

Bridging Voices in The Climate Crisis: The Role of Hope in Young People's Participation

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Keywords: Young People, Hope, Political Participation, Solidarity, Climate Crisis

The climate crisis places a disproportionate burden upon young people's (YP) health and well-being as they face uncertain futures (Sanson, Van Hoorn and Burke, 2019). Simultaneously, we are witnessing an epidemic of hopelessness, with feelings of distress, betrayal, eco-anxiety, and a doomed planet narrative increasingly being reported across mainstream media (Hickman *et al.*, 2021; Kelsey, 2020). As YP grapple with these challenges their participation in climate decision-making processes become ever-more crucial. They serve as our closest representatives of future generations, with decisions made today directly impacting on their futures.

Yet, YP feel marginalized in decision-making processes, with their participation often being tokenistic and adult-centric, leading to distrust in elected leaders and disillusionment in the political process (Weiss, 2020; Sloam, 2007). Responding to this, this presentation will draw on a semi-systematic literature review to present a case for hope as a key asset that plays a crucial role in facilitating meaningful youth participation. This research will explore how instilling hope is rooted in trust; trust in oneself, in collective efforts and in elected leaders to give agency to youth voices (Marlon *et al.*, 2019; Ojala, 2012). However, for trust to be built then elected leaders need to facilitate spaces of mutual learning and understanding.

Through exploring the connections between hope and trust, this research will show how understanding this requires delving into contributing factors exacerbating YP's distrust, such as the perceived intergenerational conflict and power imbalances present in addressing the climate crisis (Ursin *et al.*, 2021). Intergenerational relationships are often framed in conflict, with younger generations portrayed as more concerned about the climate crisis, while older generations are perceived as apathetic (Roy and Ayalon, 2023). However, there is minimal empirical evidence to suggest differing generational views (Corner *et al.*, 2015). This perceived conflict only exacerbates YPs feelings of hopelessness and distrust particularly in a political system where they hold little power. To foster trust in the political system these preconceived notions need to be dismantled and intergenerational solidarity promoted.

Youth participation emerges as a key strategy for promoting intergenerational solidarity and fostering hope. However, as emphasized, current participatory approaches often fall short, criticised for being tokenistic and adult-centric (Brady, Chaskin and McGregor, 2020). For meaningful youth participation to be achieved, YP needs to feel empowered and hopeful by building trust and solidarity through the climate decision-making process. However, there is limited exploration of new methods for youth participation that fundamentally aim to build trust and intergenerational solidarity.

This presentation argues for the development of creative communication mechanisms as a tool to enhance meaningful youth participation in climate decision-making. Existing participatory mechanisms often lack two-way communication and fail to empower and foster hope in YP (Brady, Chaskin, & McGregor, 2020), highlighting the need for further research to develop innovative and inclusive creative communication pathways for increasing meaningful youth participation. By amplifying young voices, fostering agency and resilience, and creating spaces that resonate with their experiences, policymakers can cultivate a more collective and empowering approach to addressing the climate crisis.

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