

2019

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Bertram, A. (2019) 'Planning their future places? Investigating the role of young people within the contemporary English planning system in Plymouth', *The Plymouth Student Scientist*, 12(1), p. 345-395.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/14691>

The Plymouth Student Scientist
University of Plymouth

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Planning their future places? Investigating the role of young people within the contemporary English planning system in Plymouth

Alex Bertram

Project Advisor: [Dr Stephen Essex](#), Faculty of Science and Engineering, University of Plymouth, PL4 8AA

Abstract

Despite young people being the longest-term stakeholders in society (Simpson, 1997), academic discourses promoting the benefits of youth involvement have historically struggled to translate into widespread youth participation in planning practice (Knowles-Yanez, 2005). However, in recent years, English planning reforms (as part of the 2010 to 2015 Coalition government's wider 'Localism' and Big Society' agendas) have provided an unprecedented devolution of powers to communities (Tewdwr-Jones, 2012), most prominently through Neighbourhood Plans (Norton and Hughes, 2018). In contrast to increasing amounts of youth participation literature from a variety of countries across the globe, there has been a relative dearth of England-specific investigation since 2010. It is therefore unclear how the English planning reforms have impacted the practice of youth participation, either positively or negatively. Within this context, this paper investigates the role of young people within the contemporary English planning system, using a case study of Plymouth, South-West England.

Through utilisation of questionnaires and workshops with 11- to 16-year-olds, and key informant interviews with planning practitioners, this paper aims to understand whether young people have the interest, capability and potential to shape better places. From this work, this paper finds a wide variety of interest and capabilities amongst young people. Despite this variety of interest and capabilities, and a potentially large target audience capable of shaping better places, youth participation is found to still be extremely low amongst the sample group. Many barriers to participation were self-identified by young people, encompassing several topics previously discussed academically, but also introducing the importance of lesser-discussed issues such as raising awareness through improved marketing. Planning practitioners from the private- and public-sectors identified the importance of youth perspectives in planning processes, although the ever-increasing viability requirements when conducting any participation events were also emphasised. Significantly for academics, practitioners and policy-makers, lessons learned through the example of Plymouth are used to discuss future avenues for viably increasing the uptake of youth participation in planning.

Introduction

“We are going to turn the tide. We will be the first government in a generation to leave office with much less power in Whitehall than we started with... We believe that when people are given the freedom to take responsibility, they start achieving things on their own and they're possessed with new dynamism”

David Cameron, *The Guardian*, September 2010

In recent years, governments globally have increasingly recognised the need to mobilise and utilise empowered citizens in the governance of societies (Agger, 2012), as a response to public concerns about an institutional ‘democratic deficit’ (Andersson and Wilson, 2009). In England, the dominant governmental response to these concerns since 2010 has been in the form of the ‘Localism’ and ‘Big Society’ agendas outlined by David Cameron’s opening statement, which has increased devolution of responsibility to local neighbourhoods through the planning system. Despite this increased devolution of power superficially appearing to be a prudent response to public ‘democratic deficit’ concerns, the implicit ideals of philanthropy, self-help and volunteerism (or ‘Active Citizenship’) have been argued to be a cynical method of legitimising socially divisive austerity policies (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012), or paradoxically a regressive dilution of local democracy by promoting the views of the middle class above marginal groups (Williams *et al.*, 2014).

Public participation within the English planning system has fluctuated over the lifetime of the planning profession (Figure 1), but its increasing prominence since the late 1990s mirrors wider global democratic trends and the English planning system’s prevailing rhetoric of favouring sustainable planning practices (Lane, 2005; Allmendinger and Haughton, 2013). Criticisms of the early ‘blueprint’ and ‘synoptic’ planning approaches adopted from the 1940s to late 1960s, approaches centred upon professional-led plans with limited meaningful public engagement, led to the 1969 Skeffington Report, which is often cited as the key driver in altering perceptions of public participation within the United Kingdom (Vigar, 2015). The 1997 to 2010 Labour government’s planning reforms furthered the role of participation by introducing a collaborative approach to planning academically associated with Patsy Healey (1992, 1997); shifting perspectives from an individualised, subject-oriented conception of reason, to reasoning formed within inter-subjective communication. The devolved planning powers facilitated by the Coalition government reforms have attempted to again further advance public participation’s importance, arguably propelling planning into the limelight in a way not witnessed for decades (Davoudi, 2011) and enforcing a paradigm shift in the profession (Norton and Hughes, 2018).

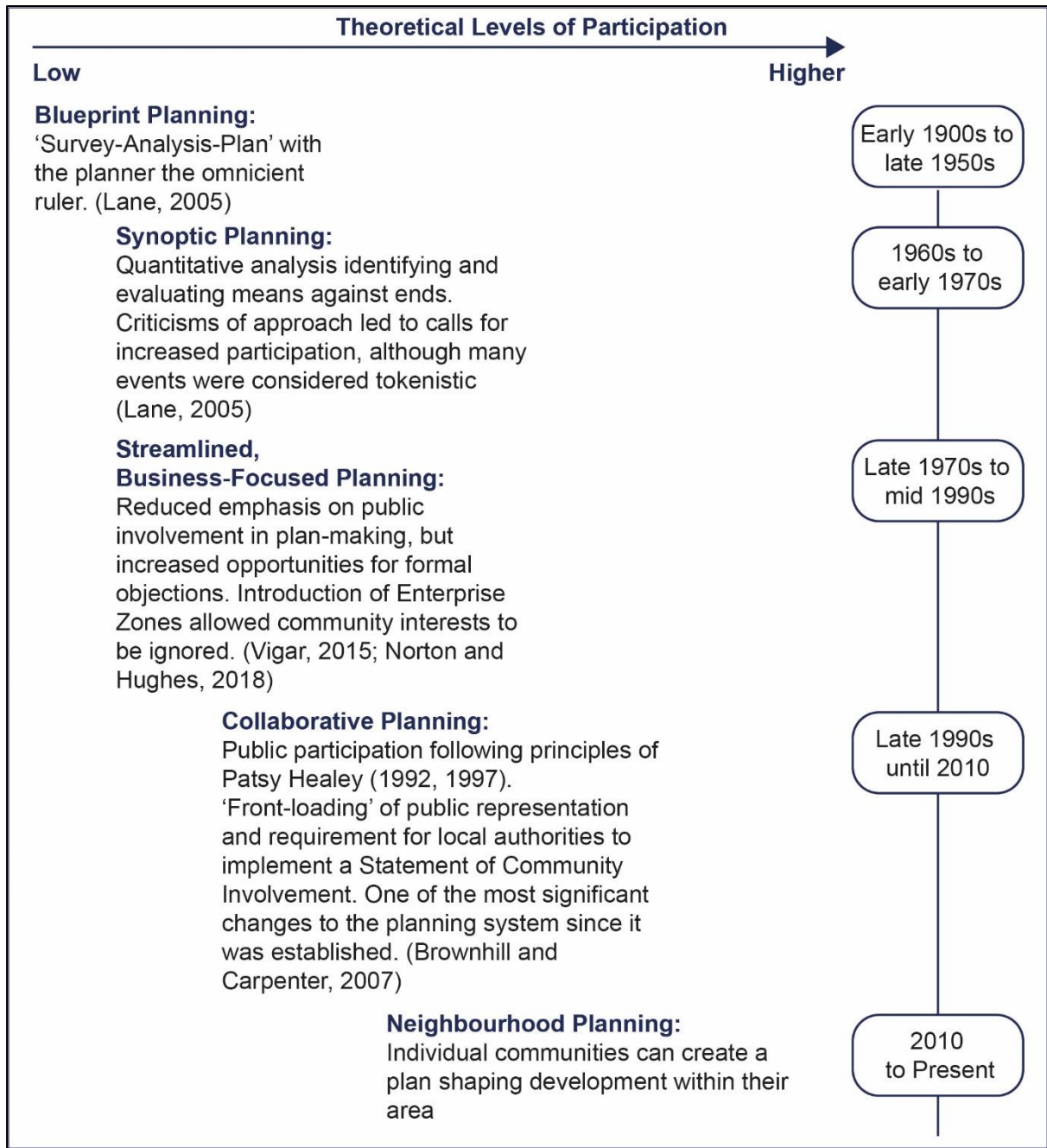


Figure 1: Timeline presenting the development of public participation within the English planning system. (Source: author)

The concept of transferring power to the ‘people’ was often referred to in many speeches and articles regarding Localism and the Big Society (see opening quote). However, academic literature suggests that public participation has been dominated by ‘sub-elites’ situated between lay people and public authorities, in turn generating democratic ownership for resourceful participants whilst alienating the less resourceful sections of society, such as young people (Agger, 2012). The planning system in particular is traditionally perceived as dominated by white, middle class (and older male) interests (Lees *et al.*, 2008). Despite constituting 23% of England’s population (ONS, 2013), young people are considered one of the ‘seldom heard’

(Scottish Government, 2009) groups within planning¹. The reasons behind young people specifically being a seldom heard group are complex, but Knowles-Yanez (2005) has argued that most land-use planning practices have historically excluded young people, citing concerns about young people's abilities and an explicit exclusion of young people from the overall idea of public participation. Alongside this argued historical exclusion of young people from land-use planning, a substantial body of literature began to propose that youth participation could provide benefits to both participants and the planning system (Hart, 1997).

Since 2010, international youth participation in planning literature has increasingly investigated the benefits of, and barriers to, increased youth participation². However, this international trend of increasing literature has not been replicated in England-centric literature since the Coalition government reforms, except for Day *et al.*'s (2011) report hypothesising potential youth participation opportunities and threats arising from outlined Coalition intentions. It is therefore unclear whether the historic arguments of exclusionary land-use practices, or the academically observed benefits and limitations, are prevalent within the contemporary English planning system. As the longest-term stakeholders in society (Simpson, 1997), young people are arguably most greatly impacted by the planning system's processes and outcomes, and therefore young people's views must be considered in these processes. This paper aims to understand whether youth participation within the contemporary English planning system has the interest, capability and potential to meet planning's overarching aim of shaping better places.

Defining young people

In seeking to define the age ranges describing 'young people', the inter-relation between issues which planning seeks to address and the defined demographic become clear. Whilst most definitions of 'youth' generally place the upper age limit as either 18 (Hart, 1997; Willow, 2002) or 25 (Yeo, 2009), Martelli (2013) argues that the definition could extend to 34 years old. The upper limit of 34 would encompass a group whose interest in development and planning decisions would reflect their growing maturity, responsibility and vested interest in life choices, quality of life and socio-economic opportunities, such as home ownership and employment. For the purposes of this research, the terms 'youth' or 'young people' refer to the age group up to the age of 18, in accordance with most existing academic literature on youth participation in planning. However, the ever-increasing average age of first home ownership of 30 years old (Halifax, 2017), a problem potentially exacerbated by the United Kingdom's annual housing supply shortfall of up to 134,000 houses (European Union, 2017; May, 2018), may necessitate a progression in youth-centric research to include those aged above 18 in the near-future.

Paper structure

In setting the scene for the primary research element of this paper, a thorough review of both academic literature and relevant planning policy is undertaken. This

¹Alongside Gypsy/Travellers, or individuals with disabilities, are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender or from a 'Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic' background (Scottish Government, 2009)

² For recent examples of research from: United States, see Derr and Kovács (2015; 2017), and Cushing (2015); Sweden, see Cele and van der Burgt (2015); Scotland, see Wood (2015); Indonesia, see Argo *et al.* (2017) and Australia, see Osborne *et al.* (2017).

paper identifies a substantial amount of literature researching wider public and youth participation in governance and planning, providing a strong foundation of critique into government policy and the strengths of, and barriers to, youth participation. This literature review guides the research objectives seeking to assess young people's interest and participation levels, evaluate methods to derive information from young people, and critically examine the value and merits of this information for planning practitioners. The case study area of the city of Plymouth, South-West England, is then introduced and analysed, before presenting a critical review of research methods used to address the aim and objectives. The methodological review firstly analyses methods considered, but not chosen due to their inherent conflict with the objectives. The adopted methods of youth questionnaire and workshop sessions (conducted with young people aged 11- to 16-years-old), and planning practitioner and political 'key informant' interviews, are then critically evaluated to justify the methodological choices and understand any potential methodological shortcomings.

The research results arising from application of the methodology are then analysed against the background of the paper's aim and objectives. The results demonstrate areas of agreement with existing academic literature, such as young people being observed as a heterogeneous group in terms of interest in planning, adding further weight to certain aspects of academic evidence. Conversely, the results identify some topics that have previously been widely overlooked in the academic literature, such as young people being unaware that they could participate in planning matters, findings that advance the wider understanding of youth participation practices. The discussion and conclusion then critically evaluates the potential of youth participation to shape better places in the contemporary planning system, acknowledging that any assessment is particularly complex and requires additional, longer-term research. Within the context of this complexity, the discussion and conclusion introduces a conceptual framework aimed at improving marketing, viability of methods and utilisation of political interventions to support increased youth participation.

Literature review

In advance of conducting research to address the relative dearth of England-centric youth participation literature since the post-2010 planning reforms, it is vital to understand the nature of the reforms and their potential impact on meaningful youth participation practices. As much youth participation literature identifies the demographic as being underutilised, the potentially dominant barriers hindering increased youth participation are therefore reviewed in advance of analysing the previously identified benefits. The critical literature review contained within this section therefore provides the grounding for the research aims and objectives.

A 'paradigm shift?': Post-2010 English planning reforms

Despite public participation in planning being first catalysed by the 1969 Skeffington Report (Vigar, 2015), and increasingly pursued since the early 21st Century, Norton and Hughes (2018) have argued that the post-2010 planning reforms have enacted a paradigm shift in the English planning system. Most significantly, in public participation terms, the 2011 Localism Act introduced the potential for local communities to shape development in their area through a process commonly referred to as Neighbourhood Planning. In the most simplistic form, Neighbourhood

Planning provides communities access to the direct power to create a development plan, which forms part of the statutory documents used to guide development and determine planning applications. A Neighbourhood Plan must follow wider planning policies, such as the area's Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (DCLG, 2017a), but can propose more housing (although importantly not less). The level of this devolution of power to communities is unprecedented (Tewdwr-Jones, 2012), far beyond those implemented post-Skeffington and as part of the early 21st Century Labour government reforms, and the enactment of over 280 Neighbourhood Plans by March 2017³ (DCLG, 2017b) arguably justifies Norton and Hughes' (2018) heralding of a paradigm shift.

Although the introduction of the NPPF proclaimed that planning should be "*empowering local people to shape their surroundings*" (DCLG, 2012: 5), it is arguably unclear how practitioners are expected to apply this principle to youth participation. Additionally, the supplementary Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (DCLG, 2014) 'streamlined' planning by reducing 8,000 pages of prescriptive policy and guidance into 65 policy pages and 60 guidance webpages (Davoudi, 2015). As a result, contemporary public participation policy and guidance is relatively vague, potentially creating a two-tier system whereby the explicit regulatory requirement for Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to conduct participation as part of the local plan process and decision-taking is clear, although it is less so for developers (

Table 1). As there is currently no compulsory requirement for developers to conduct public consultation prior to application submission in most instances, this paper seeks to understand private-sector developer's attitudes towards both youth and public participation.

Post-reform legislation, policy and guidance arguably provides an opportunity for public participation in planning within England to be more widely practiced than ever before, with participation now capable of tangibly guiding development through Neighbourhood Plans. However, as the introduction outlined, wider experience suggests that younger people have not widely participated historically, and therefore this paper seeks to understand the current role of young people within the updated English planning system.

³ From 'Notes on neighbourhood planning: edition 19'. Despite previously providing updates every two months, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (known as the DCLG until January 2018) have not published any updated figures since March 2017 (at the time of writing).

Table 1: Contemporary central Government public participation legislation, policy and guidance (Source: author)

Local plan

Local authorities must conduct “*effective discussion and consultation with local communities*” (DCLG, 2017c, Para.1). The means and extent of this discussion and consultation is described to be flexible, although it must meet the requirements in regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (*ibid.*). Regulation 18 (Section 3) emphasises that “*in preparing the local plan, the local planning authority must take into account any representation made to them*”.

In addition, the consultation must meet the commitments outlined in the LPA’s Statement of Community Involvement, which was mandated as part of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (*ibid.*)

Planning applications (decision-taking)

Despite its initial inclusion on the Localism Bill, the Localism Act failed to incorporate the compulsory requirement for developers to conduct public consultation prior to the submission of planning applications, except in planning applications for wind turbines (Norton and Hughes, 2018).

From the perspective of developers and decision takers (i.e. the LPA,), Para 188 of the National Planning Policy Framework outlines that “*Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community*” (DCLG, 2012).

Once an application has been submitted, LPAs are required to undertake a formal period of public consultation, prior to deciding a planning application (DCLG, 2017d). These requirements are prescribed in Article 15 of The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. Levels of consultation vary between development type, but are required which vary from consultation in the form of at least one of the following:

- Site notices;
- Site notice or neighbour notification letter;
- Newspaper advertisement; and
- Website (All instances).

Public participation theory

The most famous and widely referred to analytical framework within public participation literature is Arnstein’s (1969) ‘ladder of participation’. Arnstein associated citizen participation with citizen power, before theorising eight distinct levels of participation from non-participation through to ‘citizen power’, whereby citizens obtain full managerial power (Figure 2). Within youth participation literature, Arnstein’s fundamental power-relation principles have been reciprocated by Hart (1992) and Shier (2001), in their youth-centric ‘ladders of youth participation’.



Figure 2: Arnstein's (1969) 'Ladder of Citizen Participation', highlighting the varying degrees to which public participation can be conducted. (Adapted from: Arnstein, 1969: 217)

Understanding Arnstein's conceptual ladder raises the key question of how much power can be transferred through youth participation within the English planning system? Although Neighbourhood Planning has been argued by Gunn *et al.* (2015) to encapsulate the top-two rungs of Arnstein's ladder, Norton and Hughes (2018) note that central government's stewardship of the UK planning system means that the top two rungs of the ladder are nearly impossible to achieve in practice (even in Neighbourhood Plans). In addition, the principle aspiration to reach the top-two rungs has been widely criticised as no improvement on non-participatory approaches, as removal of professional and (democratically-elected) political involvement has the potential to transfer power to community dictatorships (Collins and Ison, 2009). This paper therefore accordingly utilises participation levels equating to the 'partnership' rung of the ladder as the current benchmark for youth participation in England.

Barriers to youth participation

Perceptions of Young People, the Planning System, and the Role of the Practitioner

Potentially the most significant barrier to promoting increased youth participation relates to negative perceptions of young people within society, particularly within the context of the planning system's complexity, and the planning practitioner's role and professional status. Matthews *et al.* (1999) argue that participation has been perceived as an adult activity in the United Kingdom, predominantly through three discourses:

1. Questioning of the appropriateness of young people's political involvement;
2. Doubts that young people lack the capability to participate; and

3. Uncertainties about the form that participation should take and the outcomes that might result.

As modern conceptions of youth as innocent and a period of training in preparation for adult life originate from the 16th Century (*ibid.*), remedying these attitudes to promote increased youth participation would therefore be a challenging process which unpicks centuries of social construct (Burr, 2006).

Given the preceding negative perceptions of young people's participation, and the inherent complexity of the planning system (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012), it could be argued that changing the planning system to put greater decision-making weight on young people's views over professional's or elected official's views would be inappropriate. Although this concern could also be held with favourably weighting the wider public's views over practitioner's, the perception of young people as incapable of participating is powerful as it suggests their views should be given less weight than the wider public. Despite these concerns, planning practitioners have arguably become increasingly adept at arbitrating responses provided as part of the wider prominence of public participation in planning policy (Frank *et al.*, 2014), suggesting that practitioners possess the sufficient capability to meaningfully acknowledge young people's views.

However, it also is unclear from the literature whether practitioners conform to the negative perceptions outlined and subsequently hold less weight to young people's views, with Cushing (2015) observing that planning practice generally adopts a 'planning *for* young people' approach, as opposed to the more academically-preferred 'planning *with* young people approach'. This paper seeks to understand whether the literature-identified negative perceptions are material considerations when young people participate in a practical task, particularly whether negative perceptions and 'planning *for* young people' approaches are widely exhibited by planning practitioners.

Time, timing and cost

Another important barrier commonly identified in the literature relates to effective youth participation being time-consuming and expensive, for both practitioners and participants (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004; Bourgon, 2009). This barrier is also identified as being a present for wider public participation, but is particularly pertinent for seldom heard groups due to the additional accessibility requirements to facilitate attendance (Norton and Hughes, 2018). As young people may have difficulty arranging transport to events, due to reliance upon parental mobility, youth participants could be required to possess significant motivation to invest the time and money required to attend events, or alternatively practitioners may be required to invest resources in staging separate events to those held for the wider public.

The literature mainly focuses on time and cost for practitioners (Blanchet-Cohen and Rainbow, 2006; Spicer and Evans, 2006). This focus may relate to historically prevalent arguments surrounding the perceived bureaucracy and time-consuming nature of the planning system, encompassing a political rarity: cross-party consensus (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Historical (1979 to present) political criticisms of the English planning system. (Source: author)

In practice, increased youth participation could lengthen the planning process and therefore indirectly undermine intentions of recent planning reforms to facilitate increased development levels. In addition, time-consuming processes directly impact public-sector plan-making departments, where resources are stretched because of average staff reductions of 37% since 2010 (RTPI, 2015), and private sector developers, whereby private consultant time directly equates to costs via fees. Given the political anti-planning rhetoric and severe resource constraints, designating extra time to a participatory process for a minority group, which has arguably not proven cost effectiveness (Leach and Wingfield, 1999), may therefore be difficult to promote and implement.

For participants, the paradoxical nature of receiving any desired increase in participation is that inappropriately frequent involvement leads to consultation fatigue. Consultation fatigue arises as people are approached increasingly often to participate, but perceive little return on the time and energy they give up doing so (Richards *et al.*, 2007). As plan-making involves multiple public issues, and the average LPA receives 1,411 development applications each year⁴ (DCLG, 2017f), when and how participant's views are sought play a key role in managing time (and to a certain extent cost) demands on participants.

To overcome time and cost barriers, youth participation must demonstrate time and cost efficiencies in both production and implementation, whilst also providing results

⁴ Plymouth received 1400 in 2016 (DCLG, 2017f)

which yield a positive return on investment within the wider planning system. This paper seeks to assess the extent to which young people can contribute in a cost and time efficient manner, whilst incorporating methods which reduce the potential for consultation fatigue.

Young people's interest in planning

A potentially fundamental barrier to youth participation, rarely addressed academically, relates to whether young people are inclined to participate, with one exception (Willow, 2002). Youth participation literature predominantly assumes that young people want to get involved, which contrasts Cunningham *et al.*'s (2003) general observations of young people as a heterogeneous group. The theoretically-improbable universal interest promoted in the literature arguably results from the widespread utilisation of time-consuming research methods that are effectively self-selecting, as the young people who voluntarily give up significant amounts of time to participate would inherently possess a pre-existing interest. Therefore, the views of those with a more casual interest, or disinterest, in planning may be neglected in the literature. As young people have an increasing number of ways to pursue interests, numerous commercial industries have subsequently invested significant amounts of time and money into a lucrative battleground for young people's attention (Buhler and Nufer, 2010). This increasingly competitive market has major implications for promoting youth participation in planning for both the immediate and longer-terms, and will be addressed by this paper identifying whether young people are interested in planning and how they feel participation could be made more attractive.

Benefits of youth participation

Although barriers to youth participation are presented as extremely influential, academic literature promotes a large array of benefits resulting from the practice. In planning terms, these benefits can be viewed as first- and second-order (First-order benefits

First order benefits in the form of service improvements are widely mentioned within wider public participation literature (Skidmore *et al.*, 2006; Bourgon, 2009). In addition, Leach and Wingfield (1999) noted that consultation of service user groups can be cost effective in terms of improved value to (or satisfaction of) service users. However, this benefit is less frequently identified in youth participation literature, with the limited articles identifying service improvements focusing upon services for young people themselves (Rogers, 2006; Derr and Kovacs, 2015). This paper therefore seeks to gain alternative perspectives on youth participation, by analysing whether the practice has the potential to improve services for the wider public, and over a longer timeframe.

Table 2). First-order benefits are typically shorter-term, tangible benefits to decisions taken within the system itself. Second-order benefits, are typically longer-term, less direct benefits where knowledge and/or skills taken from initial participation are used to more actively participate in the future.

First-order benefits

First order benefits in the form of service improvements are widely mentioned within wider public participation literature (Skidmore *et al.*, 2006; Bourgon, 2009). In addition, Leach and Wingfield (1999) noted that consultation of service user groups can be cost effective in terms of improved value to (or satisfaction of) service users. However, this benefit is less frequently identified in youth participation literature, with the limited articles identifying service improvements focusing upon services for young people themselves (Rogers, 2006; Derr and Kovacs, 2015). This paper therefore seeks to gain alternative perspectives on youth participation, by analysing whether the practice has the potential to improve services for the wider public, and over a longer timeframe.

Table 2: Benefits of youth participation in planning (Source: author)

First Order Benefits	
Improved decision-making, in turn improving facilities and services for young people	Spicer and Evans (2006) Rogers (2006) Derr and Kovacs (2015)
Second Order Benefits	
Improved awareness of, and engagement with, democratic processes. Potentially useful for those previously deemed troublesome or marginalised	Hart (1997) Matthews <i>et al.</i> (1999) Spicer and Evans (2006) Willow (2002)
Enhance young people's skills, such as communication, co-operation and understanding of other people's perspectives	Hart (1997) Spicer and Evans (2006) Willow (2002)
Young people are human capital central to Europe's success in the global competition as an economy of knowledge, skills learned through youth participation contribute greatly to gaining this knowledge.	Martelli (2013)
Uphold young people's rights, particularly in the form of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children	Spicer and Evans (2006) Wood (2015) Cele and van der Burgt (2015) Percy-Smith (2010)

Additionally, many of the first-order benefits observed have been achieved in projects initiated by academics or advocates, who can input substantial time and

expertise that may be unavailable within a practical planning exercise (Frank, 2006). Despite the RTPPI (2005) promoting at least 40 methods for conducting wider public participation events, it is unclear how viable some of the youth participation methods used in academia are, such as Clark and Moss's (2011) 'Mosaic Approach', which provides beneficial insight by utilising walking tours and extended reflective interviews with smaller groups of young people. Therefore, there is arguably a discord between academia and practice (Knowles-Yanez, 2005), demonstrating why practitioners may struggle to replicate the positive results found in academia. Given the time and cost concerns identified, this paper aims to understand whether first-order benefits can be achieved through use of methods that are practically feasible.

Second-order benefits

Youth participation discourses mostly focus upon second-order benefits, with the principal benefits being the meeting of young people's rights enshrined in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) (Table 3; Wood, 2015; Percy-Smith, 2010), or developing future 'active citizens' (Hart, 1997; Martelli, 2013).

Table 3: Youth participation in planning-relevant excerpts from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (up to 18 years old)

The UNCRC, ratified by United Nations on 20th November 1989, and by the United Kingdom in December 1991 (UNICEF, 2017), applies to "*every human being below the age of 18 years*" (Article 1)

Article 12:

1. "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law".

Whilst these rights-based approaches could potentially yield unquantifiable long-term benefits, as part of a wider participatory approach within all forms of government, they could limit the view that younger people can positively impact more immediate planning decisions. If not viewed holistically, using participation to develop *future* citizens arguably strengthens the barriers faced in promoting the practice as they reaffirm perceptions of young people as 'in training' (Matthews *et al.*, 1999) or future capital (Martelli, 2013).

Based upon the existing gaps in literature, this paper focuses upon first-order benefits as the most pragmatic approach to increasing youth participation (and counteract the previously identified barriers) through promotion of a business case exhibiting numerous tangible benefits. This approach is believed to be the most suitable due to the current pro-development, cost efficient nature of public- and private-sector planning practice, combined with an almost 'defensive' academically observed starting position of low youth participation.

Aims and objectives

Based upon the preceding literature review, this paper has identified the following aim and objectives:

Aim:

To establish if youth participation in planning has the interest, capability and potential to shape better places, with the use of a case study of Plymouth.

Objectives:

1. To assess the participation levels and desire amongst young people to participate within the planning system, through the use of questionnaires, interactive workshops and key informant interviews.
2. To evaluate methods of capturing young people's opinions to inform planning policies and decisions, utilising interactive workshop and key informant interview responses.
3. To critically examine the value and merits of youth participation within the planning system, using insights from key informant interviews.

Summary

The post-reform planning system presents significant opportunities for increased public participation in planning, particularly through Neighbourhood Planning. There are several significant barriers limiting increased youth participation in planning, particularly the doubts about young people's interest and capabilities. In addition, the high costs for practitioners to hold more youth-friendly events potentially undermines the intention of the post-2010 reforms to facilitate a pro-development agenda. Young people can provide numerous benefits to the planning system, although much of the existing literature focuses upon participation meeting young people's rights or longer-term benefits of personal skill development. Where more direct service benefits are identified in the literature, they often focus upon meeting young people's current needs as young people, as opposed to wider societal benefits or young people's future needs such as employment or housing. Three main research objectives have been created to assist the paper's overall aim, in the form of assessing young people's interest and participation levels, evaluating methods to derive information from young people, and critically examining the value and merits of this information for planning practitioners.

Study area, the City of Plymouth

A case study approach has been adopted to meet the previously outlined aims and objectives. The main strength of the case study approach is that it allowed a manageable spatial area to be established and investigated in greater depth (Clark, 2005). This manageable area facilitated a deeper understanding of practical realities, in turn progressing the research beyond a theoretical grounding. However, the use of only a single case study area could be viewed as a limitation of the approach, as results from this finer spatial resolution may be ethnocentric, and not representative of the wider population, potentially limiting any finding's wider applicability.

The case study area adopted for this paper is the city of Plymouth, South-West England (Figure 4). With Plymouth's youth population of approximately 55,000 constituting roughly 21% of its total (ONS, 2013; 2017), the city is the second largest youth settlement within the South-West region, after Bristol. After justifying the choice of Plymouth as the study area, a critical analysis of youth participation work conducted as part of the area's Local Plan development is then undertaken.

Justification of study area: A brief history of planning in Plymouth

Plymouth has been dramatically shaped by planning historically, with the acclaimed planner Sir Patrick Abercrombie's 1943 *Plan for Plymouth* considered one of the most radical and celebrated examples of post-war planning (Essex and Brayshay, 2007). However, the post-war redesign was not universally celebrated, with some arguing that the town planners had too much uncontested influence (Chalkley, 1998). Over the past 20 years, planning has played a major role in assisting Plymouth City Council (PCC) in working towards the city's vision to be "one of Europe's most vibrant waterfronts, where an outstanding quality of life is enjoyed by everyone" (PCC, 2017a), through plan-led initiatives such as the regeneration of the Devonport South Dockyard, Royal William Victualling Yard and Drake Circus Shopping Centre.

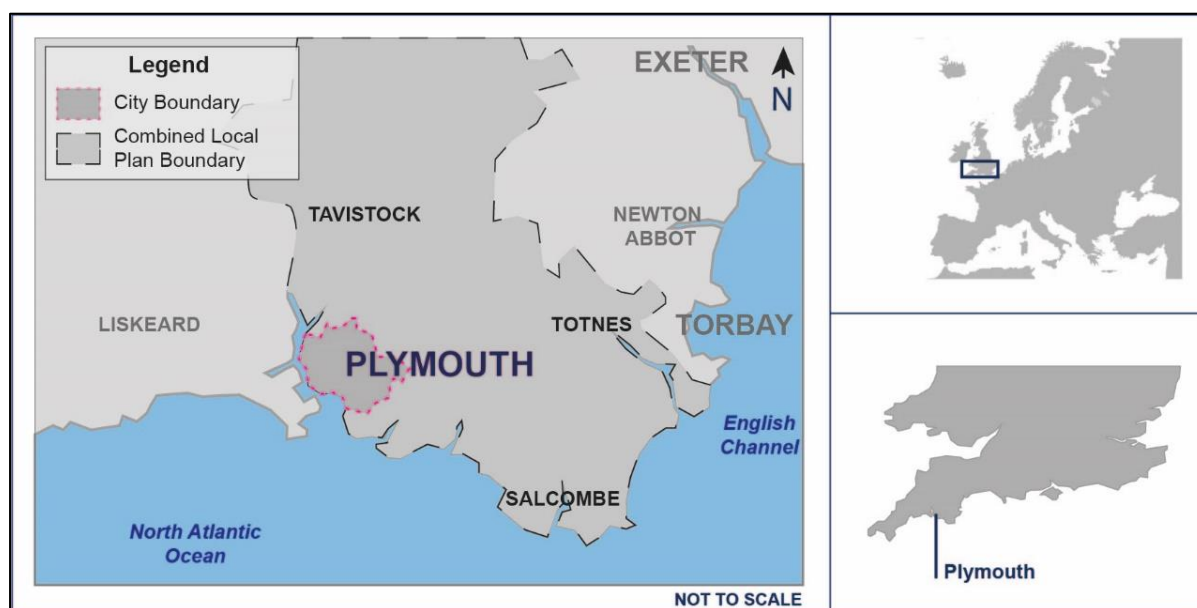


Figure 4: Plymouth location map, within the context of the combined Local Plan area and important local settlements. (Source: author, digitised from Ordnance Survey, 2017)

With many of these recent projects resulting from the Mackay Vision (2004), it could be perceived that Plymouth still places greater emphasis to concepts originating from 'celebrity' planning consultants, a practice that has indirectly reduced the prominence of public participation in other cities globally (Sklair, 2005).

PCC have been fashioning the Plymouth Plan since 2013, which now forms part of the wider Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan for developments until 2034. Four Neighbourhood Plans are currently in production to form part of this plan (PCC, 2017b). The council's planning department and the Plymouth Plan have been critically acclaimed in recent years, winning the Royal Town Planning Institute's

(RTPI) 2016 ‘Local Authority Planning Team of the Year’ (RTPI, 2016) and The Planning Award’s ‘Award for Strategic Planning’ (PCC, 2017c). Plymouth is therefore considered a suitable study area for this project as planning outcomes have radically shaped the city, and PCC’s successful adaptation to the recent planning reforms potentially provides a benchmark for implementation of post-reform policies.

Youth participation and the Plymouth plan

As part of the Joint Local Plan submission, PCC co-produced a Statement of Consultation document outlining how, when and where local and statutory stakeholders were consulted during the Plymouth Plan’s development (PCC *et al.*, 2017). The document outlined four separate engagement phases (Table 4), receiving 4,700 comments in total. If treated as individual members of the public posting individual comments, these comments equate to approximately 1.8% of Plymouth’s population. However, as many individuals and stakeholders provide multiple comments across the different engagement phases, the number of individuals commenting is realistically significantly lower, demonstrating the selective nature of participation levels within the wider public.

Table 4: Plymouth City Council ‘Plymouth Plan’ consultation and engagement phases and responses (PCC *et al.*, 2017: 4)

Plan Preparation Phase	Name of Engagement	Date	No. of Comments
Issues and Options Consultation	Plymouth Plan Conversation	October to July 2013	2,500
	Plymouth Plan Connections	July to October 2014	1,000
	Plymouth Plan Check-Up	21 January to 4 March 2015	400
Consultation on Site Options for Development	Plymouth Plan Collect	28 September 2015 to January 2016	800

Youth-friendly methods, such as a design competition for schools, were explained to have been utilised to reach individuals who do not normally attend formal meetings (Table 5). However, it is unclear how many young people participated and whether youth representations meaningfully impacted the Plymouth Plan’s development. To compliment more traditional marketing methods, such as newspaper adverts, social media accounts were also used to promote many events across the city, with the Twitter page explained as having 1,471 followers by July 2017. However, a review of the follower profiles suggests that fewer than five young people follow the page, potentially limiting its effectiveness as a tool for engaging young people directly.

Whilst staging youth-friendly events is outwardly positive, many events outlined within the document appear to focus upon capturing the opinions of those who were already politically engaged. For example, events were held at the Youth Parliament election or Youth Council meetings. However, only one of the ‘Sofa Conversation’ events, where a sofa was located in public space alongside Plymouth Plan materials to creatively prompt discussions, was specifically aimed at engaging with disadvantaged youths in the city (at the Plymouth Foyer vulnerable youth centre).

This use of predominantly politically engaged young people could be perceived as reinforcing the views a group of 'sub-elites' within the demographic itself (Agger, 2012).

Table 5: Methods used by Plymouth City Council in attempts to reach young people specifically. Methods conducted as part of the Plymouth Plan 'Conversation' stage of Local Plan development (PCC *et al.*, 2017)

The sofa conversations

A sofa was moved around to approximately 40 venues around the city to promote informal discussion of Local Plan materials, with young people targeted specifically at the following events:

- Plymouth City Council Transport Summit;
- Youth Council;
- Youth Parliament Elections;
- Early Years Conference;
- Drake Circus Shopping Centre; and
- Plymouth Foyer.

Fringe events

- Five secondary schools participated in a competition at the University exploring opportunities for the future of the North Cross area of the city.
- Creating Our Future: An event for young people to discuss what matters to them and explore their vision of future Plymouth through creative arts. They produced a film High Street 2031.

Summary

The chosen case study area is the city of Plymouth, the second largest settlement in south-west England. Plymouth has been significantly shaped by planners historically, with its planning department also highly commended in recent years. Young people's views have been actively sought to help develop the city's next Local Plan, but many of the events held appear to be targeted at already politically engaged perspectives. Although the events appear well intentioned, it is unclear how many young people participated, and how any representations were used to help guide the Local Plan's contents. Within this context, and in accordance with the research aims and objectives, the research methodology has been designed to provide further understanding of youth participation within Plymouth.

Methodology

This methodology introduces, critiques and justifies the research methods used to address the previously outlined research aim and objectives, within the study area of Plymouth. As quantitative and qualitative data is required from various youth participation stakeholders (young people, practitioners and politicians), numerous methods have been considered. A selection of the methods considered, but not chosen, are initially critically reviewed to justify their non-selection. The methods adopted are then critiqued to provide greater understanding of the rationale for selection, methodological limitations, and reflective lessons for future research.

Methods considered but not chosen

Numerous methods, including the use of multiple case study areas or observing activities conducted as part of the Plymouth Plan development, were considered but not chosen (Table 6). Although these methods have their merits, they were deemed inappropriate for this paper due to concerns that they would not efficiently meet the research's aims and objectives, in addition to resource constraints. Clark and Moss's (2011) 'Mosaic approach', involving detailed walking tours of Plymouth with a small number of young people, was most seriously considered for utilisation due to the depth of responses providing opportunities to understand young people's capabilities and topics identified.

Table 6: Methods considered but not chosen

Method	Potential Benefits	Rationale for non-selection
Critical comparison of more than one case study location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater understanding of methods employed across numerous LPAs • Research is more representative of the wider country and planning system, conclusions can be contextualised as endemic of a wider system rather than the practice within a single area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and Cost. A reduced number of participants would have been able to be reached within resource constraints. • Due to lack of previous literature, dilution of resources to enable cross-examination of study areas may detract from the paper's overall aim of understanding young people's potential.
Mosaic approach (raised by Clark and Moss, 2011 and utilised in Derr, 2015). Use of cameras, tours and mapping to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially more creative results • Deeper level of engagement from participants • Deeper levels of understanding for researcher due to increased reflection and engagement of participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time. Participants may not be willing to give up large amounts of time when under no obligation. Viability concerns for practical implementation • Type of participant willing to participate

<p>enable creativity and allows the flexibility for young people to lead the research. Results then followed by a period of reflection then interaction with participant through informal interview</p>		<p>would reflect only a certain section of young people and may lead to disinterested young people's views being ignored.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Method generally focuses upon planning spaces that are better for young people, as opposed to the longer-term concerns this paper seeks to address.
<p>First hand observation of Neighbourhood or Plymouth Plan development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a deeper understanding of approaches used during the development of an actual Local Plan document. • If same research sessions were applied within the Local Plan development process the tokenistic nature of the research design could be minimalised • Greater understanding of how young people are represented in the Localism-created Neighbourhood Plan process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation for the Plymouth Plan had been completed 12-18 months in advance of research commencement.

However, the Mosaic approach is perhaps illustrative of the discord between academic and practice observed by Knowles-Yanez (2005). It was therefore decided that the method would compromise the achievement of all three objectives, as use of the Mosaic approach would create difficulties in gaining a wider understanding of the levels of interest (and participation levels) of the wider youth population. Furthermore, use of this method would also minimise the opportunity to test young people's capabilities within an environment that is more likely to represent practitioner needs.

Methods chosen

Multiple methods, consisting of questionnaires and workshops with young people, and interviews with planning practitioners, were used to ensure that objectives could be reliably achieved and optimise research quality. The youth engagement methodology adopted, and supported by practitioner views, was specifically designed to address the discord between academia and practice through triangulation. This triangulation, or use of multiple complimentary methods to gain deeper insight into a research problem than gained using only one method (Hoggart *et al.*, 2002), robustly allowed the combined methods to counteract each individual method's limitations.

Researching with young people: Questionnaires and workshops

102 students aged 11- to 16-years-old participated anonymously in questionnaire and workshop sessions, consisting of a short introduction to planning before completion of the questionnaire and a hypothetical planning task, during July and October 2016 (Table 7). An 'opportunistic' sampling approach was utilised to gain the views of a wide variety of young people, not just those interested in participating in planning (Anderson, 2017). Additionally, the sampling approach provided an opportunity to greater understand the methodological potential of, and practical challenges in, implementing youth participation through the education system. As a seldom heard group, use of the education system potentially reduces accessibility barriers by providing a captive audience in a location where many young people are legally required to be. Given previous research's limitations of adopting self-selecting (and time-consuming) methods, conducting participation events in classes allowed a diverse range of interest and views to be collected within a relatively short time period, whilst also potentially facilitating the second-order knowledge and skill benefits frequently observed within the literature.

Table 7: Secondary school research session outline

The 1-hour research sessions were divided into 3 distinct sections for the purpose of this research task:

Part 1: Introduction to planning and the research task (15 Minutes)

A brief PowerPoint presentation was conducted to explain the role of Planning in shaping places, outline the research tasks to be conducted and remind participant of their ethical rights (particularly Right to Withdraw). The aim of the session was predominantly to inform less aware participants of the type 'planning' that was to be reviewed as part of the research tasks, in an attempt to allow informed responses and ensure that there was no confusion with other forms of planning such as time management.

Part 2: Questionnaire completion (15 Minutes)

Students were provided with questionnaires to complete and provided with assistance when requested. Assistance provided predominantly related to an expanded explanation of the Likert scale categories.

Part 3: Practical task completion (30 Minutes)

Upon completion of the questionnaire, students were presented with the hypothesised scenario: "What do you want Plymouth to look like in 20 years?". The teacher was briefed in advance regarding the levels of assistance to provide to the young people, to ensure the research objectives were not compromised, with an emphasis on acting as facilitators rather than instructing the young people how to complete the task.

All of Plymouth's 16 secondary schools were invited to participate in the research study via publicly available contact details, with one-hour sessions proposed to be conducted with any available classes. One-hour sessions were proposed to coincide with lesson lengths used for regular curriculum teaching, but also as a proxy of practitioner's time constraints. Non-responsive schools were only contacted twice, to simulate practitioner time constraints, although it is also important to note that

practitioners (particularly public-sector) may have greater access to educational networks. Unfortunately, sessions were only conducted at two of the 16 schools, potentially highlighting school's own time constraints in meeting the requirements of the national curriculum (Winters, 2010). Importantly, the low institutional uptake demonstrates that access difficulties are still a consideration for planning practice when using the education system. Due to the anonymity of responses, it is unclear how socio-economically representative the two participant schools were in relation to the rest of Plymouth. However, both schools held non-selective Academy status, and are therefore potentially less likely to strongly feature the 'elite' views Agger (2012) referred to.

Sample analysis and researcher positionality

Demographic analysis of the youth sample group has been undertaken to assess the research's general representativeness. Due to ethical considerations when working with young people, more sensitive information such as religion or socio-economic status (derived from Census postcode analysis) was not sought from individuals. Analysis of the gender proportions observed (53% Male, 47% Female) suggests that the sample is broadly representative of the wider English population (49% Male, 51% Female; ONS, 2017).

However, the sample displays a broad age dominance (Figure 5), with 90% of participants aged under 15 (and 55% aged 14). The observed age split demonstrates the previously described access difficulty, with lower ages potentially over-represented due to a lack of major exams. This dominance of younger age groups means that observations will therefore more generally relate to the lower end of the secondary school age range. To address this limitation, future research could adopt a more targeted sampling method to focus upon those aged over 15, and therefore provide greater understanding of how capability and interest varies within the youth group.

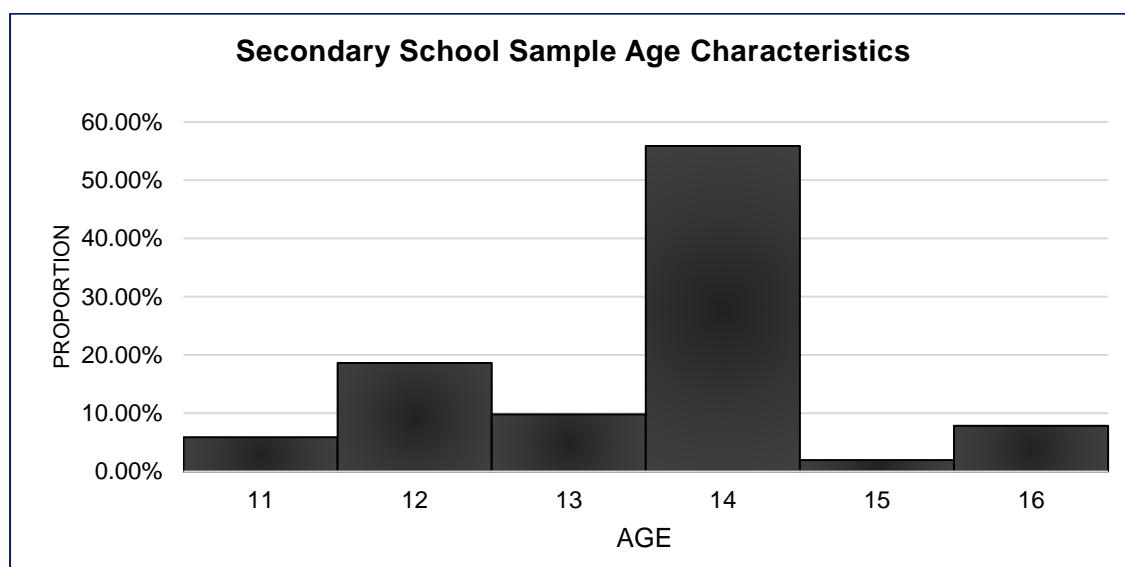


Figure 5: Secondary school sample age characteristics

Notwithstanding considerations such as race, gender and social class, it is unclear whether the researcher's positionality as a 25-year-old led to youth responses being

different to if senior practitioners had conducted the sessions. The obvious power imbalances between adults and young people are one of the biggest challenges for participatory researchers (Valentine, 1999; Matthews, 2001). The researcher's positionality as a young person by some definitions could reduce this relative power imbalance, although Gallagher's (2008) observations that power relations are complex and young people's ability to subvert expected power relations in practice could potentially mean that there would be minimal differences in responses between different researchers.

Questionnaires

The questionnaire predominantly consisted of scaled responses and supporting open questions to establish young people's desire to participate and previous engagement with planning. The Likert scale (Strongly agree=5, Strongly disagree=1) was adopted to provide a reliable, rough ordering of people regarding attitudes (Oppenheim, 1992). Supporting open questions were utilised to ascertain a greater understanding of these attitudes that may otherwise be lacking from the use of only scaled-answers (Frazer and Lawley, 2000), and potentially identify barriers not previously examined within the literature.

The seating arrangement of students in groups at tables created opportunity for 'Social Desirability Bias' to occur between participants (Belli *et al.*, 1999). For example, the idea of wanting to participate within planning may be seen as 'uncool', leading to results skewed towards a non-representative viewpoint. However, the promise of anonymity and individual completion of questionnaires was used to reduce the potential for both Social Desirability, and Observer, biases to occur (Parfitt, 2005).

Use of questionnaires theoretically permitted statistical analysis in the form of Chi Square (X^2) to be undertaken, based upon a reasonable distribution of the 102 samples. As Cunningham *et al.* (2003) identified young people to be a heterogeneous group, the use of questionnaires allowed cross-analysis into the desire to participate based upon parameters, such as age, gender and previous participation to be conducted. Questionnaire responses were ordinal or nominal variables, therefore the non-parametric X^2 analysis technique was appropriate for use (Gilbert, 1993). Upon initial review of the five Likert scale 'interest in planning' question responses, less reliable results were produced due to more than 20% of response cells containing less than five responses, which is a key assumption for reliable X^2 analysis (Lovett, 2013). As suggested by Lovett (2013), the five Likert scale categories were amalgamated into three (Non-interest [1-2], neutral [3], and interest [4-5]) to try and achieve statistically reliable analysis. Unfortunately, despite this amalgamation, two of the four categories tested still failed to meet this assumption. The significance of the X^2 results for these parameters must therefore be viewed with relative caution. Upon further analysis, if similar behavioural trends were to be observed, then a sample size of up to 510 respondents would be required to proficiently conduct such analysis in the future.

Workshops

The workshop element of the session set students the task of illustrating how they would like Plymouth to look in 20 years' time. Designing future space tasks are widely used within planning and urban design (Cunningham *et al.*, 2003), and was

also adopted by PCC in development of the Plymouth Plan, whereby young people were given a task to design the High Street area of the city (PCC *et al.*, 2017). The young people were permitted to use many response methods, including writing stories, drawing annotated maps or bullet point lists.

An inherent, and accepted, limitation of the workshop approach as part of this research is the 'tokenistic' nature of the task (Arnstein, 1969), as young people's responses are unable to directly to shape the wider planning process. In addition, judging the success of places and outcomes attributed to youth participation is difficult (Day *et al.*, 2011), requiring a significantly longer-term study as development can take many years to implement. This limitation has therefore been reflected in the wording of the overall aim, which seeks to understand the *potential* instead of evaluating practical outcomes.

Workshops have been adopted for this research study as, in addition to examining potential methods for conducting youth participation, they allowed the previously outlined perception of young people as incapable of participating (Matthews *et al.*, 1999) to be examined. The vagueness of the brief allowed elements such as level of detail, issues addressed and spatial scale (whether at neighbourhood or city-wide) to be analysed. The 'artisan' analytical mode of understanding (Cloke *et al.*, 2004), utilising coding in the spirit of grounded theory to identify sections of material relevant the objectives, was adopted before subsequently cross-referencing findings between participants.

Collaboration was evident amongst a small number of workshop responses, with near-identical answers produced by individuals sat within the same area. Although not widespread enough to influence the overall observations, collaborative working suggests that group working should be considered as part of the future design of practical youth participation. A practical benefit of adopting a group work approach could be increased discussion, potentially shaping better places through second-order benefits by developing soft-skills such as teamwork, communication and negotiation.

Key informant interviews

The final research method utilised was key informant interviews. Seven semi-structured interviews ranging from 20 to 60 minutes were conducted with participants from varied political and professional perspectives (Table 8) to gain a greater practical understanding of the role of youth participation which would be impossible through other methods (Hoggart *et al.*, 2002). All eight of Plymouth's RTPI accredited private planning consultancies were approached, with representatives from five interviewed. All participants were asked a series of 'core' questions about their observations of youth participation in planning, such as youth interest levels, quality of responses and methods used. Questions tailored to the interviewee's specialised sector were then discussed to further understand the practical viability of youth participation in planning. For example, public-sector practitioners were asked about the impact of budget cuts on participatory practices, with private-sector practitioners questioned on topics surrounding client perspectives.

The use of core and specialised questions and topics provided professional, and political, perspectives to help meet all the objectives identified, which is crucial given the previously outlined discord between youth participation academia and planning

practice. An inherent limitation (but also practical strength) of key informant interviews is that interviewees provided subjective answers, owing to their positions as representatives of wider organisations. Although responses may not be balanced, and instead reflect corporate or political agendas rather than professional understanding (Valentine, 2005), subjectivity of responses is extremely useful in establishing the viability of youth participation as the informants are in positions of political and professional authority. The viewpoints or agendas presented therefore hold a particularly strong bearing upon the reality of future youth participation.

Table 8: Key informant interviewee profiles

Pseudonym	Description
KI1	Plymouth City Council employee, specialising in community engagement. Involved with production of Plymouth Plan, but also works with developers as part of the application process and distribution of Community Infrastructure Levy funds.
KI2	Founder and Director of small-sized planning consultancy (2 employees). External examiner for a post-graduate MSc Planning course. Provides planning advice to individuals and private-sector clients.
KI3	Planning Director for a small-sized (15 employees) planning and urban design consultancy. Works with private- and public-sector clients, encompassing planning application advice for developers and spatial master planning for LPAs.
KI4	Planning Consultant for a small-sized planning consultancy. Provides advice for private-sector developers across a range of pre- and post-application matters.
KI5	Director of Planning & Regeneration at a medium-sized environmental planning & design consultancy (Approx. 125 employees). Works with private- and public-sector clients encompassing regeneration strategy support for developers and conceptual master planning for LPAs.
KI6	Principal Planner at a large, multi-national planning and infrastructure consultancy. Provides consultancy services for public and private sector clients.
KI7	Former Member of Parliament who specialised in planning and housing matters whilst in office, informing several government reviews within these areas. Currently a freelance planning and political consultant.

Summary

Within the case study area outlined earlier, three main methods have been utilised for this research: questionnaires and workshops with 102 11- to 16-year-olds, and key informant interviews with seven practitioners. Although several alternative methods were considered, these were not adopted due to their inability to adequately meet the research aim and objectives. Although the sample size and methods used contain some minor limitations, the combination of methods adopted are believed to be the most robust approach to assess young people's interest and participation levels, evaluate methods to derive information from young people, and critically examine the value and merits of this information for planning practitioners.

Results

Using the methods previously outlined and reviewed, this section presents and analyses research results in line with topics identified in the literature review. 'Objective-by-objective' conclusions are then synthesised to establish whether young people are interested and participate in planning, whether the methods used derived information from young people that can be applied to planning practice, and how valuable planning practitioners view young people's participation.

Are young people interested in planning?

A wide range of interest was demonstrated amongst the young people surveyed (Figure 6), with 38% of participants not interested in participating in planning Plymouth's future, and a further 43% holding a neutral view. As only 19% of participants showed an interest in planning, a figure supported by qualitative feedback from key informant observations, the surveys greatly contrast the predominant academic assumptions of universal interest. However, in terms of increasing youth participation, the 62% of young people holding neutral or positive interest levels provides a potentially significant captive audience of young people who could be convinced to participate.

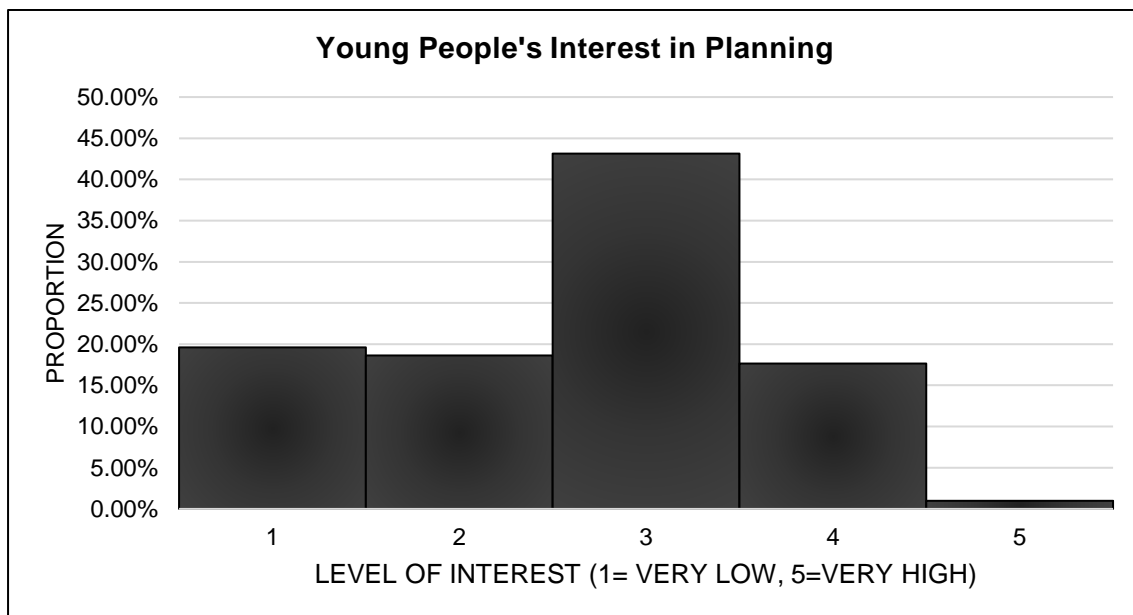


Figure 6: Young people's interest in planning

Cross-tabulation of interest in participating against age, gender, previous participation, and future desire to stay in Plymouth has been conducted to further investigate the heterogeneity of the young people studied. The five Likert categories displayed in Figure 6 have been amalgamated into three categories (lower/neutral/higher interest) to streamline results and allow limited X² analysis to be undertaken.

Gender

Given the sample's relatively even gender split, the lower (19 male:18 female) and neutral (22:22) levels of interest were remarkably similar (Table 9). Of the 19 participants demonstrating a higher level of interest in planning, 63% were male. Whilst this could be descriptively perceived as males being (marginally) more likely to be interested in planning, the inferential X² analysis found no significant relationship between gender and interest in planning.

Table 9: Cross-tabulation and Chi Square results showing the relationship between interest in planning against gender

	Level of Interest in Planning				Chi Square Analysis	
	Lower	Neutral	Higher	Total	Chi Sq	0.99
Male	19	22	12	53	Critical value	5.99
Female	18	22	7	47	No significant relationship (to 95% certainty)	
Total	37	44	19	100 ^a		

^a 2 respondents did not answer the question, reducing the sample size to 100

Age

The results demonstrate a wide variety of interest amongst the different age ranges sampled (Table 10). However, no individual age group demonstrated higher relative levels of interest. The X² analysis results further support this observation, finding no significant relationship between gender and interest in planning.

Table 10: Cross-tabulation and Chi Square results showing the relationship between interest in planning against age

	Level of Interest in Planning				Chi Square Analysis	
	Lower	Neutral	Higher	Total	Chi Sq	1.83 ^a
11 to 12	11	10	4	25	Critical value	9.49
13 to 14	25	28	14	67	No significant relationship (to 95% certainty)	
15 to 16	3	6	1	102		
Total	39	44	19	102		

^a Chi Square analysis assumption not met as more than 20% of samples have a count of less than 5 (33%). Results should be treated with less confidence.

Previous participation

Perhaps expectedly, those who had previously participated were proportionally more likely to have a higher interest in planning. 66% of those who had previously participated showed a higher level of interest in planning, as opposed to 18% of those who had not (Table 11). However, the X² results do not statistically support this observation (to 95% certainty), but this may be due to only three of the individuals who were surveyed having previously participated. As previously discussed, X² analysis assumptions rely upon more than 20% of the cross-tabulation cells having less than five responses. The low participation levels therefore make it difficult to confidently establish a significant statistical relationship.

Table 11: Cross-tabulation and Chi Square results showing the relationship between interest in planning against previous participation

	Level of Interest in Planning				Chi Square Analysis	
	Lower	Neutral	Higher	Total	Chi Sq	4.92 ^b
Yes	0	1	2	3	Critical value	5.99
No	37	43	17	97	No significant relationship (to 95% certainty)	
Total	37	44	19	100 ^a		

^a 2 respondents did not answer the question, reducing the sample size to 100

^b Chi Square analysis assumption not met as more than 20% of samples have a count of less than 5 (50%). Results should be treated with less confidence.

Desire to live in Plymouth in the future

As an amalgamated sample, broadly similar proportions of desire to live in Plymouth were observed as evidenced in the interest in planning (Table 12). When cross-tabulated, high levels of interest in planning were relatively similar between the those within the higher (six responses) and lower (seven responses) levels of desire to stay in Plymouth. X² analysis also found no significant relationship between the two variables, suggesting that an interest to stay in the area does not necessarily equate to an interest in shaping the area’s built environment through the planning system.

Table 12: Cross-Tabulation and Chi Square results showing the relationship between interest in planning against desire to live in Plymouth in the future.

	Level of Interest in Planning				Chi Square Analysis	
	Lower	Neutral	Higher	Total	Chi Sq	4.48
Lower	15	10	7	32	Critical value	9.49
Neutral	17	9	6	42		

Higher	7	15	6	28	No significant relationship (to 95% certainty)
Total	39	44	19	102	

Overall, the X^2 results demonstrate no significant relationship between interest in planning and age, gender, previous participation, or future desire to stay in Plymouth. This general lack of relationship confirms Cunningham *et al.*'s (2003) observations of heterogeneity amongst young people. The extremely low participation levels perhaps statistically hide a potential, albeit logical, relationship between previous participation and higher levels of interest in planning. Further research is required to further explore this relationship statistically, but unfortunately the potential necessity for a five times greater sample size (assuming the same 'previous participation' proportions), was beyond the means of this project.

Why are young people not participating in planning?

Only three students had previously participated in planning, with two of these participating through the means of a school council or alongside their parents. The low participation levels observed amongst the study group were universally acknowledged by the practitioners, who noted very rare occasions whereby more than one young person would attend non-youth-specific events. Although previously academically unquantified, these findings match literature proclaiming that young people are underrepresented within planning (Knowles-Yanez, 2005; Agger, 2012). However, when the observed youth participation proportion (3%) is compared to comments received for the Plymouth Plan (maximum 1.8% of the whole population), it appears that young people are proportionally more highly represented than the wider population. The minority of participants in both instances is perhaps alarmingly low, in that only a maximum of three per cent of the population are contributing their views over development options. Agger's (2012) belief that public participation is usually dominated by a minority of vocal participants appears to hold true.

The discord between the potential 62% target audience and three per cent observed participation emphasises that the previously identified barriers are significant in practice. Participants who self-identified as being interested in planning were asked why they had not previously participated, with answers coded into six main response categories (Table 13).

Table 13: Reasons for not previously participating in planning (self-identified by individuals stating an interest in planning)

Reason for not participating	Number of participants
Did not know how or where to participate	24
Unaware that could participate	19
Lack motivation to attend events	8
Believed that were too young	7
Feared views would not be listened to or taken seriously	7
Lack time	2

Students self-identified two significant reasons for not participating: being unaware of how to participate, and being unaware that they could participate. These two reasons had not previously been covered within the literature reviewed, but were recognised by interviewee KI3. It is apparent that the marketing of participation events firstly does not reach enough young people, particularly the potential 62% target audience previously observed. Secondly, the information that does reach young people may not be presented explicitly enough for young people to understand that they can attend, or how and where they can participate.

Although marketing appears to potentially be important in improving participation rates, directly inviting young people to an event does not always result in widespread participation. KI7 recalled that students were emailed about a Neighbourhood Planning event they organised at a school, and hosted during a lunchtime, but only one student participated. This low attendance, despite an explicit, widely distributed invitation, highlights that improved marketing may not be the 'magic bullet' and that there are numerous, complex barriers to increasing youth participation in practice.

Two reasons provided by young people for not participating were previously covered within the literature. Several respondents perceived that they are too young to participate or that their views would not be taken seriously, although this viewpoint was not replicated by practitioners. Young people's self-awareness of negative perceptions confirms Matthews *et al.*'s (1999) barrier observations to a certain extent. However, as the mediating practitioners (as adults) hold positive perceptions, this barrier may be surmountable through staging of youth-specific events where young people can participate freely without fear of their views being suppressed by non-practitioner adults.

In contrast to wider public participation literature (Bourgon, 2009), only a small number of young people (two respondents; Table 13) recognised a lack of time as a reason for not previously participating. Time and cost constraints for participants may therefore not be as great as previously documented, and/or are more prominent from planning practitioner's perspectives. However, as KI1 noted youth participation in some longer-term public-sector projects was not sustained by individuals, the absence of time constraints being identified by young people could be due to lack of awareness of potential time requirements.

How do young people prefer to participate?

Although it has been identified that it is difficult to convert interest in planning into participation, understanding preferred participation methods is still important in helping to shape better places, as adopted methods need to extract information which can then be efficiently developed by practitioners or young people as co-producers. Young people used a wide variety of methods in the workshops to demonstrate what they wanted Plymouth to look like in 20 years. Lists and drawing were the two most popular methods adopted, although cartography, mind mapping and storytelling were utilised to lower degrees. Despite being constrained by the workshop method adopted, this variety of sub-methods utilised corresponds to the limited amounts of available guidance and academic literature, which suggest multiple ways of practising participation (RTPI, 2005).

The methods adopted by young people provided various means for diverse issues to be identified and presented, although many responses lacked additional depth by not providing detailed discussion or analysis explaining issue choices. This lack of additional depth could result from the methodological time constraints discussed previously, but is imperative as understanding the rationale behind choices is necessary to inform implementable planning decisions. Despite this lack of discussion, all methods adopted by the participants could be viewed as effective ways of identifying issues particularly important to young people, and therefore implementable in planning practice.

In accordance with academic literature and guidance, practitioners provided a wide variety of methods that they had previously adopted (Table 14). These methods varied from creating an Instagram 'post' illustrating development preferences, to 'virtual tours' discussing certain areas of the city. The detail of responses was described as broadly comparable between methods, although the larger scale methods such as physically outlining proposed development dimensions were explained to be more engaging and enjoyable for participants and practitioners alike, and therefore potentially more sustainable in maintaining participants' longer-term interest. Whilst the larger-scale, more time intensive methods were adopted for a variety of projects, from neighbourhood plans to public-sector-led regeneration projects, these methods were explained to be less frequently adopted for private-sector clients, particularly major house builders, due to cost concerns (K13).

Several young people suggested that participatory processes could be improved to make participating more accessible, with the hosting of youth-specific events in schools a commonly promoted method. These suggestions highlight that event location is potentially as important as the content of the session itself. The requirement to proactively engage with young people was also widely acknowledged by practitioners as the utopian approach to engage young people meaningfully, but potentially limited due to viability concerns of conducting additional time consuming (thus costly) participation events.

Table 14: A selection of the youth participation methods previously utilised by key informants

'Virtual tour', whereby practitioners explore the development area and take a series of photos and videos. This material is then presented to participants as a slideshow and used as discussion points at events. (KI5)

Presenting Local Plan proposals and topics in school halls and letting young people put stickers against favoured approaches. (KI1)

Designing an outline of development onto the ground and measuring the heights of proposed buildings, as part of a 'Planning by Design' consultation for a development of 5 houses in a small community. (KI2)

Presentation for secondary school students as part of a Neighbourhood Plan process, with young people asked to subsequently fill out a "newspaper-style, tabloidy" questionnaire. (KI7)

Postcard/Instagram post from the future. Participants visualise that they are living within the proposed development and present what they particularly like/dislike about their new community. (KI5)

Are young people capable of identifying relevant issues?

The key informants widely perceived young people's involvement in the planning as positive, and arguably fundamental to the system itself. These findings contrast the literature that portrayed adult perceptions of young people as being unable to contribute and comprehend issues (Matthews *et al.*, 1999). KI4 commented that,

"it is better to have more young people because it is almost more their future that is at stake, that is what the planning system is there to do: meet the needs of future generations".

Positively for promoting youth participation, there was widespread agreement that it was up to practitioners themselves to make events more user-friendly and accessible. Where occasional negative comments about contributions of young people's input and abilities were made, they were framed by practitioners as also being indicative of wider public trends. In accordance with the broad variety in the levels of interest in planning outlined earlier, detail and engagement amongst workshop responses varied greatly. Within the varied levels of detail and engagement, many responses with relatively low levels of detail were still able to identify either unique or important issues, demonstrating that quantity does not necessarily correlate with quality. However, a small minority of responses came in the form of no response (n=8), or bore very little relevance to the task set (n=2), such as providing illustrations of alien invasions (Figure 7).



Males, 14. Responded not at all interested in planning

Figure 7: Examples of youth workshop responses that bore very little relevance to the task set

Most responses identified one to five issues that the individual wanted to be addressed (Figure 8). These responses tended to encompass a couple of sentences or annotations on a drawing, with broad concepts such as 'more jobs' briefly introduced. Importantly for increasing youth participation, the widespread extent of these responses demonstrates that many young people have the ability to articulate ideas that can be used as a starting point for creating better places.

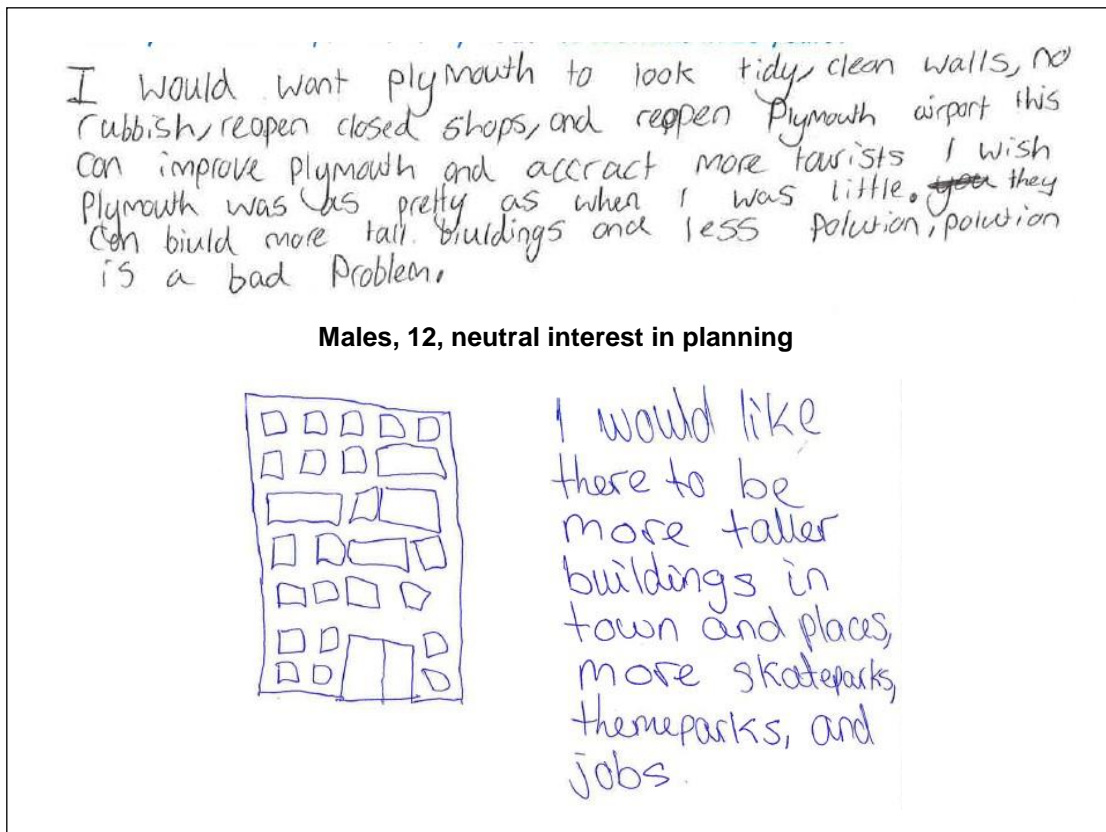


Figure 8: Examples of youth workshop responses that identified one to five issues

Several responses demonstrated more significant thought and engagement (Figure 9), particularly given the time constraints. In addition to the increased quantity of issues identified, these responses tended to provide an additional layer of detail or awareness, by commenting on more marginalised issues such as provision of housing for the homeless. Despite still requiring additional input and guidance to be implemented into planning practice, the individuals providing these responses offer important perspectives necessary for deeper discussions. As the two examples in Figure 9 were provided by individuals who self-identified little or no interest in planning, it also is testament that young people do not necessarily have to be interested in planning to provide engaged responses.



Female, 12, no interest in planning (above)

Female, 14, neutral interest in planning (below)

- More interactive things on the way for children eg: puppet shows
- Nicer/safer pavements
- Places where teenagers can go to learn eg: baby sitting courses for (14-16) year olds.
- Places where young people can volunteer easily for care homes
- More homes for the homeless (One large bed-sit)
- Leisure activities for teens and sport places
- Make a bigger/larger industry for business/healthcare or fashion - make a mark.
- Parks for young children (little lakes)
- Local miniature care homes.
- More natural places
- Local superstores
- Airport
- More security/safety
- Jobs are to normal and limited
- Some city oddities (protection)
- Bring different qualifications in colleges for business or plastic surgeon/counsellor etc
- Letterers to clean streets
- Better transport
- Tourism eg: cruises.
- Drakes Island - hotel for wedding etc
- Less 'scrabby' nightclubs and more larger nightclubs attractions
- Something to attract people to make money eg: Zoo

Figure 9: Examples of youth workshop responses that demonstrated more highly engaged levels of detail and concepts

The issues identified amongst the positive workshop responses can be illustrated within three main categories, with some individual responses not necessarily encompassing a single category, but representing issues from a combination of categories:

Key local planning issues: A lot of the issues and locations identified are ongoing concerns acknowledged in previous and current PCC planning documents. For example, several respondents identified the re-opening of the city's airport and the renovation of Drake's Island as important issues needing to be addressed in the future (Figures 8 and 9). Whilst these issues could have been recognised from media coverage, the general lack of prior awareness to the topic of planning demonstrated by the youth participants could mean that young people are capable of self-identifying issues acknowledged as important by professional planners.

General planning issues: In addition to the Key Local Planning Issues, many respondents identified issues relevant within national planning policy, such as sustainable transport and environmental protection. Transport issues were identified across a wide range of scales, from local pedestrian crossings to more strategic, regional issues such as bus connectivity and the potential for bus lanes to promote sustainable travel by reducing bus journey times. This awareness of issues at multiple scales could mean that young people, as those more likely to use buses or walk due to non-car driver status, are particularly useful in identifying and addressing sustainable transport issues that may otherwise not be identified by much of the wider public.

Non-planning issues: A small number of issues that could not be addressed by the planning system were identified. For example, issues related to permanent sunny weather (n=1), planting trees that grow money (n=1), or improving the local football team (n=4).

As most participants identified at least one 'Key Local' or 'General' planning issue, the workshop results suggest that the negative perceptions of young people as lacking the capability to effectively participate effectively or identify complex planning issues (Matthews *et al.*, 1999) are broadly unsubstantiated. However, there are some concerns that the young people who participated predominantly focused on planning for young people, rather than themselves as future adults. These findings also match much of the youth participation literature focusing upon case studies whereby young people design spaces for themselves or other young people (Rogers, 2006), but it is still unclear to what extent young people can plan for longer-temporal scales (i.e. for themselves as adults). Most participants identified a desire for, or predominantly focused upon, Plymouth having more youth-orientated spaces such as skate parks or fast-food restaurants. Whilst focusing upon youth spaces can be positive, as it provides a viewpoint potentially otherwise marginalised, it could negatively divert attention from young people's other valuable contributions. This is demonstrated by KI1's observation that

“with young people in particular you kind of know that they are going to say that they want a place to go and hang out”.

Practitioners Perspectives: The Importance of Viability and the Role of Political Interventions

Despite the consensus that young people should be involved in planning practice, practitioners emphasised that viability is currently the most important consideration when designing and implementing wider public participation. The viability of targeting marginal groups such as young people was identified as being particularly crucial. These perspectives correlate to the literature identified concerns of youth participation being time and cost intensive to implement (Spicer and Evans, 2006). The importance of viability for the private-sector practitioners was perhaps encapsulated most succinctly by KI5, who explained that:

“viability is key... I don’t think that they [private-sector clients] will willingly invest more money [in youth participation] until they recognise, almost by default, that it is the right thing for them financially”

Despite many private-sector practitioners suggesting youth participation may be better incorporated into public-sector practice, based upon a perception of reduced public-sector financial imperatives, KI1 added that the central government-enforced budget cuts have placed increased scrutiny on participation investment:

“It is continual [public-sector] cuts, so always arguing the value of what we are doing and the importance of it... we are [now] much more focused around ‘what’s the impact of what we are doing? How valuable is it?’”

Private-sector practitioners identified increasing participation as potentially viable by reducing an application’s ‘planning risk’ (KI’s 3, 4 and 5), or the likelihood for expensive objections and appeals later in the application process. In addition, there are signs that Localism has positively impacted the attitude of practitioner’s private-sector clients towards investing in participation. KI3 acknowledged that, whilst not universally accepted by developers,

“with the onset of Localism and the Coalition government it [public participation] has kind of had increasingly more weight attached to it... there is a kind of growing trend towards developers really putting time into it”.

If this increased awareness of first-order participatory benefits can be more readily combined with the high levels of engagement that several young people demonstrated in the workshops, there is arguably an opportunity to demonstrate to private-sector developers that increased investment in youth participation can be viable.

Improved communication and governance structures were identified as opportunities to increase viability of public-sector youth participation. KI1 explained that information from young people in a non-planning-specific competition was reviewed to help guide the Plymouth Plan, therefore providing a more efficient use of information that the council already possessed, yet this approach was more of an exception than the norm. If PCC’s horizontal governance and communication could be further improved, large quantities of planning relevant information can potentially be gained and shared between departments. In terms of viability, re-use of existing information can reduce the need to commit significant resources to multiple youth participation projects, making the process more cost efficient and/or focusing

resources on adequately conducting effective events. In addition, this reduction in participation events could mean that young people are less likely to experience consultation fatigue resulting from numerous departments seeking their time and opinions.

When asked whether central government intervention in the form of youth participation-specific legislation or policy would be beneficial to uptake of the practice, many practitioners acknowledged that central interventions may be the only ways in which private-sector clients would invest more resources. However, there were widespread concerns that this kind of intervention may not be universally beneficial to the practice of youth participation, with many developers potentially responding by merely adopting the practice in a tokenistic, 'tick-box' manner.

Summary

Objective 1: What is the desire amongst young people to participate within the planning system?

As only 38% of respondents showed little interest in participating, the sample responses demonstrate that there could be a sufficient latent interest in planning (i.e. 62%) to potentially promote increased levels of youth participation. However, this latent interest does not always translate into widespread participation, with only three per cent of the sample having previously done so. Key informant interviews also provided anecdotal evidence supporting the under-representation of young people. The reasons identified by young people for not participating correlate to those presented in the literature to varying degrees, with the most frequently cited reasons of lack of awareness in the ability to be included and how to participate not previously covered widely in the literature. In advance of reviewing the methods applied to engage young people with planning, it is important to acknowledge that a lack of effective marketing may be significantly contributing to the low number of participants being included within process in the first place.

Objective 2: What viable methods can be used to capture young people's opinions to inform planning practice?

Within planning practice there is a wide knowledge base of methods that effectively engage young people with the planning system. Young people demonstrated, during the workshop sessions, that non-time-consuming methods can prompt meaningful discussion and capture opinions. However, many of the responses provided could be perceived as lacking sufficient depth to be directly implemented into policy, and also focus upon youth-centric spaces. Young people proposing youth-specific events in locations such as schools illustrates that where the event is held is also an important consideration for method choice, but discussions with practitioners demonstrate that utilising viable methods is key to enable increased youth participation within both the public- and private-sectors.

Objective 3: What are the values and merits of youth participation within the planning system?

Young people identified numerous planning-relevant issues, with the capability to view these issues at a variety of scales and from the perspective as a service end-user potentially useful to assist planning in shaping better places. These results suggest the negative perceptions of young people identified in wider youth literature

could be considered unsubstantiated in the case of planning. Practitioner's belief that young people's involvement is fundamental to the planning system suggests that the negative perceptions of young people's ability, widely discussed as potential barriers in the literature, are not reciprocated by practitioners. Practitioners also demonstrated a desire to make complex issues more understandable, thus making events more accessible to young people and more frequently receive the valued contributions anecdotally received from existing (but infrequent) youth participation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The overarching aim of this paper has been to establish if youth participation in planning has the interest, capability and potential to shape better places, with the use of a case study of Plymouth. The first section of this discussion therefore addresses this main aim, whilst arguing the inherent complexities of reaching a definitive conclusion. Considering these complexities, and within the context of a discord between previous academic literature and planning practice, a pragmatic framework aimed at increasing youth participation in planning in England is then introduced and discussed. Whilst acknowledging that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to conducting youth participation exercises, the framework is used to examine how academia, practice and policy makers can collaboratively contribute to youth participation practices that benefit all stakeholders.

From the results observed, young people arguably have the *interest* and *capability* to help shape better places through youth participation. It is important to note that this interest and capability is by no means universal. Additionally, the levels of capability shown could most certainly have been better harvested into fully implementable planning policy and decisions had more guidance been provided for the practical task, although this was by design given this paper's purpose as an academic exercise in understanding young people's general ability.

However, in responding to the initial aim, it is important to emphasise the word *potential*. As such, whilst young people possess the *potential* to shape better places in terms of capability, contemporary planning practices do not effectively provide them with the *potential* to demonstrate this ability. The results in this paper have further strengthened the existing academic evidence base demonstrating young people's ability to effectively participate, with practitioners willing to adopt the practice more widely if viability can be demonstrated. Key informant observations of increased youth participation potentially reducing planning risk demonstrates Irvin and Stansbury's (2004) wider public participation benefit of breaking the 'deadlock' and reduced litigation costs from the youth perspective. Therefore, a combination of young people's capability in identifying important issues within a time-constrained exercise and the potential to reduce planning risk could help further promote the viability of increased youth participation. Despite the apparent intent of Localism providing an opportunity to enhance youth participation levels, the practice is still alarmingly low, although similarly low uptake still appears to be prevalent in wider public participation.

Most alarmingly, the discord between practice and academia observed by Knowles-Yanez (2005) and Frank (2006) is still evidently remarkably large. This discord is particularly evident in terms of the contrasting perceptions of young people's abilities and interest in planning, and the participation methods adopted. For example, young

people and practitioners view participation barriers in a much more simplistic fashion, with practitioner’s generally correlating interest and participation. This simplification of low participation being attributed to a lack of youth interest, combined with a lack of practitioner awareness of other academically identified barriers and effective marketing, could demonstrate why the conversion of potential interest into participation in events is so low in practice. Conversely, where planning practice is maybe too simplistic in understanding the causes for low participation, academia may be too simplistic in accepting the severity of practitioner’s viability concerns, or ignore them by principally adopting economically unviable youth participation methods.

Towards increased youth participation: A conceptual framework

This paper proposes a conceptual framework aimed at iteratively increasing youth participation from its currently low level (Figure 10). The framework disaggregates youth participation into five stages, which constitute two focus areas for consideration when holding an event: marketing and methods. The framework considers both academic and practitioner perspectives, whilst drawing upon lessons learned in arranging the youth participation events for this research.

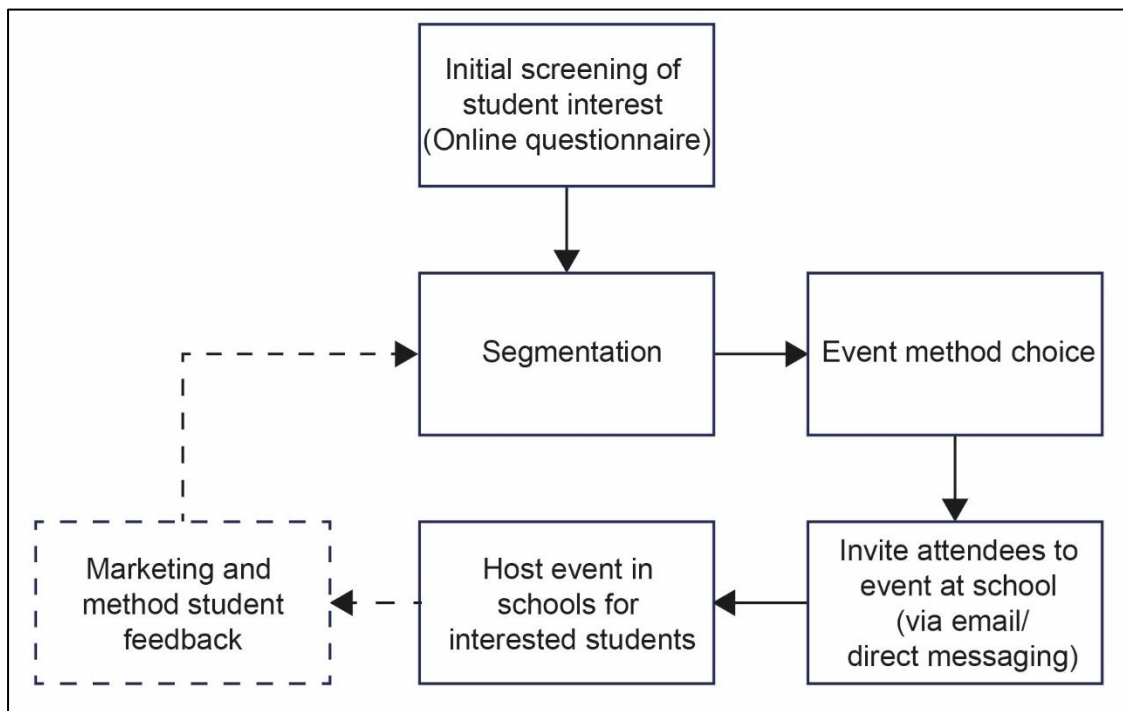


Figure 10: A conceptual framework for increasing youth participation in planning (Source: author)

Events are proposed to be located in schools, in response to youth and practitioner observations that events exclusively targeting young people would be most effective. Establishing a network of schools could be difficult, as observed as part of this research. However, a combined effort between practitioners, local authorities and professional institutions such as the RTPi could spread costs and potentially enhance the likelihood of schools responding positively.

The need for more effective marketing

The marketing of youth participation needs to be significantly improved to facilitate increased participation and convert the relatively large captive audience into event attendance. Whilst much of the academic focus has previously been upon methods employed, to increase the uptake of youth participation practice young people need to firstly be aware that there is an event happening that they can participate in, before they then make the decision of whether they would like to participate through use of a certain method. As an area of youth participation currently under-researched, future research should focus upon establishing which (economically viable) marketing methods are particularly effective.

An important aspect of any marketing approach is segmentation, which is the process of defining meaningful sub-groups of individuals or objects (Wedel and Kamakura, 1998). Segmentation of young people could be used to identify a more precise marketing target audience and increase the viability of such investment. Sustained academic research can support this process by establishing target segments through surveys, in turn addressing this study's relative limitation of being unable to identify distinct segments through inferential statistical analysis.

Whilst segmentation is crucial in promoting efficient marketing, it is important to acknowledge that young people have the right to participate engrained in law, despite the relative lack of enforcement. This right to participate potentially undermines segmentation approaches, as initial screening may be required to establish whether non-targeted young people would like to participate, to eradicate the potential to further marginalise certain groups. Once a network of schools is established, all young people could be invited to complete a relatively short online screening questionnaire to identify segments for future marketing. In the interests of ethical concerns, randomly selected participants could then be invited to participate in events held at the schools, with different schools chosen for events to also reduce the potential for consultation fatigue or the same perspectives being repeatedly heard. Within this approach, first-order benefits could be extracted by practitioners via more informed decisions, and second-order benefits could be realised for both schools and students themselves by improving 'soft' skills such as critical thinking, communication and negotiation, which could then be deployed in other aspects of the education system.

The need for more viable methods

For increased participation to be sustainable over the longer-term, engaging and cost-effective methods must be utilised to maintain young people's interest whilst providing viability for practitioners. Maintaining interest is particularly important in contemporary times, as the increasing weight given to feedback provided on web services to inform individual's future decisions holds the potential to rapidly create a downward spiral, if negative participation experiences are distributed in such a global format (Berthon *et al.*, 2012). However, this is not currently a major concern due to youth participation's low uptake.

The large amounts of literature that provide abundant engaging methods suggests that maintaining interest should not be difficult in idealistic terms. However, some of the literature-derived methods do not meet practitioner's viability requirements, and therefore may be dismissed without greater understanding. The adoption of larger

scale methods by private-sector practitioners may be positive in terms of methods introduced and developed in the academic literature, particularly given the previously outlined time and cost constraints. Whilst academic perspectives are crucial to enhance youth participation, future methodological research approaches need to be tailored to facilitate increased uptake through practitioner acceptance. Effective collaboration between academia and practitioners in future practice-based research provides opportunities to share the vast amount of distinct knowledge, and in turn refine methods to more viably achieve the literature-observed positive results for practitioners.

The role of central government in facilitating increased youth participation

The practitioner observed improvement in attitudes towards public participation resulting from Localism stimulated discussion as to whether direct central government legislative or policy interventions could be used to increase youth participation. However, any intervention is arguably now even lower in any governmental priority list given the dominance of Brexit negotiations, with the ex-chair of the Social Mobility Commission recently accusing the government of lacking *“the necessary bandwidth to ensure that the rhetoric of healing social division is matched with the reality”* (Milburn, 2017). This realistic lack of intervention highlights the importance of promoting an iterative business-case approach, that utilises methods efficiently extracting useful information from young people, in facilitating increased youth participation.

Whilst not directly addressing planning practice’s current inability to meet the fundamental right of young people to participate, improved central government guidance could help establish, and then increase adoption of best practice. Effective guidance is particularly important when considering Willow’s (2002) observations that adults contribute to the lack of youth participation by not confidently understanding how to best incorporate young people into participatory processes. Partially motivated by governmental costs, the piecemeal implementation of the Taylor Review (2012) recommendations has resulted in vague central government for practitioners in performing participation in general (Table 1), but also decentralised responsibility for subject specific guidance to relevant professional institutes. However, institutional guidance for youth participation is currently either outdated and inaccessible, with the Chartered Association of Building Engineers’ most recent (2004) guidance potentially not reflecting current best practice, with the RTPI’s (2017) ‘Youth Participation Toolkit’ a useful resource but difficult to locate⁵. It is therefore understandable that practitioners may find it difficult to identify viable practices. Consequently, more easily accessible, up-to-date guidance will need to be provided by either central government or the relevant professional institutes if youth participation is to be more widely practised. In support of this increased guidance, implementation of central government-endorsed annual best practice awards, as recommended by the Taylor Review, could also provide cost-effective and regularly updatable ways of sharing successful youth participation practices.

⁵ Both through an RTPI topic search, and as the 19th most highly rated Google search using the term ‘RTPI young people’

Concluding remarks

It is evident that a discussion around the topic of youth participation in planning is required in England. Despite the opportunities presented by Localism, the level of discussion falls behind many other nations, including some who are significantly less economically developed, and appears to be endemic of a wider democratic deficit. Given the relatively low levels of disinterest and the practical capabilities of young people, participation can provide numerous benefits to planning practice and participants, but the alarmingly low uptake conceivably correlates to this lack of discussion. Whilst increased discussion is a logical starting point, this paper has most importantly identified the need to incorporate any discussion effectively into all aspects of planning practice, integrating academic, political and practitioner perspectives. The hypothesised framework introduced may be an imperfect solution, but demonstrates the need to significantly progress away from the current piecemeal approaches.

Further academic research is required to address the existing lack of knowledge relating to effective marketing and viable methods, but any research design needs to fundamentally consider practical implementation to provide genuine impact. For practitioners themselves, partnership with academic institutions can help guide this research and provide a 'live' test environment. Use of planning Master's students provides opportunities for practitioners to reduce financial risks associated with relatively unproven practices, whilst providing future practitioners with the greater skills and understanding required to sustain any increased youth participation. Although 'hard' governmental policy interventions in the form of compulsory youth participation legislation would be detrimental to the practice, softer measures such as government-endorsed best practice guidance can (cost-effectively) share any collaborative academic-practitioner research benefits with the wider planning practice. It is therefore with great hope that this paper can be the catalyst for an evidence base facilitating sustainable increases in youth participation to shape better places, and arguably transcend planning in the longer-term by creating truly 'active citizens' whom use these places.

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