

In order to produce empowerment and individual development, a participatory opportunity must hold some transformative potential. Recent research into transformative experiences gives some clues towards understanding when these turning points occur in people's lives and helps us understand how this development might be realised more consistently in conventional youth participation.

In order to understand why youth participation turns out to be transformative for some but leaves others unaffected, it is necessary to determine the connection between politics and culture, or why participatory processes can make sense to some participants but leave others untouched. This suggests that the transformation of citizenship skills through youth participation is a result of a culturally resonant (relevant) process of participation. The resonance of a participatory process is dependent on the cultural toolkit available to the individual. These toolkits are created by past experiences and form a lens the individual uses to make sense of the participatory mechanisms.

There is a commonly expressed dichotomy between two kinds of engagement, one of quality deliberation with visible results, leading individuals on a path of active citizenship and loyalty to the democratic ideal, and one of tokenistic exploitation resulting in cynicism and disillusionment. However, this division does not acknowledge that participating individuals have access to differing sets of cultural "tool kits" (Swidler 1986). These toolkits are collections of symbols, stories, rituals and worldviews which people use to solve different kinds of problems and plan their actions (ibid: 273).

Acknowledging that these cultural toolkits will affect the way a participating individual makes sense of their opportunity to participate allows us to see that young people with different toolkits need different political participation opportunities to thrive. In other words, under certain circumstances, political youth participation triggers deep life-changing experiences if the participant has the skillset needed to gain this insight. When the skillset of young people and the nature of political participation opportunities align, the scene of participation resonates with the participant.

Youth participation can be a transformative experience in terms of enriching participants with political efficacy, democratic values and the competences and attitudes required for a life of active citizenship. As resonance describes a process that a participant sees as relevant from their own point of view, the development of civic skills can be described as a result of a culturally resonant experience of youth participation. However, when an individual with a highly developed skillset is engaged in culturally resonant youth participation, the outcome is an accumulation of privilege and a further boost of the skillset. On the other hand, when participation is culturally non-resonant or irrelevant to a participant, the outcome of the experience brings feelings of failure. Young people in that situation often end up in a position of a spectator, not an active agent, and participation in the role of a spectator again reinforces political passivity of the individual. Finally, a participant in possession of the prerequisites for participation, attending a culturally non-resonant participation activity, will exit the scene of participation while staying loyal to the general idea of democracy, continuing their search for a mechanism of participation that reflects their preferred repertoires of political action.

One of the key benefits and objectives of conventional political youth participation is the prevention of marginalisation and a strengthened social cohesion. Unfortunately,