources required. Though I argue that the Youth Action Network promotes a more autonomous form of citizenship, than managed forms, this highlights one of the tensions between *managed processes* that promote autonomous citizenship.

Both organisations utilised the internet to facilitate youth participation, primarily via websites run for young people by adults, but in very different ways. One key difference between the way these two organisations utilised online mechanisms for youth participation was whether or not the primary driver was to support people coming together online (to engage in dialogue and group decision-making) or to link individuals with online and offline opportunities to get involved. At the Youth Action Network, the internet was used as a mechanism to connect young people to information and organisations for volunteering offline. The internet did not feature in British interviewees' participatory trajectories in the same way that it did for Australian interviewees. The distinction, in part must be attributed to how young people come to connect with the case study organisations. Unlike Australian participants who most often came across the Inspire Foundation for the first time online, British young people typically came to be involved with the Youth Action Network through member organisations. As such, they had close connections with

local, grass-roots groups and many were networked into other policy processes, but did not require or utilise the internet as a strategy to achieve this.

7.3 Conclusion

In contrast to Coleman's research on e-citizenship initiatives, my discussion has focused primarily on exploring the young people's perspectives e-participation in relation to the case study organisations. This discussion illuminates the value of Coleman's ideal type of citizenship – the 'productive convergence' which I have termed 'Democratic Citizenship'. This third type is most important because it hypothesises that e-citizenship projects can:

- be funded, but not controlled, by government (or government agendas)

- promote partnership and new forms of decision-making between young people and the people and institutions that traditionally have power over them

- construct young people as citizens who can author the terms of their political engagement

- recognise the ways that young people are already participating in a diverse range of settings and forms

- emphasis difference-centred conceptions of citizenship

However, several points emerge from this discussion that can be used to expand the Coleman's schema to understand the role of policy for e-participation. The first issue is that young people's online participation does not take place within the confines of a single site, but rather across many different sites, communities and networks (as an information source, communication medium and virtual public sphere). This is not to conflate all three ways of participating - in many respects there is limited evidence that young people use the internet as a virtual public sphere for debate and rational discussion, although there is substantial evidence of the use of the internet for information gathering and a wide range of types of communication. I concur with Vromen (2008) that the normative ideal of deliberation distracts from the interesting and diverse ways that young people and organisations are using the internet to create, share, access content and build networks and reflexive communities for action.

Indeed, this discussion tells us that young people find particular forms and sites of participation meaningful because they can exercise agency, build respectful relationships and often see the impact of their participation. They use the internet to 'find multiple points of entry into varieties of political action' (Bennett, 2003: 144). The implication of this is that e-citizenship projects can be simultaneously altered depending on the how young people interact with them. In other words, these projects are neither static, nor independent of other forms of activity both on and offline.

Secondly, the views and experiences of Australian young people presented in this chapter reflect a rather different picture to that of the young people in the United Kingdom. The Inspire Foundation consciously used the internet to facilitate young people's participation and there is an emphasis on creating spaces for young people to determine how they want to participate both on and offline. E-participation at the foundation enabled young people to engage and disengage at will and play a central role in determining the overall direction of the foundation – as well as programmatic decisions. This supports Coleman's thesis that there may be a productive convergence between autonomous and managed forms of youth e-citizenship (Coleman, 2008: 201). At the Inspire Foundation many of the interviewees felt they had autonomy *within* managed processes and that this was a powerful strategy for ensuring young people's participation within and beyond traditional policy making institutions. The purpose of the managed space was to ensure that young people were supported and resourced to participate – not to dictate where and how that participation would occur. From this perspective I suggest it is more useful to consider the role of the Inspire Foundation as a facilitator of Democratic Citizenship.

However, at the Youth Action Network, the internet plays an instrumental role, rather than operating as a setting for participation. That is to say that the internet enables participation, but that there were limited examples of young people participating online. Nevertheless, interviewees in both countries demonstrated how the internet plays a critical role in their participatory acts, in particular by enabling a convergence of different aspects of their lives. Their lived experience of politics found natural translation into the overlaps and intersection of their online activities. Furthermore, in the United Kingdom grassroots organisations, bolstered by recent policies on volunteering, are the primary resources for the young people in this study. Under the Youth Action Network framework, which emphasises youth-led responses to

community issues, young people are able to access and create opportunities to have a voice and be heard. As such, for interviewees, the internet was rarely seen as an alternative to existing social and political spaces for action.

Though the young people in this study were mobilised online through networks, their views on political participation were still informed by the online strategies of traditional political institutions. For them, highly managed, old, adult-centric forms of government – whether they employ online communication tools or not – were not where political participation 'is at'. However, this is not merely a reaction to the management strategies of old institutions of government. My research finds that it is also related to a shift amongst young people who are mobilised in relation to issues. There are young people who neither endorsed nor rejected government approaches to youth participation because they essentially look *beyond* government to effect change on the issues they care about. Therefore, some included government sites for youth participation strategies in their networks – the key difference is that they related to them differently to those that are youth or case study organisation-led. Far from being politically disengaged, these young people identified online environments associated with issues or non-government organisations as legitimate sites for participation. This is partly because they could opt into managed forms of participation – but also utilise these spaces for 'autonomous' participation. These non-government organisations and the online spaces for participation that they created were micro-political spheres where they felt their participation was recognised and could be influential. Some young people still engaged with government sites because they recognised the role that government plays in policy production and wish to influence that particular process. However, in Australia, interviewees were dismissive of government online youth strategies as they were perceived to be controlled by political agendas and to speak 'at', not 'with', young people. In the United Kingdom interviewees were not even aware of any online initiatives for engaging with government.

Although these young people saw their online participation as distinct from connecting with agents and institutions of government, there is a continuing and unresolved question of co-optation and the role that the internet plays in managing how young people participate (Bang, 2005; Coleman, 2008). Interviewees indicated a diverse range of ways in which they use the internet to connect with each other, communities of interest and non-government organisations. Though there was

evidence of one-to-one communication via email and group dialogue via community forums there were very few examples where young people engaged in deliberation in spaces which could be considered virtual public spheres. Nevertheless, these interviews with young people suggest that their ability to engage and disengage with different sites and networks and build their own communities for action is a fluid process that affords them substantial agency. Moreover they expressed a preference for sites through which they could author citizenship by contributing to the evolution of the community via both production and consumption of content, involvement in decision-making and engaging in participatory acts both online and offline.

I find that:

- project-oriented identities are mobilised online. They frequently engage in personalisable and individualised forms of participation but they also value group and community organising. These can be fostered online but require offline power relations to be based on recognition.

- the Inspire Foundation and Youth Action Network are exceptions – not the norm. These organisations reflect Coleman's productive convergence between managed and autonomous citizenship. However, they are sufficiently different in terms of how they facilitate networks which suggests that the 'Democratic Citizenship' model should be further distinguished by two sub categories: *building* and *linking* to communities for action.

- young people and organisations can assume a partnership or collaborative approach. I therefore suggest that Coleman's spectrum might look more like Figure 2.

Figure 2 Approaches to youth e-citizenship
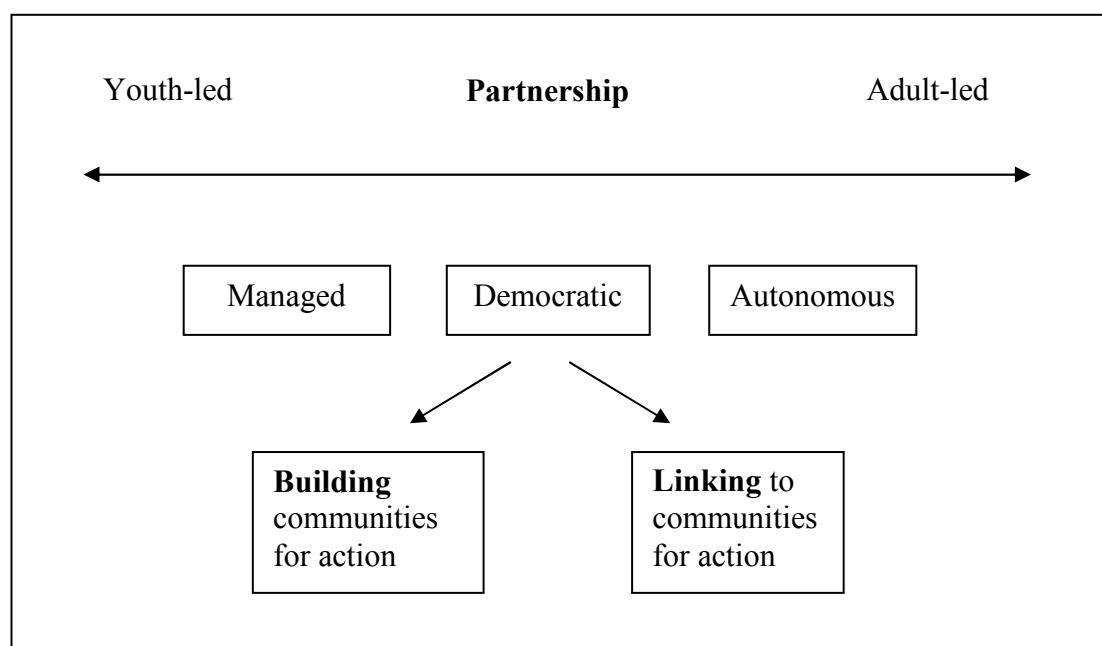
I argue that the Inspire Foundation is focused on forms of participation that build communities for action, whereas the Youth Action Network is focused on connecting young people up with existing organisations and communities. Furthermore, these two organisations go some way to responding to Coleman's challenges for e-citizenship in the digital age:

- They both challenge dominant discourses and stereotypes of youth, practicing and promoting a capacity-based approach to youth.

- The Inspire Foundation acknowledges and works with everyday and non-conventional forms of participation. The Youth Action Network groups these into youth-led 'volunteering'. This may de-legitimise other forms of political expression and action and, therefore, not acknowledge emerging and new forms of participation

- The Inspire Foundation makes innovative use of the internet to expand the democratic features of e-citizenship projects. This involves using technology to devolve some decision-making processes, although there is still some segregation between youth-led decision-making (through youth programs) and 'adult-led' decision-making (at the executive and board level).

Chapter 8. Diversity in Participation

So far I have looked at the kinds of policies that are shaping young people's attitudes and experiences of citizenship and participation, the forms of participation undertaken by a group of young people in both Australia and the United Kingdom, and their use of the internet for participation. In this chapter I consider the question of *who is participating*.

Whilst Bennett and Coleman offer useful frameworks for analysing how young people approach participation and citizenship, they treat young people as a homogenous group. Bang indicates that processes of network governance which create Expert Citizen opportunities, can create problems of exclusion and furthermore he suggests that Expert Citizen roles require skills and experience associated with access to resources, but he provides no insight into what might structure people's participatory trajectories. I argue that in the context of youth participation policies, we must consider the role that organisations themselves play in creating these positions and influencing the extent to which certain forms of participation are recognised over others. Additionally, Bang does acknowledge that the problem of elitism for network governance is one of recognition, not representation (Bang, 2005: 175). I believe this deserves more attention as it draws out one of the key tensions between youth participation policies and young people's lived experiences of politics and participation.

In my analysis I have drawn on Marsh and colleagues (2007) to explore how young people conceptualise participation and consider how this shapes who participates. They have argued strongly for the need to view political engagement as structured lived experience. The novelty of their approach is not only that they consider how participation is structured by gender, age, class and ethnicity, but how *ideas* about politics and participation are shaped by these dimensions of life experience. (I have outlined in Chapter 3 how they conceptualise politics as lived experience.) This chapter affords a comparatively limited examination of the issue of diversity, however, I argue that we must consider the role participation policies may play in creating patterns of exclusion given that the evidence suggests that some groups of young people are more likely to engage than others (Badham, 2004; Francis and

Cornfoot, 2007: 8-9; Bell et.al., 2008). There is therefore a need to understand who these policies include and who they exclude.

I look at the views of young people themselves and consider the way that identity shapes their participatory experiences, particularly as expressed through issues that they care about and which act as catalysts for engagement. Then I consider the views of case study organisations on diversity in participation. How do they respond to issues of diversity and what contribution do they make to wider processes of youth citizenship? While the question of elitism remains the enduring problem for modern democracy (Bang, 2005: 162) I ask whether participation policies work to overcome elitism, or whether they entrench it?

8.1 Who is mobilised by participation policies?

As described in Chapter 4, young people were recruited for this research according to the roles they had played in the case study organisations. I selected and approached young people based on gender, geographical location and length of time involved with the organisation. I asked young people for information regarding ethnicity, level of educational attainment and employment though these were not factors used in the selection of interview participants.

In analysing the data I looked at the basic demographic indicators of each group and then considered the ways that young people talked about the issues they cared about and the ways they viewed and experienced participation. I focused on the reasons interviewees gave for their participation and their views on who they thought participation policies were aimed at and who participation should be for. This process revealed how interviewee notions and experiences of participation were shaped by their cultural background, level of education and employment, gender and also disability. Furthermore, discourses on 'representativeness' also featured strongly throughout the interviews.

Demographics of sample

Roughly equal numbers of male and female participants were recruited in both country settings. However, this does not reflect actual gender balance of young people participating in each organisation. Female participants are over represented amongst

participants in the Inspire Foundation, whilst young men are over represented in the activities of the Youth Action Network. I deliberately sought a gender balance to maximise the breadth of insight into both male and female attitudes and experiences of participation.

Overall, the Australian participants represented a fairly homogenous group: all thirteen had enrolled in or completed tertiary studies (University level); all were engaged in some form of paid employment; and, three had parents born overseas or from non-English speaking backgrounds.

By comparison, the demographics of the British group were more diverse: only three interview participants were enrolled or had completed tertiary education, four were not in paid employment and one was neither employed, nor in formal education. This included two people who had not yet completed their secondary schooling and one who had left school aged fifteen and two aged sixteen. Two interviewees had arrived in the United Kingdom as unaccompanied minors and a further three had a parent born overseas or from a non-English speaking background.

Research on young people and participation tends to use demographic categories as variables and thus treat them as fixed. This is contested by Marsh et.al. (2007) who argue:

> *In our view then age, gender, ethnicity and class are not independent variables to be used to predict participation; rather, they are 'lived experience' or identities which shape our respondents' political experiences and how they understand politics.*

> (Marsh, O'Toole & Jones, 2007: 29)

Below I consider how young people's views and experiences of participation were shaped by age, class, ethnicity, gender and disability.

8.1.1 The relationship between lived experience and views of participation

The distinction in the demographic profiles of these groups is food for thought – particularly the observation that the Australian cohort represents a well educated and economically resourced group. However, I agree with Marsh and colleagues that it is

the ways in which young people understand and make meaning of age (particularly 'youth), ethnicity, gender and class that shapes their views and experiences of participation. This is particularly important to consider given that in their work on new forms of political identity and citizenship Bennett, Coleman and Bang do not look at the role of social structures. I find here that a consideration of how structured lived experience shapes attitudes and experiences of participation can help us to understand the nature of the elitism problem raised by Bang (2005).

Age

Young people's experiences of participation are clearly shaped by age and several themes relating to age emerged in the interviews. Firstly, amongst Australian interviewees, youth participation was often overtly associated with challenging structural exclusion on the basis of age. For example, David, 20, got involved in the Inspire Foundation because of the way it was promoting a youth participation agenda:

> *At the time I guess it was one of the few organisations that I knew that was engaging with young people and had opportunities for young people to be involved… I'd done some work around mental health before and was working with an organisation around youth depression at the time, but that wasn't a hugely motivating factor and I think that the mental health stuff was less important that the youth involvement stuff.*

> David, 20, Australia

Whether through formal or informal processes, it was common for interviewees to talk about challenging negative stereotypes of young people. For example, Matt, 17, was motivated to organise a youth music and arts event to promote the positive things that young people do because:

> *Kids always get a bad name – obviously there are some bad people out there, but not everyone is like that. So, one person does something wrong and everyone gets a bad name.*

> Matt, 17, United Kingdom

He argued that the project he was running presented a positive picture of 'youth' where there were mostly negative stereotypes. Lily explained how sensitive she was to negative images painted of young people by politicians and the media:

> *They don't talk about anything that young people do that's worthwhile, it's always – like I was saying, about teenage pregnancy, and how teenagers always vandalise things and it's just the bad side really – that's all they go on about.*

<div align="right">Lily, 19, United Kingdom</div>

In this sense, demonstrating how young people contributed to the community was a primary driver for her participation. Serger, also felt that volunteering presented an alternative and positive image of young people to that which predominated in the mainstream media:

> *It's good to give something back when you have been helped. And also how the youth are seen. I think that there are lots of negative views on youth and how young people are – like they are all doing bad things and bad for society. But I think there are lots of young people doing good things and working for the community. So I like to be involved that way.*

<div align="right">Serger, 21, United Kingdom</div>

Whilst some young people felt optimistic about changing views of young people, others were cynical about the likelihood of changing the perceptions and responses of government.

> *Ruth: Howard[17] is nearing 70 or something isn't he? And the only time you ever see him with young people is when he goes to schools to get on the news! He doesn't really care.*
>
> *Interviewer: Why do you think he doesn't care?*
>
> *Ruth: Well, there's just never any action around youth problems I guess.*
>
> *Interviewer: So it's all talk and no action?*

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[17] Ruth is referring to John Howard, Prime Minister of Australia from 1996 – 2007.

> *Ruth: There's not even that much talk! Just the – well the only talk that there is, is that we're lazy and we bash our Grandmas and go around in gangs and started the Cronulla riots.*

Ruth looked to the community as an arena in which she could challenge these negative perceptions of youth. Her efforts were focused on working with community-based organisations and shifting community attitudes, rather than challenging wider structures and processes. This resistance to tackle government approaches to youth participation reflected feelings of powerlessness and frustration, particularly related to perceptions that Governments thought of young people as being deficient and needing development:

> *Well I'm sure that for one they argue that young people are still learning, that they haven't experienced the world and haven't been in the working industry and don't know what it's like to manage the blah blah blah. I suppose they'd also say that youth are a bit flippant, they're easily persuaded by certain promises. They might say that we don't see the whole of what's going on.*

> Phillip, 22, Australia

Participation was seen as a way to challenge the notion that young people were 'becoming' citizens. It was important for these young people to demonstrate their abilities and the contributions they could make, often arguing that, independently, or through the Inspire Foundation or Youth Action Network, they were able to respond to youth issues more effectively than the authorities.

Interviewees in the United Kingdom also felt that when governments and politicians talked about young people's participation they not only perpetuated ideas about what characteristics youth representatives *should* have, but also what a non-participant was. The image described by interviewees was of delinquent young people who were anti-social and non-compliant. When asked who they thought governments and politicians were talking about when calling for increased youth participation, young people variously cited 'hoodies', young people involved in crime and other risky behaviour:

> *I don't think it's really about participation at all. They don't talk about anything that young people do that's worthwhile, it's always – like I was saying, about teenage pregnancy, and how teenagers always vandalise things and it's just the bad side really – that's all they go on about.*

<div align="right">

Kathryn, 19, United Kingdom

</div>

Participation policies were associated with social control. Non-participation was associated with anti-social behaviour whilst formal participation was assumed to be pro-social. However, several young people argued that non-participation in conventional political acts – such as voting and party membership – was a protest against institutions and agencies they felt were unrepresentative of their views. There was a strong sense of solidarity around the experience of being young and a belief that young people should be able to determine and be recognised for their participation.

Class: education and employment

Issues of class, education and employment shaped young people's views on participation − particularly in the United Kingdom where volunteering was associated with 'getting ahead' through skill-building and gaining experience. For young people with limited economic resources – due to circumstance, low levels of education or unemployment - it was a way to make claims to citizenship through socially-constructive activities.

For instance, several young women were introduced to a Youth Action Network member organisation through the Connections program for early school leavers. Kylie felt she had few options for further education or employment when she left school. She initially enrolled in a program, but had since become involved in organising projects at the organisation. In her interview she rarely mentioned personal gain as a motivating factor, focusing instead on improving outcomes for her peers.

> *Well, around* [this] *area there isn't really nothing to do. So we thought of running a project, and like, Mums that's bringing their children to 'Arts Action' has actually said that the kids really enjoy it and they hope it'll run for a long time. So it's been good for the community.*

<div align="right">

Kylie, 16, United Kingdom

</div>

Kylie's perspective on issues that matter to young people related to resources, safety and exclusion from public spaces. She talked about her participation in terms of addressing negative images of young people, but more importantly, filling what she perceived to be gaps in services and disinterest on the part of governments.

> *Well, I find that the government don't really do a lot for young people. So running* [projects] *brings more young people from the streets into a safe environment.*

Kylie, 16, United Kingdom

Other British interviewees who had left school early or not done well in their high school studies, were particularly focused on how they personally benefited from volunteering, and framed their work in terms of 'getting ahead' and improving their options. These benefits included getting experience, learning new things and gaining formal recognition for volunteer activities that would be considered when applying for further study or employment.

> *I didn't really do very well in school, and I want to go to University when I'm twenty one 'cos then I just need experience to get onto the course. So I'm just hoping to do that and start working from there.*

Kathryn, 19, United Kingdom

Kathryn was sensitive to discourses of young people as economic dependents. There was a strong tension between her desire to participate to make a difference, and her need to gather personal economic resources. When she was able to work she expressed guilt at not being able to continue working on volunteering projects.

The tension between working and 'participating' was also a theme that emerged in interviews with Australian young people. Though issues of education and employment were noticeably absent from many of the interviews, for others, the kinds of participation they engaged in was shaped by time restrictions due to employment or seeking work. For example, Stevie indicated that he'd had to pull back from participating in the Inspire Foundation's more structured – and time-consuming − activities because of the need to engage in paid work.

> *Well just today I was offered – no, I GOT – a job in sales, in fundraising and sales, signing people up to different charities – Save the Children and Child Fund Australia. I see myself as being pretty passionate about those causes and I see myself as being part of the process that spreads that work – that gets other people passionate about it too.*

> Stevie, 22, Australia

Being paid to take action on an issue he cared about was something Stevie was very pleased with. Like most of the Australian interviewees, he took for granted that he would find the means to take action, whether it was in a paid or unpaid capacity. In contrast to some British interviewees whose participation was often about securing local resources and improving conditions for young people, Australian interviewees were mobilised around issues that had personal significance but which were often issues of national and international importance, such as mental health reform, Indigenous reconciliation and climate change. Their lived experiences of privilege opened up seemingly endless possibilities for political action and were not framed by the need to secure personal resources in the same way as some British interviewees. Furthermore, just as Marsh et.al. (2007) have found in the United Kingdom, these young people did not indicate an awareness of their class advantage.

Race and ethnicity

As with class, British interviewees 'lived' race and ethnicity in ways that the Australian interviewees did not. This was most noticeable in the cases of two young men – Joseph and Serger − who had arrived in the United Kingdom as unaccompanied minors and whose perspectives on and experiences of participation were directly underpinned by their refugee experiences and status.

> *First I was inspired to get involved because when I first came to this country I didn't know anyone and I didn't have any friends. I was by myself. I was involved with a project run by UNICEF and Save the Children. In that project they help out young people who are alone, they bring youth together and they help you to learn English and all that, they help you access help and services, showing you around, making new friends, doing fun things on the weekend. They are volunteers who do it and they really help a lot. So I thought, if I was*

helped by such people, maybe I could also do some sort of volunteering and help other people. So that's how I got involved in volunteering. It was to help other people who had been through what I'd experienced because it's very hard when you come here and you're on your own and you have had terrible experiences.

Joseph, 17, United Kingdom

Clearly Joseph viewed his personal experiences of exclusion from a wide range of social, economic and political settings in relation to being a refugee. Both Joseph and Serger struggled to separate their experiences of political persecution, violence and trauma from their views on politics in the United Kingdom. This exchange with Joseph illustrates the tensions implicit in the relationship between lived experience and conceptualising politics:

PC: So do you think of your volunteering as political.

Joseph: I suppose that depends on what you mean by 'political'.

PC: Well that's what I'm asking you.

Joseph: Well, it's very hard for me, because when you come from a country where there has been war, you think of politics and you think of war. I don't like to think about politicians or politics because it makes me think of war and all that. So no, I don't think my participation is political.

PC: Do you feel the same way now that you live in England?

Joseph: Yes.

PC: So what about if the 'political' is about how people influence the policy decisions that determine the kind of society that we live in?

Joseph: Well I definitely think that volunteers can impact on that. Like for instance the recent Green Paper on children and young people. Young people from schools around the country were chosen to be on a committee and they made recommendations that were then taken to parliament and were included in the Green Paper.

Similarly, Serger, a refugee who arrived as an unaccompanied minor, closely associated 'the political' with politicians, governments and bureaucracy in which he had little faith:

> *PC: Do you think your participation is political?*
>
> *Serger: No, no not political. I don't trust politicians or any government. I just want to work in the community, to make a difference to the community, so more people have better lives.*

Serger was more dismissive of governments and politicians than most of the young people I interviewed. He conceptualised participation in a way that was 'depoliticised' enabling him to retain personal integrity and assume greater agency and control over local-level social change. Although Serger had met with politicians – including Tony Blair, during his term as British Prime Minister - he placed greater emphasis on the transformational potential of 'everyday' participation than on one-off meetings with powerful decision-makers. He was also conscious that his status as a refugee was at once the very thing that gave him 'access' to political elites, but restricted his citizenship rights and, therefore his access to other economic, social and cultural resources. In this way, his participation was very much framed by the need to comply with normative notions of 'good' and 'active' citizen. He explained to me:

> *...it's very important to me to volunteer to show that I am wanting to contribute to this country so they will give me a visa to stay. I have been here for 4 years and I am still not permanent. I show them, 'look, this is all the things that I've done in the community. All the organisations I work for'. So I hope that when I take it all to court they will see that I am a good person and that I want to stay.*
>
> Serger, 21, United Kingdom

For Serger, citizenship as legal status was closely tied to moral values demonstrated through volunteering - or 'socially constructive participation' (Smith et.al., 2004: 436 – 439). Serger and Joseph experienced institutionalised racism, but looked to the community to challenge this prejudice. Transitioning from being a service recipient, to a participant in decision making and service delivery was a conscious strategy for making a claim to citizenship status.

The Australian group of young people was linguistically and culturally quite homogenous and represented Anglo-Australian backgrounds. Where issues of race or ethnicity were raised, these reflected participants' positions of white privilege. Stevie explained why he was passionate about issues of ethnicity and race:

> Stevie: ...inequality [between] different cultures. And I mean, it's ok that they're different – we're not all mean to be the same. But like, for instance, the Cronulla riots, that just f-ed me up the wall.

> PC: In what sense?

> Stevie: That people could be so naïve and so ignorant to the bigger issues involved! Not understanding culture – I mean sure, ah, like how do you qualify it? I just don't agree with this whole idea that all Lebanese are rapists or whatever. I mean, I know it does happen, but – I just think we need to respect their culture... we feel like we can target them because we think they're supposedly different to us. But it happens in all parts of Aussie culture – all over the world.

Whilst racism was an issue that Stevie cared about, he did not use his participation in the Inspire Foundation to address it and he did not reflect on the ethnic profile of young people involved in the Foundation.

Gender

Gender was the least prominent dimension of young people's experience. Interviewees did not talk either directly or indirectly about participation – or exclusion – in terms of gender. This may be because both organisations provided opportunities to participate that were more like traditional volunteering than participation in overtly political – and typically, adversarial – organisations. Indeed, young women tend to spend more time volunteering than young men (Brown et.al., 2003) although research in both Australia (Vromen, 2003; Harris, 2004) and the United Kingdom (Marsh et.al., 2007) has found that there is a gender dimension to youth participation.

Some female interviewees were active around women's issues. Lily, 19, was passionate about addressing issues of teenage pregnancy, safe sex and sexual violence. She participated in planning and delivery activities through her local youth

service that helped to raise awareness of these issues amongst young women and helping young women to stay safe was the main purpose of her participation with a Leeds youth service. When talking about presenting to school groups about different topics she described the purpose as:

> *It was just to make people aware. It were an informal group and we were there and we did a little, like a drama thing – a show. It was about safety – also safety on the street. So we learnt how to take care of ourselves on the street and stuff like that.*

<div align="right">Lily,19, United Kingdom</div>

Kathryn also identified issues related to girls' sexual health and safety:

> *Making sure that young people are aware of all the dangers that are out there, but that they also know about contraception, knowing about all the things you can catch and teenage pregnancy and all that… because there are too many CHAV[18]s having babies.*

<div align="right">Kathryn, 19, United Kingdom</div>

For Kathryn, addressing the issue of teenage pregnancy was closely linked to discourses of delinquency and class in the identification of 'Chavs' as a problem group. By identifying young female 'Chavs' as the primary problem, and herself as someone taking action to prevent more teenage pregnancies amongst this group, Kathryn distanced herself from them, although she came from a community where there were a lot of 'Chavs' with whom she had shared experiences of limited education and unemployment. Participation was therefore a way for Kathryn to distinguish herself from young women perceived to be anti-social and disengaged.

In Australia, Paula, 20, was on the organising committee of 'Reclaim the Night', an annual march to raise awareness, and protest against, violence towards women. Paula was an example of what Harris (2004) has termed "self-made girls". As a 'self-made

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[18] 'Chav' is a slang term which has gained prominence in England and generally According to www.wikipedia, "The stereotypical image of a chav is a white aggressive teen or young adult, of working class background, who wears branded sports and casual clothing (baseball caps are also common) who often fights and engages in petty criminality and are often assumed to be unemployed or in a low paid job." Kathryn told me "you'll see them around… they're all wearing tracksuits and big earrings and loads of gold things."

girl', Paula's approach to politics and participation was very much framed by a sense of responsibility – to make a difference, to act as an 'ambassadress' and leader (Harris, 2004: 72). Paula was one such young woman who, despite carer responsibilities, juggling study and a job, had still taken on a number of representative roles:

> *Yeah, it's just a part of who I am and what I do. If someone goes 'what do you do with yourself'? I say 'I'm a Uni student, I work and I volunteer for this site'. It's on my resume, even though it's not an employed job, it's still something that I do.*

Paula, 20, Australia

Paula reflects an ability to overcome adversity and self-manage the demands of her public and private life. By working with the Inspire Foundation she was also taking on responsibility for the mental health and wellbeing of her peers through working as an ambassador for the Reach Out service. Politics, participation and citizenship for these young women was, as Harris points out a matter of defining themselves as either independent, competent 'can-do' girls, and distinguishing themselves against the 'at-risk' young women: portrayed as a 'problem' for society, at risk of disengagement and requiring development to full citizenship (Harris, 2004:70).

8.1.2 Disability as a dimension of identity

Disability is often overlooked in studies of participation and citizenship and is not a social division explored by Marsh et.al (2007). Under discourses of 'active citizenship' people with disabilities experience even greater disempowerment as they are positioned as non-productive, 'passive' citizens (Meekosha & Dowse, 1997: 50). Definitions of disability have been contested, even within the disability movement (for example, Pfeiffer, 1993), and has typically focused on physical and intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, contention over definitions and the nature of disability has further marginalised the experiences of people with disabilities within other movements including feminist and class movements (Meekosha & Dowse, 1997).

Dominant discourses on disability have traditionally drawn on a medical model which conceptualises a range of different physical, emotional, intellectual and mental conditions as 'abnormal', inferior and the problem of the individual, not society

(Barton, 1993:237). Barton argues that the impact of market ideology and neo-liberal theory on citizenship discourse has had the effect of placing both blame and responsibility on people with disabilities (Barton, 1993). Meekosha and Dowse (1997) have demonstrated how discourses of (in)dependency, active citizenship and social contribution through economic participation exclude people with a disability – and some experience multiple dimensions of exclusion due to gender, class, ethnicity and type of disability.

However, several interviewees in both countries 'lived' disability, including physical disabilities, chronic illness and mental illness. The challenges brought about through a disability or caring for, or supporting, someone with a disability were raised in the context of their participatory activities - particularly for young people at the Inspire Foundation. They tended to speak about helping others, rather than advocacy or accessing support themselves. Some interviewees differentiated between who they saw as service users (others) and participants (themselves).

> *I was always very careful – I don't know why - to separate myself from a user of the site, and as someone who helped to create the site. So I guess, just in my language – consciously I guess - I would say that I work alongside the crew to help 'those people' who are struggling with tough times. I'd never included myself as a user or a member of the group that used the site – but rather as a member of the group that helped develop it.*

Jade, 23, Australia.

Jade stated that she personally had benefited from using the Reach Out site, but by the end of the interview had reconceptualised herself as a contributor only. Whilst describing the motivation to get involved as related to personal experience of having benefited from a program or service, few young people continued to speak about the direct benefits to themselves. Indeed, some made clear and conscious distinctions between their roles as participants - and therefore agent of social change - and as perhaps passive recipients of a service or social action.

Other interviewees had experienced mental and physical health difficulties, leading to a lack of recognition of their ability to participate. Because the Inspire Foundation has

a broad approach to 'improving the mental health and wellbeing of young people', Jade felt she could bring her personal experiences to improve the service, without needing to identify as 'disabled' or 'chronically ill'. As a young person with mobility issues, she also identified the online aspect as something that made it significantly easier to be involved. The flexible and participant-led approach enabled some participants to have 'time out' to get care, without having to cease their involvement. Ruth's personal experience led her to want to get involved:

> *I guess generally, a lot of my friends have always had mental health issues and I've had a few myself. I guess those personal experiences mean that there are still a lot of people who just want to run away because they don't know how to deal with that stuff... I just want to help people to understand that it (mental health difficulties) isn't something to be afraid of.*

> Ruth, 22, Australia.

The Inspire Foundation approach to youth participation provides a broad structure designed to resource and facilitate youth-led participation. By positioning the experiences of all young people as valuable to the work of the organisation, making application processes anonymous and online and combining face to face and online mechanisms for communication, Inspire has been able to involve a wide range of young people from different backgrounds, including those with disabilities – without requiring people to identify as having a disability. However, bringing together young people sitting across the spectrum of mental health was not seen as a universally positive thing. Though some interviewees saw the ability of the Inspire Foundation to engage young people with sometimes very significant mental health issues as a strength, others saw it as problematic.

> *Because of the way people hear about the program I think that there are a number of young people who have been consumers of mental health services or tough times themselves. And then I think there's another group of young people who haven't necessarily been through similar experiences and, to put it on a spectrum that probably isn't very accurate, are the overachieving, president of the SRC-type young person versus the young person who has experienced extreme disadvantage through living in a rural area with a parent with a mental illness. So these people have two very different perspectives on*

life, and I think it's awesome that they come together, but I think [it's hard] *in terms of structuring a program that can actively support and continue to engage with those young people who are at different ends of the participation spectrum, who have different skill sets and are operating at different levels and from different perspectives.*

David, 20, Australia.

David reflects a wider tension in policy discourse and practice on what the purpose of youth participation is, who should be involved and in what kinds of decision-making. As demonstrated in the literature on disability politics, new social movements born out of minority groups can result in the limiting of the spectrum of political issues or ideas around which certain people are 'allowed' to mobilise. Young people with specific needs or backgrounds (indigenous young people, young people with a disability) are often herded into decision-making processes that relate to that one aspect of their identity and silence or negate other aspects which they see as significant. Some interviewees felt that, although by nature the Inspire Foundation addressed issues of mental health, the range of issues that young people have a say over in the organisation meant that their experiences of mental health issues informed, but did not define their participation.

In the United Kingdom, Evan had mental health needs which had affected his schooling and employment. He felt that his interrupted schooling and lack of, or limited, employment impacted on the personal and economic resources needed to take part in many forums or campaigns or projects.

I suffer from clinical depression myself and I go through the cycles of being ok sometimes, not being ok other times. That was why I was on the sick (benefit) for six months. I just couldn't do anything – except volunteer. Volunteering was my lifeline.

Evan, 21, United Kingdom

Volunteering made Evan feel that he was contributing and that he was valued. Feeling that in spite – or because – of his illness his views on a range of other issues mattered, that his involvement could be respected and responded to and make a difference underpinned his participation. He clearly articulated a commitment to social justice,

particularly around mental health and wanting to reduce negative attitudes and stigma. He felt that the dominant policy was to take a band-aid approach:

> *Mental health service in this country lets people down. If you're depressed just take a pill. Hell, take three. So we've got a generation of zombies, essentially.*

<div align="right">Evan, 21, United Kingdom</div>

Being part of an active response to this – and having experiences of inclusion and exclusion on the basis of having a mental health difficulty – shaped his notion of the political and influenced, but did not define, his participatory activities.

8.1.3 Problems of 'representativeness': exclusion in policy

In interviews young people critiqued youth participation policies and identified some of the critical issues with the approaches to youth participation in each country. These reflected concerns raised by Bessant (2003) that youth participation policies are undemocratic. They also highlighted questions of elitism that concern Bang (2005) and provided insight into why strategies which call for 'youth representatives' may not mobilise young people.

Several interviewees were equally sceptical about the ability of formal participation structures to address diversity – primarily because they were rarely democratic as young people were appointed by adults, not elected by their peers. Interviewees observed that processes of application and selection for such opportunities meant that elite groups of young people were regularly engaged in decision-making processes, whilst the majority of young people remain excluded. Alana described her first-hand experience of being one of the 'chosen few':

> *...there was actually a period of time where* [we] *... were on every committee under the sun. And no one ever challenged that, no one ever said, "why is it always Alana and Stephen"? There were a couple of other people... there was a real group of us who were involved in everything* [including] *few people in NSW, and WA. The same guys no matter where you went and it went on for maybe two and a half years and it was us who ended up challenging that, going why the hell are Stephen and I at every single meeting?*

<div align="right">Alana, 24, Australia.</div>

Alana believed she was invited and appointed to a number of different youth advisory positions citing two main reasons. Firstly, only small numbers of young people were interested – and applied – to the kinds of highly structured and formal opportunities in both government and non-government settings that were typical in Australia. Secondly because it was easier for governments to appoint young people who knew how to get along in the system and would not challenge it.

Alana noted it was easy for organisations, bureaucrats and governments to engage with young people who understood and could negotiate existing decision-making structures, who would be relatively compliant and who wanted to be a part of these structures – rather than wanting to change them:

> *I think it's* [youth participation] *always going to be limited… But are indigenous people involved? What about people with a disability or the elderly or just ordinary people in some way In some respects young people are more involved in some of those policy making processes because people have made an effort through youth engagement policies… But it's not as though all young people have the same access because often it's the same group of 15 or 20 people.*

<div align="right">Alana, 24, Australia.</div>

As one of three highly connected young people who had extensive experience in government and non-government organisations through youth participation policies, Alana believed that the criteria for participating in formal decision-making processes favour those who benefit from high levels of education, safe environments such as stable families and communities, financial security and English-speaking backgrounds. This is because they fit in with pre-determined decision-making processes and rarely present challenges to organisational norms. She also highlighted the way that participation policies entrench elitist practices by reinforcing the very barriers that prevent many young people from being able to participate in general. According to Paula,

I think they look for people who are high achievers, who already have some life experience, even though a lot of people don't think that young people have had any kind of life experience! But [young people] *come from different backgrounds – whether it is socially or economically or from different areas. I don't think they try to have a range of different voices.*

I think it's unfair to have one person sit on a board or a committee and then say that they're representing every young person in the community, or this town or this state or whatever. They do need to have more young people than they do in senior positions I think.

Paula, 20, Australia

Paula highlighted the limitations of this approach arguing against the liberal conception of representation, emphasising that there was also an issue of diversity where certain kinds of people were invited to participate and who were then considered to represent young people from a range of backgrounds and life experiences.

Evan, 21, also challenged models which called for youth representatives on the basis that they seemed to involve young people from privileged backgrounds who were then asked to give advice about how things should be for young people with different backgrounds and life experiences:

But you can't say because youth participation is such a broad scale. You've got your class system, you've got your ethnic minorities, you've got your religious beliefs. So there is no one 'youth culture'. There are sub-pockets of other cultures that are youth-oriented. And they haven't tried to bring these together. I mean what works with wealthy white kids in Kent probably isn't going to work with black kids living in inner-city London.

Evan, 21, United Kingdom

Evan, like Alana in Australia, was highly critical of what he saw as a tendency for youth participation approaches to replicate the inequality and biases of the broader political system. He pointed out that young people in representative positions are often appointed by adults who look for those with skills and experience and who will

comply with adult systems and processes. Furthermore, there was a perception that youth participation processes ran parallel to 'adult' decision making processes.

Compared to what governments claim to be – I think we're more representative than them. Democracy is where the people rule and take part in things. But the reality is that the government doesn't always allow people to take part in decisions high up, or policy making.

John, 25 United Kingdom

These parallel processes were seen as lacking power and authority to make substantive decisions – or even to set the agendas. Furthermore, youth participation mechanisms were seen as tokenistic and unrepresentative.

Few interviewees saw themselves as the kinds of young people who would be chosen for such positions. They didn't see themselves as 'representative' and they demonstrated sensitivity to the discourses that frame participation as 'representation' and influence assumptions about who makes a 'good representative:

Kate: Ah, there was a link on the site which was for the youth advisory board. I thought I had no hope, and just sent off an application anyway after spending heaps of time on my application – after school – I sent it off and then got an email from Jono.

PC: Why did you think you wouldn't be selected?

Kate: Because it sounded like a really special opportunity – which it was – but I just thought I wouldn't get picked because I'd applied for other things before and never got picked – like, I wasn't school captain at school, I'd never really had opportunities like that before.

Kate articulated a belief, common amongst interviewees in both countries, that selection was predicated on the criteria of technical skills and demonstrated experience in formal decision-making opportunities. Kate believed that 'not having been chosen before' would exclude her from selection for formal participatory activities. It is this emphasis on 'process' and being 'the chosen one' - rather than issues - that contributes to what Bang refers to as the neo-republican shift: the tendency towards elitism amongst new political identities (Bang, 2004).

In both Australia and the United Kingdom these young people were sensitive to civic republican discourses that strongly associate 'socially constructive participation' with citizenship status (Smith et.al., 2004:436 – 439). They were sensitive to the discourses of 'difference' and 'deficiency' prominent in narratives of youth and participation and the forms and sites of participation chosen by these young people were influenced by the extent to which they felt positioned as deficient or capable. Some participants viewed the structured, representative roles within the Inspire Foundation as more autonomous than similar roles in government participation mechanisms, whereas yet others veered away from such positions at the Inspire Foundation and favoured the much more informal, issues-based and project oriented opportunities instead. I agree with Marsh and colleagues (2007), that these young people were conscious of the ways that mainstream political institutions and mechanisms for political engagement at different levels of the community could be exclusionary. Far from being 'non-participants' they saw participating in organisations, such as the Youth Action Network and the Inspire Foundation as an alternative and legitimate way to have a say and make a difference. What this suggests is that critical issue for youth participation is not one of representation, but of recognition.

8.2 The role of organisations

Participation policies are generally focused on structures and linking young people artificially to government processes that they feel alienated from. So far the discussion has focused on the diversity of lived experience and the way that this frames young people's approach to politics and participation. Policy analysis (Chapter 5) and young people's views suggest that governments do not recognise or respond to diversity because diversity categories, such as 'disability' and low socio-economic status are treated as fixed categories which do not take into account young people's lived experience. As identified in Chapter 5 government policies on youth participation in both countries present a problematic segmentation of the youth population into those who are successfully transitioning to adulthood (defined as engaged in education or employment) or those 'at-risk'. This approach to viewing youth experience neither acknowledges and accounts for difference, nor does it sufficiently recognise the way that lived experiences shape young people's views on politics or participation. Harris has also identified that the key issue for advocates of

youth participation is not how to increase opportunities, but how to ensure that diverse groups of young people can participate in meaningful ways (Harris, 2006: 223).

In this respect, the case study organisations took different approaches to participation and who it was for and in doing so, presented a counter discourse to issues of diversity in participation. Yet, particular characteristics of each group stand out – in particular, that the Australian group was well educated and employed compared with the British group of interviewees.

Here I look at how the organisations defined diversity through interviews with executive staff and board members and in their publically available documents such as annual reports and websites and consider why the two groups are different.

8.2.1 The Inspire Foundation

Young people have historically participated in organisational decision making via the Inspire Foundation services. Whilst delivering universal online programs that are pitched at the general population of young people, the Inspire Foundation acknowledges and works to recognise and respond to diversity. The organisation has addressed diversity by acknowledging that some young people 'are at risk of, or are experiencing, social, economic or cultural marginalisation' (Inspire Foundation Annual Report, 2008) and has worked over many years with a diverse range of community partners through which to reach young people from a range of backgrounds. These included Aboriginal employment and health services, drug and alcohol services, youth centres[19] and alternative education institutes. However, rather than actively promoting 'diversity' the organisation champions a participatory approach which emphasises partnering with community and youth-led organisations and groups to connect with young people from a diverse range of backgrounds.

The website, annual reports and interviews with executive staff and board members speak very strongly of a commitment to a participatory approach. As one board member put it, this is not a consequence of being a youth-led, or youth serving organisation, but a philosophical approach to delivering social change:

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[19] In Australia youth drop in centres are community run spaces where young people can hang out, take part in activities and access services. These centres are often located in geographical areas that are otherwise under-served, have large youth populations, low socio-economic status, migrant or refugee or indigenous backgrounds.

> *Even if I was talking about another organisation altogether that works with,*
> *you know, drug addicts, I would say to that group, you must have a participant*
> *focused approach in your work.*

<div align="right">Executive Interview #3, Australia</div>

According to this interviewee, being able to effectively meet the needs and aspirations of young people required that the organisation ask, listen and respond to young people. This broad commitment to participation meant that the Inspire Foundation challenged many assumptions about how young people should be involved and which young people should be involved in decision making.

> *I've thought it was a very wide target group, although of course I know that*
> *the people who would end up being directly attracted, and want to be involved*
> *in Inspire would be people with personal experience.*

<div align="right">Executive Interview #3, Australia</div>

Because of the nature of the work of the organisation (focusing on improving the health and wellbeing of young people) it attracted many young people with mental health difficulties. The organisation has promoted participation in a number of ways – both by being issue-based and 'having a say' through advisory boards. The organisation has valued diversity in selection processes over 'objective scales' of merit and prioritised equal representation of males and females, young people from rural, regional and metropolitan locations and those with disclosed mental health issues (ranging from having a chronic illness, suffering bullying or sexual assault or a mental illness). However, young people must self-nominate in order to be considered.

A common assumption made by executive interviewees was that the internet would address diversity:

> *The ability for any number of young people with any range of experiences to*
> *actually tap in, get information, pass a comment if they feel like it. This is one*
> *of the things I think is so attractive about Inspire. It is open, it is saying, all*
> *young people are able to access. We don't discriminate. And I think that's*
> *what makes Inspire unique.*

<div align="right">Executive Interview #3, Australia</div>

Executives tended to assume a level playing field to participation, particularly via the internet. What my research suggests is that although participants from a wide range of life experiences get involved, they are also likely to have high levels of education and be from English-speaking backgrounds. However, this does not reflect the user-base or the organisation's initiatives. User profiling conducted in 2007[20] found that fifteen percent of Reach Out users and ten percent of ActNow users speak a language other than English at home. However, none of the participants in this research spoke a language other than English. The three whose parents were born overseas were born in the United Kingdom, Canada and Mauritius and were all English-speaking. Similarly, though only sixteen percent of Reach Out respondents were undertaking an undergraduate or postgraduate degree and twenty nine percent of ActNow respondents had a undergraduate or postgraduate degree, all research participants had, or were completing, university studies.

Although executive interviewees all believed that Inspire deliberately sought to attract the participation of young people who do not see themselves as youth leaders, I find that key social divisions such as extent of education or ethnic background, orient young people towards particular kinds of participatory activities.

When challenged on this point, one executive interviewee said that low recruitment and retention of young people from diverse backgrounds was because the kinds of opportunities traditionally offered through the structured model of participation didn't appeal to all young people:

> *Over the years… Inspire hasn't been able to create the right kinds of opportunities for some young people… I think organisations should continue to reflect on how they can provide more and more significant opportunities for more people… But I hope that most people walk about saying 'well, it didn't really work for me, but I do think that they were open to my involvement. I mean, it would be really terrible if a young person walked away thinking 'they never really wanted me there in the first place'. That's the difference.*

<div align="right">Executive Interview, Australia #2</div>

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[20] This is a self-selecting online survey conducted on www.reachout.com.au and www.actnow.com.au . The ReachOut! survey had 1016 non-professional users of whom 79% were aged 14 – 25. The ActNow survey had 380 respondents of whom 81% were aged 16 – 25.

The organisation demonstrated a commitment to broadening the mechanisms for participation – and looked to non-participant interests and participatory preferences to inform this change. For example, in 2007 and 2008 the organisation undertook research to explore the barriers to participation for young people from marginalised communities (Bell et.al., 2008; Blanchard et.al., 2008). In 2008 a revisioning of the youth participation model took place resulting in significant changes to the existing model. These include moving from mechanisms which emphasise process and structure (such as advisory boards) to more participatory and project-based forms of participation, including building greater interactivity into the websites, creating projects around desired outcomes (such as a marketing campaign or policy submission) and targeting young people with particular experiences (such as young carers) to work on making the organisation more accessible and responsive to their particular needs and views. The theory is that by building mechanisms for the recognition of Everyday Making, there is less opportunity for Expert Citizens (for example, young people on the board of directors) to be seen as the only, or most important and influential youth participant. This highlights that the core issue for democracy under culture governance is not one of representation of Everyday Maker views, but rather of *recognition* of everyday forms of political expression in decision making processes.

8.2.2 Youth Action Network

By comparison, the Youth Action Network has no formal process in place or structured model of participation. Nevertheless, project-based opportunities for participation with the organisation engage with young people from a range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. I find that there are three significant features of the Youth Action Network approach to youth participation which support diversity in youth participation. Firstly, the organisation takes a proactive approach to diversity and acknowledgement of difference by developing and operationalising strategies for reducing barriers to participation such, as developing cultural sensitivity resources. Secondly, the organisation recruits young people through its network which is made up of local, regional and national youth-serving organisation. The diversity of organisations ensures the Youth Action Network is able to engage with a diverse range of young people. Thirdly, by utilising a project-based approach to participation at both a local and national level, the Youth Action Network and member

organisations place the emphasis of participation on issues and uses formats that can reflect diverse life experiences.

At an executive level, the Youth Action Network recognises and responds to issues of diversity meaning that the organisation consciously brings together a wide range of young people with diverse skills and experience. The Youth Action Network, board and member organisations were more self conscious than the Inspire Foundation about their responsibilities to recognise and respond to issues of diversity. One of the nine stated principles of Youth Action by which the organisation operates is a commitment to being "Diverse & inclusive: Anyone should be able to do Youth Action. Think creatively to break down those barriers" (www.youthactionnetwork.org.uk). As part of its contribution to the community and voluntary sector, the Youth Action Network worked with member organisations and young people to identify barriers and strategies for promoting participation to marginalised young people. An online training and resource module – TREaD - was developed and is utilised within the Youth Action Network and members to promote the participation of particular groups of young people including young people with disabilities, young offenders, carers, young people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds.

The principles of youth action and the TREaD resource aim to challenge assumptions and common approaches to youth participation which create barriers for some young people. Information, activities and evaluation resources help Youth Action Network organisations to build and sustain diversity in participants with a focus on addressing the structural and attitudinal barriers that inhibit their participation.

> *I think there is now an understanding – and again with all under-represented groups - that you need to spend time empowering some people in order to get to this base ...where they can say what they need. You need to spend time doing that.*

> Executive Interview, #5, United Kingdom

This board member believed that strategies for youth participation that homogenise young people may achieve political goals to raise the numbers of participants, but fail to engage those who are least able to get involved. However, this interviewee pointed

out that organisations needed to be deliberate in their strategies for supporting diversity and described the resource challenge presented by focusing efforts on working with young people who were disengaged from education and employment. He felt that whilst organisations should focus on facilitating the participation of the most marginalised young people, the resources and strategies required to do this often ran counter to government requirements for targets to reflect ever higher numbers of young participants. He acknowledged that his organisation often 'made up the numbers' with university students who could easily undertake different activities in the community, in order to get the resources to work with young people with more complex needs.

A board member who was also a young person felt that challenging negative stereotypes of youth was made more difficult by cultural, ethnic and class background. He identified multiple ways in which citizenship is complicated for young people:

> *...in this country you're not just a young person, you're a young criminal, or a young asylum seeker, or you're young and trans-gendered, or a young lesbian, you're always you 'this or that'. So they might talk about citizenship as a whole, but it's always broken down if you know what I mean.*

Executive Interview #8, United Kingdom

In his view, access to 'citizenship status' was not equal and for some young people, their citizenship status hinged on a particular aspect of their identity. His observation was that governments and politicians, in particular, used these categories in ways which differentiated amongst young people in unhelpful ways. His experience was that these categories were used to limit citizenship claims, rather than promote inclusiveness based on difference.

The Youth Action Network has a website for young people on which it promotes many opportunities to get involved. These are aimed both at young people involved in youth action through member organisations, as well as young people who are seeking out information and opportunities to get involved. In addition the Youth Action Network set up profiles on social networking sites, including www.myspace.com and www.facebook.com to engage with young people not already connected to youth

action organisations. However, these approaches were met with scepticism by an executive staff member:

> *I just don't think we understand as adults actually what young people want out of the Internet. I think if we try and second guess - which is why all these sites are set up - and then they don't work because we are all trying to guess what the young people want. It would be much better if it was youth action and* [the young people] *just did it themselves…. It's like the virtual volunteering project. I think it was a fantastic project, but I think actually it should have been run by a bunch of young people and not by a load of workers because I think probably you would get many more young people involved.*

> Executive interview # 7, United Kingdom

At the core of the Youth Action Network approach is a belief in the value of young people driving the forms that participation takes. Whilst this interviewee acknowledged the utility of the internet for connecting to a diverse range of young people, she rejected the idea that adults could use it to increase young people's participation. She also challenged the view that the internet could bring together diverse people, when her impression was that when young people are online they connect to their friends and others who are 'like them'.

Another executive interviewee raised concerns that a focus on online participation could exclude young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Drawing on his experiences running a youth service, he challenged the popular belief that all young people are online:

> *The other thing I'm interested in is not all young people feel confident with computers and I think there's a sort of general thinking that every young person is way connected more than anybody who's over the age of 30 but actually I don't think that's necessarily true. I think there's a lot of young people who struggle with computers for whatever reason and don't like using them.*

> Executive Interview, #5, United Kingdom

His observations were that whilst some of the young people he worked with were able to use the internet to find information, play games and engage in online communication via email and sms or chat, they were not as skilled or confident in generating media rich content. Online participation was typically limited to seeking information and he felt that some young people even found this difficult and frustrating.

In any case, the majority of young people involved in the Youth Action Network come from member organisations and networks. Member organisations represent a diverse range of community, single issue and large charitable organisations including youth clubs, women and girls groups, volunteering services, employment and community capacity building initiatives and organisations using a range of areas of interests, such as football, fishing and the arts to address social justice issues such as racism. Some organisations offer universal initiatives and others target services to particular groups including:

- black and ethnic minorities

- young offenders

- newly arrived and refugee youth

- early school leavers

When the Youth Action Network wants to work directly with young people on a particular need or opportunity – for example, staff recruitment, a new communications campaign or research project – a general call out is sent to member organisations. Different member organisations communicate differently with young people. Interviews with young people indicate that some organisations contacted young people when an opportunity arose, whereas others had regular contact through a communications strategy (such as a newsletter) or a program. In some cases contact was face to face, in others it was via email and mobile phone. While some organisations made targeted invites to particular young people, others gave general call outs for participants – either way, young people were predominately linked into the Youth Action Network via member organisations.

An interesting paradox of the different approaches by case study organisations has emerged through this discussion: The Youth Action Network engages an elite group of young people who are come from a diverse range of cultural, social and economic backgrounds. Whereas, the Inspire Foundation engages comparatively large numbers of young people, however, those involved in formal participation opportunities are more culturally, socially and economically homogenous.

8.3 Conclusions

This analysis of youth participation helps us to think about how ideas about politics and participation are structured by life experience. Young people's interest in certain issues and their orientation towards particular kinds of participation was influenced by their individual subjectivities – in particular, their experiences of age, ethnicity, disability and class.

Key differences in the policy contexts in the United Kingdom and Australia were reflected in the ways that young people's lived experiences shaped their views on participation – namely that the United Kingdom group related a diverse range of life experiences to opportunities to participate, whereas in Australia, liberal notions of citizenship which emphasise models of leadership, education and workplace participation had greater influence over the way that young people thought about participation. Interviews with young people also indicated that the British interviewees lived class and ethnicity (Marsh et.al., 2007) in a way that the Australian interviewees did not.

The discussion on how diversity is viewed by case study organisations raises some interesting questions. The Inspire Foundation acknowledged difference and worked hard to open up the organisation, through working with a range of groups and by emphasising the use of technology to engage with young people from diverse backgrounds. However, the profile of this group suggests that where organisations emphasise 'inclusion' rather than 'participation', they speak to structures and hierarchies of exclusion. This shows how ideas about 'representativeness' and expertise are at the centre of tensions between Expert Citizens and Everyday Makers.

Nevertheless, participation policies articulated through the case study organisations are able to challenges some of the barriers to participation – particularly those that

position young people as deficient. Because participation policies in the case study organisations are experienced by young people as flexible, empowering and responsive to participant views, they provide important opportunities for the 'politics of the ordinary' (Bang, 2005:173) to feature in decision making at each organisation. However, I also find that the policy context matters and participation policies on their own are unable to challenge some structural barriers to participation. The Australian case study suggests that young people with cultural, social and economic capital are more likely to get involved in formalised processes. Indeed, the 'professional political deliberation, participation and cooperation' that Bang associates with Expert Citizens alone does not uncouple citizens from the politics of the ordinary. This discussion demonstrates that *ideas* of 'representation' and feeling a lack of recognition experienced by young people may be sufficient to create patterns of elitism that compound the exclusionary effects of structured inequality.

This raises the question of how organisations and institutions can respond to 'the politics of the ordinary'? Is it possible? Perhaps the best that can be done is to foster and acknowledge multiple ways of defining politics and of participating and organising? Recognising politics as 'lived experience' requires going to where young people's lives take place. There is an implicit challenge for policies that attempt to backward engineer participation and diversity into structures and processes that are either non-democratic or seen to represent structured processes.

Even progressive difference-centred policies have limitations. The question is *does this matter?* Should all participatory projects be all things to all young people? Will a shift by the Inspire Foundation towards less structured models of participation lead to more Everyday Making and thus greater diversity? The experience of the Youth Action Network suggests that this would be the case. At the same time, there is a risk of setting up diversity in all participatory processes as a normative ideal for participation policies which may legitimise some forms of participation over others, therefore limiting the ways in which young people can author participation. Perhaps the forms of participation identified in this research by this group of young people – and who feel the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network open up democratic spaces for them to author and action citizenship – simply will not resonate with young people with different kinds of life experiences. In other words, are we trying to fit square – and triangular and star-shaped – pegs into round holes?

Chapter 9. Conclusions

In undertaking this research I have critically engaged with what is widely seen to be a 'problem' of youth disengagement with democracy. This problem tends to be viewed as either one of 'civic deficit' or 'new forms of engagement' (Harris et.al., 2007: 20-21). The range of policy responses to the issue of youth participation indicates that there is an unresolved tension between viewing young people as apprentice citizens or full citizens in the present. At the same time, the internet is increasingly seen as a mechanism for delivering on a range of policies for youth participation. Despite the need to understand the relationship between these processes and the development of young people's political identities, research rarely looks to young people's own perspectives to determine the importance and effect these policy positions have in shaping their views and participatory practices.

In conducting this research I have been guided by two key questions. Firstly, what is the relationship between youth participation policies and the development of youth political identities? Secondly, what is the role of the internet for youth participation? In responding to these questions I have traversed a number of theoretical and empirical terrains and brought together several distinct literatures in an effort to make a contribution to our thinking on forms of contemporary citizenship and democracy. I have taken issue with the claims that young people are disengaged from politics, by conducting youth-centred research which privileges young people's perspectives over preconceived ideas about what politics is and what participation should be. The dominant view in both the youth and mainstream literature, of youth as a period of transition, has tended to measure young people's views and behaviours against the normative standards of previous generations. I have argued instead that by taking a social generation approach to 'youth' (Wyn & Woodman, 2006;2007) young people can be recognised as full citizens (not apprentices) whose interpretations and strategies for making sense of the social world can inform our understanding of broader patterns of social change. As such, I have reflected on young people's subjective experiences and the multitude of ways that they create meaning and respond to politics in their everyday lives. Their experiences of social structures, such as class, gender and disability tell us about how powerful continuities in access to resources and power relations inform participatory trajectories.

Chapter 9. Conclusions

I have teased out the tensions between policy discourses, the operationalisation of youth participation policies in two settings and young people's experiences of these policies. This has been an exercise in understanding the various approaches that underpin contemporary youth participation policies and making visible the ways that young people themselves seek to effect change. I have also questioned claims that youth participation policy is concerned with extending youth citizenship and examined what kind of citizenship is being promoted. At the centre of this investigation are the views of young people, their responses to authority and their strategies for creating social change. In examining the perspectives of young people I have expanded on the work by Marsh, O'Toole and Jones (2007) to look beyond young people's views on politics to the ways that young people seek out and create opportunities to address issues they care about. I have then brought together the theoretical arguments of Bennett (2007), Bang (2005) and Coleman (2008) to develop comprehensive understanding of the ways that these young people view and experience political participation in contemporary Britain and Australia.

This thesis has provided new data and analysis on the experiences of young people in Australia and the United Kingdom, but there are limitations to what can be concluded from the research. Firstly, I have focused on identifying Expert Citizens and Everyday Makers, though I acknowledge that it is unhelpful to suggest that other political identities – such as political activists and non-participants – do not exist. Marsh and Li (2008) have demonstrated this point and also pick up on a second limitation of research I have conducted here: that it cannot tell us how common the views and activities of the young people here are. Marsh and Li (2008) have developed indicators and quantified the prevalence of Expert Citizens and Everyday Makers in the United Kingdom using the best available data. A similar exercise in Australia would be beneficial for testing the usefulness of Bang's theory in Australia in order to empirically examine theories, that across the population, young people are disengaging from politics. Marsh and Li (2008) find that Expert Citizens are more likely to be male, middle class and middle aged, where as Everyday Makers are more likely to be female, young and single and that over 50 percent of the (general) population could be classified as either Expert Citizens (14.5 percent) or Everyday Makers (37.3 percent). This kind of research in the Australian context would make a

valuable contribution to the debate on participation generally, but particularly as it relates to young people.

Similarly, the mainstream literature would benefit from considering formal participatory processes, informal participation and the internet as a setting for participation. These are insufficiently considered in existing frameworks for participation, and consequently, are not included in national survey data.

Thirdly, like Bang (2005) and Bennett (2007) I find that networks provide a key to understanding young people's views and engagement on political issues. In-depth research that focuses on mapping the participatory networks of young people could provide even more insight into the relationship between structured lived experience and participation – particularly in identifying points of fortification or dislocation. This would be particularly valuable for the development of participation policies that are genuinely intended to promote participatory citizenship and effective partnerships between young people and political elites. A related issue is the *impact* of youth participation. I have demonstrated here that young people play a central role in the work of the case study organisation. However, there is still a dearth of evidence on the impact of youth participation for setting agendas and contributing to decision-making on a range of policy issues.

In this final chapter I begin by summarising my findings on how young people participate and reflect on the kinds of political identities that are emerging. I then reflect on the role of the internet for participation. This is followed by my assessment of the relationship between youth participation policies – and counter discourses in case study organisations - and young people's views and experiences, concentrating on the value of the comparative study. I conclude by looking at the question of elitism and consider how youth participation policies might contribute to bringing together – rather than further alienating – young people and decision makers across and beyond government. This directly responds to the concerns of Bang (2005) that Expert Citizens are the dominant, most logical response to the needs of network governance (2004a) but that they contribute to the further alienation of everyday forms of political expression. Secondly it expands on the observations of Marsh et. al. (2007) that current forms of participative governance are not only elitist, but that young people's

structured lived experiences of class, gender, ethnicity and age further alienate them from formal, structured forms of political participation.

9.1 Policies, participation and political identity

9.1.1 Self-actualising citizens

The young people in this study represented a diverse range of views and experiences of participation. Amongst this diversity some clear themes emerged which provide insight into how these young people conceptualised and responded to politics. By virtue of participating in the Youth Action Network and the Inspire Foundation they were normatively civically engaged. However, the ways these young people conceptualised politics and the extent of their participatory activities – which often extended well beyond these organisations – illustrates how the political has become personal and how structured lived experience shapes young people's ideas and actions in specific ways.

These young people were indeed cynical about the interest and ability of governments to recognise and respond to their needs. Whilst most indicated that they would vote, they saw governments and politicians as remote from their lives and the issues they cared about. Comparatively, they demonstrated a passionate commitment to personally defined acts incorporated in their everyday lives through local volunteering and contributing to national initiatives. Furthermore, these young people rejected traditional hierarchies, showed significant commitment to action over ideology and valued the cultural and interpersonal dimensions of participation. Though traditional hierarchies were often conceptualised in terms of governments and politicians, the beliefs and actions of these young people were not characterised by resistance to the state, but rather, looking beyond the state to a range of other political arenas and actors. I have provided qualitative evidence of the range of these arenas (including young people's places of work, study, and the internet) and actors (non-government organisations, friendship groups) and suggest that young people take a pluralistic approach, seeking to maximise their impact by partnering with and targeting a diverse range of political players.

I therefore conclude that there was evidence amongst the young people in this study of what Bennett has termed self-actualising citizens – and, a notable absence of dutiful citizens.

9.1.2 Expert Citizens and Everyday Makers

There was substantial evidence that supports Bang's theory of Expert Citizens and Everyday Makers. These young people were mobilised in relation to projects and issues, not structures and processes of government. They saw themselves as legitimate authors of the political and took a broad collaborative approach to politics. Expert Citizens were identified amongst both groups of young people as those who took on a professionalised, full time participatory identity. However, the majority of young people in each country could be categorised as Everyday Makers who had a pragmatic, action-based approach to political participation and were uninterested in official roles or connecting with political elites unless it furthered their cause. They viewed participation as something that was part of their lifestyle, and was an expression of their identity in so far as they sought out forms of participation that were culturally relevant and overlapped with other aspects of their lives, such as their friendships and hobbies. In addition to supporting Bang's theory of project-oriented participation and associated citizen types, I make two observations that advance his perspective.

The first is that these two political identities are not fixed, but fluid – some young people moved between the two depending on the issues they wanted to address. Amongst the Expert Citizens identified in this research, were two young Australians who were self-reflexive and critical of what they saw as the implicitly elitist nature of their roles. These two young people described how they had shifted from assuming the increased power and influence that came with being an Expert Citizen, to lobbying and agitating within policy environments (in both government and non-government settings) for participation models to become more open and inclusive. They were acting against what they saw as processes of elitism and as a result, depending on the issue, often operated in ways more reflective of Everyday Makers. They were sensitive to the pejorative overtones with which many young people who demonstrated Everyday Maker identities spoke of Expert Citizens. For example, where some believed Expert Citizen roles opened up opportunities to access adult-

power and to shape processes from within, others saw them as unauthentic and symptomatic of wider processes of co-optation. Some of the Everyday Makers, when compared to young people not engaged at all with formal participation mechanisms, might be thought of as Expert Citizens as they all had opportunities to influence policy at the organisational level, as well as connect to other decision makers through their roles in the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network. However, these young people would certainly reject that proposition. They dismissed youth Expert Citizen roles for being unrepresentative, targeting 'leaders' or 'problem youth' (with whom they did not identify), instead arguing for what they saw as more authentic, everyday and ad-hoc approaches to participation. Though they were involved in formal mechanisms through the case study organisations, they argued that within these managed processes they had high levels of autonomy and control as well as influence and power over their own participation and the outcomes of their involvement. This was valued over and above access and influence to decision makers and political elites. Nevertheless, all the participants in this study could be labelled Expert Citizens to the extent that through participation in the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network they were situated in both internal and external policy processes as expert young people. This suggests that for some, assuming an Expert Citizen or Everyday Maker approach depends on the issue or cause they wish to address. On this basis, it seems appropriate, when using Bang's typology, not to assume that these identities are fixed. Furthermore, this indicates that some Expert Citizens grapple with the issue of co-optation which sits at the centre of network governance models.

The second observation that builds on Bang's work is that youth participation policies create a unique problem of co-optation. This is alluded to by Coleman, and I expand this thinking here in relation to Bang's Expert Citizens. There are many studies which report that young people see formal participation mechanisms to be tokenistic and disempowering (e.g. Matthews, 2001: 308; Bridgland Sorenson, 2007) and many of the young people I interviewed had had negative experiences of formal participation mechanisms. Although in many respects, participation policies have drawn attention to the multiple barriers that young people face in being recognised and involved as full citizens, they also reinforce some of the barriers by requiring that young people act like 'adults' and participate in processes that are no longer seen as relevant. They

also legitimise some forms of participation and de-legitimise others. Consequently, participation policies, in their present form, tend to exacerbate, rather than remedy problems of elitism and can further alienate young people from political elites. My research suggests that young people manage the constant threat of co-optation by seeking out participatory opportunities in organisations, spaces, initiatives, collectives, networks and events where they can exercise a high degree of agency. I find that in the case study organisations, this was reflected in the level of influence – and therefore power - that young people held within the organisations. However, there is a broader, unanswered, question of how their new, everyday forms of participation challenge traditional authorities and institutions of power.

Some commentators have suggested that in this search for agency young people are taking on individual responsibility for wider social problems (Harris, 2004: 94; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007: 144). However, in light of my research I would caution against interpreting young people's desire for personalisation as the individualisation of politics. In fact, the young people in my study placed great value on the networks and communities for action that they were involved in and believed that being part of both loose and tightly knit networks facilitated both the individual and collective actions necessary to create change. Bang underplays the role of networks for Everyday Makers, though Bennett stresses that networks are at the centre of new political identities (Bennett, 2003a). I have also found that networks transcend traditional models of membership-based organisations, of state-oriented politics, of locally-based action and of formal and informal processes of policy making.

Through the various chapters we have seen how these young people's networks for action extend into other aspects of their lives including family and friendship groups, work, study and hobbies. As such, we have learnt that governance networks for young people may extend beyond formal networks on a set of policy issues, and are deeply rooted in their everyday lives. Furthermore, the exercise of agency and the level of power that they leverage to influence or change social outcomes is related to the closeness, or distance, that their participatory trajectories take them from formal structures and processes of network governance. The young people in this study displayed a high level of interest in a range of issues of importance to the wider community, but for most, the strategies they used to address these issues led them further away from government and traditional spheres of political power and

influence. My research suggests that more attention should be paid to the way in which networks feature in the political identities of young people as well as their role more broadly in network governance.

9.1.3 Youth participation and the internet

As Bennett argues, the way that networks feature in the political identities of self-actualising citizens is both a cause and effect of the kind of communication made possible by the internet. Many of the young people in this study did not differentiate between the ways they used the internet for participation, for socialising, for study and for entertainment. The internet facilitated activities which brought together the political, cultural, social and economic dimensions of their lives. For instance, participatory activities, friendships, study, hobbies and consumer activities were often interwoven as young people discussed participation. For those young people who did distinguish between using the internet for participation and other aspects of their lives, the internet largely played an instrumental role, enabling them to research and recruit other young people to their offline actions. This view was more prevalent amongst British young people whose engagement with the Youth Action Network, and other participatory activities, was largely offline. For the Australian young people, whose participation in the Inspire Foundation took place largely online, the internet was a setting in which there was a convergence of the political and everyday life.

Rather than examining these young people's use of the internet for participation in order to understand whether or not it is a mobilising or reinforcing factor for youth participation, I have sought to understand the relationship between the internet and young people's views and participatory actions. Of greatest interest to this discussion is how the internet featured in the ways that young people connected to and built political communities and networks for action. The case study organisations played a key role in this and I have used Coleman's schema (2008) to analyse the kind of youth citizenship promoted by the Inspire Foundation and the Youth Action Network.

I argued in Chapters 5 and 7 that the case study organisation's use of the internet does not easily fit into Coleman's typology of 'managed' and 'autonomous' citizenship. Instead I find they are a better fit with the model that he proposes would arise from a 'productive convergence' of the two (Coleman, 2008: 202). This 'democratic citizenship' model promotes, amongst other things, a view of young people as citizens

who are already participating in ways and settings distinct from the traditional. Additionally, reflecting Coleman's ideal e-citizenship project, these organisations promoted partnership and new forms of decision making between young people and the institutions and adults that traditionally have power over them.

What sets these organisations apart from the managed e-citizenship projects that Coleman has studied is that they allow – even promote – horizontal communication between young people, staff and political actors beyond the organisation. At the Youth Action Network, this tended to be offline, although young people indicated that information communication technologies – particularly email and SMS – was particularly important for their participatory activities. At the Inspire Foundation, young people were encouraged to build communities for action online – and though the organisation managed risks associated with duty-of-care, child protection and privacy, there was recognition that young people would weave networks beyond the control of the organisation. These observations have led me to propose that Coleman's schema include an additional layer which helps to identify the extent to which organisations contribute to the *building* of communities for action or *link* young people to communities for action as indicated in Figure 2 (Chapter 7: 221).

The emerging picture of what young people value in online participation contrasts starkly with the government policies examined in this thesis which favour structured, managed, prescribed processes for youth participation both on and offline. The degree to which networks are controlled or managed is of considerable significance to young people.

9.1.4 Participation policies in practice

I have approached this study of youth participation policies from two directions: firstly to use a comparative analysis to examine their intent and also to draw out the salient features that contribute to – or impede – participatory citizenship. I also compared the goals of youth participation policies with young people's own views of citizenship.

In both countries government policy has produced strong discourses on youth citizenship which had a direct impact on young people's views and experiences of participation. In both countries liberal conceptions of citizenship were evident in the

emphasis on 'good' youth transitions indicated by participation in education, training or employment. Civic republican notions were also present in the emphasis on volunteering. I have argued in Chapter 5 that the relative emphasis of these two perspectives on citizenship differed: in Australia liberal notions were more prominent; and in the United Kingdom civic republican notions were dominant. Furthermore, in the United Kingdom a well constructed policy framework that incorporates youth participation principles operates across government, whereas in Australia there are significant inconsistencies in approaches to youth participation, particularly between the federal and state-level governments, but also between different states and territories.

In Australia, at the Federal level we have seen a shift from a social rights paradigm to neo-conservative notions of democracy that emphasise duties (particularly to become economically independent individuals through participation in the workforce) and representation. Whilst some have argued that in the United Kingdom, a neo-conservative push has increasingly shaped citizenship discourse by emphasising duties (Marsh, et.al., 2007:37), I argue that with regards to youth participation the dominant discourse promotes a civic-republican form of citizenship where young people are encouraged to contribute to the common good through volunteering and community-based organising[21].

Secondly, non-government organisation policy documents and the interviews with executive staff and board members of case study organisations studied here do not easily fit into Coleman's typology of 'managed' and 'autonomous' citizenship. The policy discourses reflect self-Actualising interpretations of citizenship, though these policies are often operationalised by adult-led or managed initiatives. They also differ from Coleman's typology in that they do not conceptualise youth participation and citizenship as a relationship (solely) between individuals and the state. Instead, young people are provided with the resources to create or connect to networks to address the issues that matter to them.

Thirdly, there is a substantial chasm between government and non-government organisation approaches to e-citizenship in both countries. In many respects it would

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[21] I do, however, acknowledge that the New Deal policies focus on duties and use coercion to engage young people in the workforce through volunteering.

seem that youth e-participation is relatively safe from potential co-optation because of the inability of government policy to reconcile offline processes of government with the online identities of young people.

However, some more general, though important, conclusions can be made. The first is that these policy discourses did not reflect the participatory values and aspirations of many of the young people in this study in at least two ways. With few exceptions, these young people reflected participatory conceptualisations of democracy and sought out spaces and opportunities where they could define the terms of their participation. However, in the policy documents, governments define the purpose, nature and scope of participation. Whilst young people's views may have been gathered in the research for participation policies, these were then interpreted and embedded in policy they cannot change. This contrasts markedly with young people's desire to not only 'have a say', but to define the issues at stake, the course of action to be taken and play a hands on role in delivering on decisions. Ultimately these young people valued participatory actions that afforded a high degree of agency because they could engage and disengage depending on where they were at in their lives. Fluidity, flexibility and control were highly valued by young people but not present in the policy discourses in either country.

The second, related, observation is that participation policies seek to engage with young people by promoting their participation in decision-making processes and institutions of government – at local, state or federal levels. However, my research confirms other research which shows that young people conceptualise politics in terms of issues. Where they were mobilised in relation to projects, the purpose of these projects was to address an issue – or issues – and not to engage with institutions or processes. Government participation policies reproduce adult-led, hierarchical and elitist modes of participation. They fail to recognise the shift from membership-based to network-based society and they attempt to orient young people in ways often dependent on 'membership-type' relationships.

Furthermore, Governments are yet to adapt and respond to the opportunities presented by the internet. Young people view government e-participation strategies as replicating the offline approach: focused on delivering information to young people, engaging young people on government terms, requesting young people's views and

contributions, but not demonstrating how these have or have not fed into policy. As demonstrated in Chapter 7, and suggested above, the power of network-based participation is that it is not containable by any one authority. The way young people use the internet and the ways in which they conceptualise participation means that their participatory trajectories are ever-expanding networks of organisations, individuals, campaigns, activities and events that spiral out and provide multiple entry points for action on issues. Government efforts to seek to contain and control participation appear to have one result – to repel young people who seek opportunities for meaningful participation in alternative arenas. Where they do attract young people, participation policies in government are most likely to produce Expert Citizens and therefore contribute to the problem of elitism. However, it is not the policies themselves that are the problem – rather, the normative models used to facilitate participation: mimicking adult structures and processes of government. The case study organisations demonstrate the potential for participation policies to contribute to democratic citizenship.

My research demonstrates that young people perceive there to be a significant difference in the participatory agendas of government and non-government organisations. The national organisations studied here represent participatory spaces where young people felt empowered and where they experienced a high level of trust. Rather than being co-opted, they experienced the kind of participatory governance that is unattainable with government. The case study organisations played a critical role in these young people's positive views and experiences of participation. The youth participation opportunities that they offered were perceived by young people to be sufficiently different to those related directly to government as to represent an entirely different way of thinking about political participation.

9.2 Implications for youth citizenship in Australia and the United Kingdom

In this thesis I have joined the chorus of scholars who argue that young people are not apathetic, but alienated, and though many may be disengaging from traditional institutions and processes of democracy, many are looking beyond them to new repertoires, actors and targets for action. The internet and the networks it facilitates sit at the centre of this shift and just as social and political life are merging, so too are the

online and offline worlds of young people. However, young people are still the subjects of social policies and discourses which see them as 'becoming', rather than being citizens. Though there is promising practice in youth participation, particularly in the non-government sector, the overwhelming impression is that participation policies are not going far enough to address young people's exclusion from decision making processes. This is primarily because the policies target young people as the subjects of change − and not the structures and processes which exclude them.

If Marsh et.al. (2007) and Bessant (2003, 2004) are right and the participation agendas of the British and Australian governments are about controlling young citizens, rather than participatory democracy, then participation policies reinforce, rather than remedy 'elitism'. Rather than prescribing how young people should participate, policies should address how governments and other authorities should respond. I concur with Bang that the key problem for democracy is not that young people are disengaging and 'free riding on the efforts of others', but whether or not their participation is recognised. As discourses of participation are becoming more prevalent in the non-government sector, young people are increasingly oriented away from government towards other actors. As such, young people are likely to become more, not less, alienated from formal politics as they find more resonance in non-government processes and feel more excluded from the processes of government.

But the way is not entirely clouded by doom and gloom. The case studies presented in this thesis demonstrate that the productive convergence envisaged by Coleman is possible, but it is reliant on genuine sharing of power and the recognition of the ways that young people conceptualise and enact citizenship through everyday life. Participation policies can challenge elitism if governments, organisations and networks recognise and respond to difference. What is for sure is that young people are already looking out and beyond conventional institutions of democracy. The question is whether governments will recognise this shift and respond:

> *Maybe government isn't where it's at anyway. Maybe you need to head towards making documentaries, or advertising and sponsorship. Wouldn't it be awesome if Coca Cola had on all their cans "stop the war in Iraq"! And you got a shot of a politician drinking from this can of Coke!*

> Phillip, 22, Australia

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276

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Schedule − Young People

Personal Demographics – closed questions   **Interview No:** __

Date of Birth?

Place of Birth?

Place of birth of parents? Mother -   Father -

Have you mostly lived you life in: urban city, regional city or rural areas?

Which of the following best describes what you currently spend most of your time doing?

  • Attending high school

  • Attending TAFE, University or other tertiary education institution

  • Attending TAFE, University etc. AND working part time

  • Working AND studying at TAFE, University etc part time

  • Working full time

  • Looking for work

  • Other: ……………………………..

If you are studying, what is the main topic of your studies (or what are you most interested in)?

If you are working, describe your job (what you do)?

References

Interview Themes and Questions – open ended questions

1. **Definitions and Experiences of Participation**
   - How did you get involved and why?
   - When you began at the foundation what did you expect your role to be?
   - What do you think is the role of young people on youth advisory boards at <organisations>?
   - What has your role been?
   - How does the foundation talk about your involvement? What do you think about how it describes youth participation?
   - How does your involvement with <organisation> relate to other stuff in your life?

2. **Organisational Practise**
   - How does the organisation facilitate your involvement?
   - What sorts of systems, policies or processes does the foundation use that you're aware of? Are these useful/effective? How?
   - What sets this organisation apart from others ?

3. **Use of the Internet**
   - Where are you able to access the internet? And how often do you get online?
   - What do you use the internet for?
   - What role does the internet play in your involvement in organisations?
   - Are you involved offline orgs/activities? What/how?

4. **Definitions and experiences of Participation Generally**
   - Govts and politicians often talk about youth participation – what do you think they mean?
   - Who do you think they're referring to?
   - What does participation mean to you (ie. work, school, elections etc)
   - What are the things that concern you, or that you care about?
   - In what ways do you engage with these issues? Personally? Publicly?
   - What kind of society would you like to see and what would be your place in it?

References

Appendix 2. Interview schedule – staff/board members

Personal Demographics – closed questions

Name:

When did you join the organisation:

In what capacity did you join the organisation:

Current role in organisation?   Paid staff / Board member / both / other

Title:

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth: City_____ State_____

Place of birth of parents: Mother: City_____ State_____

                            Father: City_____ State_____

Have you mostly lived you life in: urban city, regional city or rural areas:

Which of the following is your highest educational attainment?

•   Incomplete high school

•   Completed high school

•   Complete college

•   Trade or professional qualification (not university)

•   University undergraduate degree

•   University postgraduate degree

If you have a University degree or professional qualification, what area is it in?

References

Interview Themes and Questions – open ended questions

1. **Definitions and experiences of youth participation**

    - What is the role of young people at the <organisation>?

    - How do you/does your role engage with young people at the <organisation>?

    - Describe what you think is the impact of youth participation on the <organisation>?

    - How does youth participation impact on you/your work?

    - Governments and Politicians often talk about youth participation. What do you think they mean by participation and who are they referring to?

2. **Role of the internet**

    - Tell me about the role of the internet for youth participation at <organisation>?

    - What do you think are the benefits/disadvantages of using the internet to work with young people?

3. **Organisational Practise**

    - How does the organisation facilitate youth involvement?

    - What sorts of systems, policies or processes enable young people's participation in <organisation> work? Are there things you think could make their participation more effective?

    - What do you think sets <organisation> apart from other orgs who work with young people?

    - What is your vision for youth participation at <organisation>?

4. **General questions – young people's role in society.**

    - What do you think is the role of young people in society?

    - Do you think young people play that role? Why/not?

Appendix 3. List of interviews

In order to protect the anonymity of interviewees, places of interview have not been included. However, in Australia, interviews were conducted in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Bendigo. In the United Kingdom they were conducted in Chester-le-Street, Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol, London

Australia: July 2006 – February 2007

Name	Date of Interview
Harry, 21	14 November 2006
David, 20	19 November 2006
Jade, 24	19 September 2006
Executive interview 2	19 September 2006
Belinda, 22	19 September 2006
Kate, 23	22 September 2006
Louise, 22	23 November 2006
Chris, 21	24 November 2006
Paula, 20	24 November 2006
Phillip, 22	26 November 2006
Rob, 19	27 November 2006
Alana, 24	27 November 2006
Stevie, 22	28 November 2006
Ruth, 22	11 November 2006
Executive interview 1	6 December 2006
Executive interview 3	9 January 2007
Executive interview 4	20 January 2007

United Kingdom: June – August 2007

Name	Date of Interview
Serger, 21	3 July 2007
Joseph,19	3 July 2007
Matt, 17	11 July 2007
Kylie, 16	11 July 2007
Evan, 21	20 July 2007
Eliza, 19	11 July 2007
Anjali, 19	1 August 2007
Will, 16	2 August 2007
Lilly, 19	9 August 2007
Kathryn, 19	9 August 2007
Joan, 25	14 August 2007
Executive Interview 5	11 July 2007
Executive interview 6	17 July 2007
Executive interview 7	20 July 2007
Executive interview 8/ John, 25	5 July 2007