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Chapter 16

Addressing the Challenges of Children and Young People's

Participation:

Considering Time and Space

E. Kay M. Tisdall

Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a platform for children and young people's¹ participation worldwide. Article 12 has been a rallying cry to promote children and young people's human rights to be involved in decisions affecting them. While Article 12 itself does not use the word "participation," the United Nations Committee's description captures the hopes for children and young people's participation:

. . . ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes. (2009, para. 3)

Yet, as children and young people's participation has gained hold in policy and practice rhetoric in many countries and contexts (e.g., see Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010; Tisdall, Butler, & Gadda, 2014), its translation into reality has led to dilemmas and

challenges in practice. A very similar list of challenges can be generated across countries (e.g., Hinton, 2008; Lansdown, 2011; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010; Thomas, 2007)w:

1. **Tokenism.** Children and young people may be consulted but their views have no discernible impact on decisions. The policy process often leaves insufficient time to involve children and young people meaningfully.
2. **Lack of feedback.** Children and young people are asked to participate but they do not know what has happened with their contributions.
3. **Who is included or excluded.** Some children and young people risk being “over-consulted,” frequently asked for their views, and become frustrated at the lack of subsequent action. Other children and young people are never reached by participation activities. Some children and young people are only invited to participate on certain topics: for example, disabled children and young people have expressed frustration at only being consulted about issues around their disability.

The children and young people consulted are often presumed to be speaking on behalf of their peers, although they are not supported to be representative in this way.

3. **Consultation but not dialogue.** Children and young people are frequently consulted in one-off activities but are not involved over time in on-going, respectful dialogue.
4. **Adult processes and structures exclude children and young people.**

Children and young people’s participation is frequently not integrated into how policy decisions are made, implemented and evaluated. It is seen as a

specialist activity and not a mainstream one. As a result, children and young people's participation risks being side-lined, if their advice and recommendations run counter to views of other, more powerful, groups.

5. Lack of sustainability. Funding for children and young people's participation is frequently short-term. As a result, supporting staff may move on, the groups dissipate and the participative process stops. (Barnardo's Scotland, Children in Scotland, and the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, 2011, p. 1)

For those who advocate for, and seek to support, meaningful, sustainable, and effective participation by children and young people, what might the solutions be, the new avenues to consider, the theoretical ideas that might assist?

To address such questions, a collaborative program of research and exchange has been undertaken through the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) at the University of Edinburgh to formulate, refine, and test ideas. This includes national and international networks, such as the seminar series (2002–2004) “Challenging Social Inclusion: Perspectives for and from Children and Young People” and the cross-country seminar (2005–2006) “Theorising Children's Participation: International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives,” which led to the international academic network (2008–2011) “Theorising Children's Participation: Learning Across Countries and Across disciplines,” working with academic, practitioner, and young collaborators from Brazil, India, South Africa, and the UK. The program involved a number of empirical research projects, including a three-year examination of school councils in Scotland (“Having a Say at School” [HASAS]). Most recently, a project (“Children and Young People's

Participation: From Fashion Accessory to Part of the Fabric”) supported CRFR to work with nongovernmental organization (NGO) partners to facilitate improved mechanisms to involve children and young people in national policymaking in Scotland. While not wanting unhelpfully to separate out children and young people’s participation in decision making about them as individuals, this collaborative program—and thus this chapter—concentrates on their involvement in *collective* decision making.

Within the field of children and young people’s participation, discussions have often relied on very influential typologies—such as Hart’s ladder (1992), Treseder’s subsequent circle (1997), and Shier’s stepwise progression (2001). These have been very useful to challenge policy and practice; they tend to emphasize the lack of children and young people’s participation and thus refresh those involved to advocate for more. Indeed, there has been substantial change in many parts of the world, including Scotland and the UK more generally, with a proliferation of participation activities (see, for example, special issues of *Children, Youth and Environments* (2006 and 2007); Hinton, 2008; Tisdall, Davis, Hill, & Prout, 2006). With this growth, these typologies have been insufficient to address the challenges in children and young people’s participation described above and thus to assist moving such participation forward (for discussion see Tisdall, 2012). More recently, a number of committed participation advocates have sought theoretical resources that can assist children and young people’s participation. For example, Mannion (2007) covers a range of potential theoretical perspectives, from “generationing” to actor network theory, that could acknowledge participation’s relational aspects. Thomas (2012) explores Honneth’s theory of recognition. Cockburn has an ongoing interest in citizenship, rights, and interdependence (e.g., 2013).

A provocative theoretical area is development studies, which has a longer history than the children and young people's field of advocating for—and looking critically at— participation.² Development studies and work embraced the concept of participation in the 1960s and 1970s, inspired by its radical roots in social movements (Leal, 2010). By the 1980s, participation had become an essential “ingredient” in the development industry. Community participation could ensure that beneficiaries' views were listened to and cultural differences better understood. Chambers and colleagues (e.g., Chambers, 1983) are particularly well known for having developed “bottom-up” approaches of engaging with people in local communities, especially with those who risked being excluded from more formal consultations and research. Development manuals enshrined such methods and an industry grew up around them. Conceptually, participation became linked to improving services and governance, recognizing that the state had to be able to respond and to be responsive, strengthening both government and governance (e.g., Gaventa, 2004).

Throughout its history in development, participation and its associated activities have been criticized. Participation can be coopted to enable those with power to maintain the status quo—through quelling political opposition or coopting the marginalized into mainstream processes. Emphasizing self-help and local participation in developing services can be doubly advantageous by diverting demands on the state to local initiatives while increasing support for the current regime (Vengroff, 1974). Cornwall (2008), writing over thirty years later, notes that such supposed empowerment can instead frustrate citizens who feel the state has not fulfilled its obligations, thus leading to resistance rather than support. Debates have emerged about the “evangelical”

proliferation of participative methodology (see Gaventa, 2004). Critics highlight examples of poor-quality data collection, described as extractive rather than empowering (e.g., Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Too many activities concentrate on engaging people and too few on ensuring accountability and impact (Hart, 2008). Cooke and Kothari (2001, pp. 8–9) put forward a harsh critique, which can equally be asked of activities outwith the “majority world”:³

The tyranny of decision-making and control: Do participatory facilitators override existing legitimate decision-making processes?

The tyranny of the group: Do group dynamics lead to participatory decisions that reinforce the interests of the already powerful?

The tyranny of method: Have participatory methods driven out others which have advantages participation cannot provide?

These questions, and the other critiques above, illuminate why some of the challenges for children and young people’s participation continue despite the growing political rhetoric of support and the increase in activities.

This chapter draws on this history of discussing participation, in development studies, to apply to the “minority world” context of Scotland. It explores certain requirements developed by Cornwall and colleagues for inclusive “participatory sphere institutions,” with a particular emphasis on space-time. With these theoretical resources, the chapter goes on to examine the empirical and experiential findings of HASAS on school councils, and “From Fashion Accessory to Part of the Fabric” on involving children and young people in national policymaking in Scotland. It concludes by considering the opportunities for change, by applying new ways of looking at current

trends on children and young people's participation in Scotland and potentially elsewhere.

The Spaces of Participation

Cornwall and Coelho (2007, p. 1) write about the “participatory sphere.” This sphere contains “hybrid new democratic spaces” at the interface between the state and society; these spaces are also often intermediary, ways for negotiation, information, and exchange. Cornwall and Coelho’s book explores some of the gaps between “normative expectations and empirical realities” (2007, p. 5) for such spaces. Bringing together the lessons from the case studies in their book, Cornwall and Coelho (2007) develop five requirements for participatory sphere institutions to be inclusive and effect change:

1. People need more than invitations to participate: they need to recognize themselves as citizens, rather than beneficiaries or clients.
2. Representative claims must be considered critically and mechanisms to be representative must be in place.
3. Structures are not enough. The motives of those who participate—including state actors—can be competing and are in constant negotiation.
4. Three factors are essential for change: involvement by a “wide spectrum of popular movements and civil associations, committed bureaucrats and inclusive institutional designs” (p. 9).
5. Participation is a process over time and must be situated alongside other political institutions, within their own social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Cornwall and Coelho (2007) use the word “spaces” in their book title—*Spaces for Change?*—and the word “spaces” can be found frequently in other works by Cornwall on participation (e.g., Cornwall, 2008; Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000). She makes distinctions between the invited spaces of participation and the ones formed by people themselves. Invited spaces are created by the powerful—the policymakers and the decision makers—and others are invited in. These are contrasted to spaces “that people create for themselves” (Cornwall, 2008, p. 275), where people come together with fewer differences of status and power, usually because they have something in common.

While less obvious than her use of “spaces,” threaded through the discussions of participation spaces is attention to time. Cornwall (2008), for example, sharply criticizes the influential participation typologies (e.g., Arnstein’s ladder of participation, the basis for Hart’s ladder for children’s participation) for producing static depictions of participatory activities. In their normative judgments about “good” and “bad” participation, these typologies fail to consider change across projects and processes. A project might be at a particular step on the ladder (e.g., low down, at informing) at a particular time, which may open up possibilities to be at a higher ladder step later (e.g., high up, at partnership). Consideration of time is also given at other points in her writings. For example, she writes of “participation fatigue” as people become disenchanted by invitations to participate because nothing has resulted from their previous participation. She advocates recognizing those not included in participation, either because they are deliberately not invited or because people self-exclude. She particularly here mentions the timing and duration of participatory activities, which may discount those with caring or work responsibilities.

Cornwall herself (e.g., 2004a, 2004b) makes references to certain key theorists and ideas of human geography. Human geography has an extensive theoretical history of theorizing and debating space and time. Fundamentally, these rich theoretical discussions critique a notion of space as a “neutral container, a blank canvas which is filled by human activity, something outwith human activity” (Hubbard & Kitchin, 2004, p. 4). Instead, human geographers perceive space as a social rather than merely a physical phenomenon, with reciprocal influences between people and spaces. As Gallagher (2006, p. 161) writes, “At its simplest, the term ‘social space’ can be seen as a way of recognising that space is produced by people (rather than pre-existing), and that spaces in turn shape people (rather than being inert or neutral).” Massey (1999) explicitly brings in a temporal dimension to human geography, critiquing the philosophical association of stasis with spatial and change with time. Instead, space and time are inseparable, and “the spatial is integral to the production of history, and thus to the possibility of politics, just as the temporal is to geography” (Massey, 1994, p. 269). Spaces, therefore, are not static; time, mobility, and change work constitutively with them; spaces and time are relational, creating and composed of human and material relationships.

This chapter takes forward Cornwall and Coelho’s requirements for inclusive participatory sphere institutions to evaluate and critique practices of children and young people’s participation. Within this generality, the chapter specifically considers space-time to further illuminate and challenge practices.

The Two Projects

“Having a Say at School” was a three-year partnership project that was conducted between 2007 and 2009 by Children in Scotland (the national umbrella organization for

the children's sector across Scotland) and CRFR at the University of Edinburgh. The project aimed to explore systematically the predominant structural form of children and young people's participation in Scottish schools: school councils.

School councils (also called pupil councils) have no statutory definition in Scotland. The official Welsh website on school councils provides one common understanding of the term:

A school council is a representative group of pupils elected by their peers to represent their views and raise issues with the senior managers and governors of their school. The school council can also take forward initiatives and projects on behalf of their peers, and be involved in strategic planning and processes such as the School Development Plan, governing body meetings and staff appointments.⁴

HASAS undertook surveys of all thirty-two Scottish local education authorities,⁵ a postal school survey of all secondary schools and a representative sample of primary schools⁶ (separate questionnaires were sent to the adult adviser/head teachers and to the school council at each school), and case studies of six illustrative schools. These case studies involved focus groups with pupil council members at the start and end of the academic year, a survey of pupil council members, staff interviews, and documentary analysis. Of these six case studies, two were followed in more depth, with the added methods of observation of school council meetings throughout the year and a survey of students who were not members of the pupil council. Ethical considerations, particularly in terms of informed and ongoing consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, were of high importance. A range of stakeholders, including children and young people, advised the

project at key points and assisted with developing and piloting field instruments. Further information about the research design, including details on methods, ethics, statistical and qualitative analysis, and findings, can be found at the project website.⁷

“Children and Young People’s Participation: From Fashion Accessory to Part of the Fabric” took place from 2011 to 2012 (referred to below as the Participation Initiative). This initiative was also a partnership between CRFR at the University of Edinburgh and Children in Scotland, with the addition of a third partner, Barnardo’s Scotland. Barnardo’s is a leading children’s charity in Scotland, with particular commitment to and expertise on involving children and young people. The initiative was a knowledge exchange partnership, based on a process of action-learning.

The initiative used findings on children and young people’s participation to assist organizations to support such participation in national policymaking. It did this by exploring sustainable ways of working with members of the Scotland’s Children’s Sector Forum, the policy network for the children’s sector in Scotland.⁸ The initiative undertook three types of knowledge exchange activities: a national Think Tank event, wider discussions and project team reflections; a program developed and run by Barnardo’s Scotland to support organizations to involve children and young people; and dissemination of accessible briefings, conference presentations, and published articles. The work was evaluated with a series of interviews, surveys, and group meetings with those involved and certain policy and decision makers. Ethical protocols were developed for working with children and young people directly and indirectly through the initiative, as well as with other people and organizations. Further information about this initiative, and its outputs, can be found at the CRFR website.⁹

Below experiences and findings are brought together, with considerations particularly of space-time, before relating these to the requirements for inclusive participatory sphere institutions.

Inclusive Participatory Sphere Institutions? Considerations of Space-Time

Institutional Space-Time

Schools in Scotland are set in circumscribed locations and now often have protective walls and limited entrances to control who comes in and who leaves. Children and young people from ages 5 to 16 are expected to be in school¹⁰ during school hours, unless they are home-schooled. Generally schools in Scotland are tightly timed, frequently with bells or other signals to prepare for or instigate changes of mode, location, or people. Delays and tardiness are frowned upon, with pupils at risk of being penalized if they are late or elsewhere than required. Teaching staff are often concerned about time in their workday—how to fit in curriculum requirements with the everyday experiences in the classroom and how to manage their workloads (e.g., see Scottish Government, 2011).

As nonmandatory activities, school councils need to fit into institutional space-time and pressures. When school councils should meet, how often they should meet, and for how long they should meet are thus not always straightforward to answer. The school survey revealed that the most common pattern across Scotland was for school councils to meet once a month (34 percent of schools). Nineteen percent met twice a month; 14 percent met once each school term; the remainder (33 percent) met on an irregular basis. Sixty-one percent met during lesson times; 20 percent met during breaks or lunchtimes.

Councils at secondary schools were more likely to meet during breaks or lunchtimes than those at primary schools (30 percent of secondary vs. 19 percent of primary schools).

Wyness (2005) notes the problems of scheduling school councils, finding in his study that operating school councils during breaks signaled a lack of institutional commitment to the councils. Instead, the important place of school councils should be underlined by having them meet within class time, as a worthwhile commitment for those involved. Timing, thus, has symbolic and institutional value. Two of the six case-study schools make particular efforts to be inclusive in their scheduling. In one small school with many visiting specialists, the head teacher varied the day of school council meetings so that no council member missed one subject more than other members. The adult adviser in another school consulted the pupil council members on suitable dates and compared their individual schedules when setting meeting times.

When involving children and young people in national policymaking, institutional space-time is also critical—and often exclusionary. Policy activities are frequently scheduled during school hours. For example, if children and young people were to give oral evidence to a parliamentary committee, they would have to reschedule their activities. Policy-strategy meetings between leading statutory organizations and NGOs tend to be held during the day. While it may be convenient for policymakers to produce policies for consultation over holiday times, this proves particularly problematic for children and young people. The consultation over the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, for example, was from July to September 2012; school holidays in Scotland start at the end of June and last until the end of August, so children and young people could not easily be contacted during that time.

In the Participation Initiative, the Barnardo's program gave the adults involved the space-time to come together. This was highly regarded by those involved, but the larger impact on the organization, past the program activities, was difficult to achieve. As others have noted (e.g., Johnson, 2011), organizational systems can be very hard to shift, replicating some of the same barriers as in policymaking.

Having Enough Time

A complaint invariably made by participation workers (i.e., those facilitating participation activities) and sometimes by the participating children and young people is the lack of time given to involving children and young people meaningfully on a particular policy issue. Lack of time can be exclusionary for certain groups, such as disabled children and young people, whose communication methods require substantial amounts of time. Consultation time periods, the time between the policymakers issuing a document and when members of the public are invited to respond, are described as much too short to identify and engage children and young people, to work with them meaningfully, and then to feed the views back to the policymakers.

When children and young people are reacting to policy developments, the institutional time constraints are often problematic. Voice against Violence, a group of eight young experts on domestic abuse, worked to the key policymakers' timeline for the National Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People (2008–2011).¹¹ They found this timeline could push out their own agendas, as the group needed to shift their attention when they had opportunities to meet with influential policymakers in the Scottish government or local government. But when Voice against Violence was involved in forms of peer research, the timing of activities suited the young people rather

than continuously needing to fit into (adults') institutional timings. These research activities were set up for defined time periods and, at the end, the young people produced their findings and waited for the institutional—the policymakers'—responses. While timing was still recognized as tight, the young people did not describe it as exclusionary. They were able to organize and put forward their findings and recommendations.

Inadequate time to operate the school council was a strong and recurrent theme across Scottish schools (see also Cotmore, 2004; Wyse, 2001). In the school survey, "Not enough time to talk at meetings about all the issues" was identified as an obstacle by 55 percent of both school councils and school staff. Observations in the case-study schools often demonstrated the meetings' tight schedules. In all six case-study schools, the school council meetings had a similar format. They started with reading the previous meeting's minutes, followed by discussing the agenda or points raised by pupil council members. These introductory processes frequently took a great deal of time, with collective discussion or decision making "squeezed out."

Space-timing tensions continued outwith the school council meetings themselves. The school survey found that 38 percent of school councils and 46 percent of school staff selected the answer "Lack of time to collect other pupils' views" as a problem for their school council. In most case-study schools, a strong representative model was promoted: Members of the pupil council were elected from their class to represent their class members' views. In seeking to fulfill this representative function, concern was equally expressed about sessions taking place before school council meetings (so that pupil council members could solicit the ideas, problems, and priorities of those they represented) and sessions after each school council meeting (so they could share what

was discussed, decided, and done). These sessions varied markedly in quality and quantity, not only between schools but also within the same school. The processes varied greatly from class to class depending on individual teachers' preferences and priorities. In one school, these consultation and feedback sessions took place in the personal and social education classes, which were led by the same teacher. With this teacher's support, the time dedicated to these sessions were commented on positively by pupil council members. In other schools, pupil council members reported that they were not given enough time to speak to their classes. While all the case-study school councils sought to communicate with their fellow pupils, 70 percent of the pupils not currently on a school council wanted more information from their council representatives. The lack of space-time for such communication was an expressed weakness of the school councils.

Adult advisers are key to the success—or not—of most school councils (see also Maithes & Deuchar, 2006). The school survey showed that 68 percent of schools in Scotland had one staff member working with the school council, usually a senior teacher or head teacher. Adult advisers were pivotal organizationally to the school councils, from organizing elections, to setting up meetings and agendas, to liaising with school management structures. Adult advisers typically had to fit in these responsibilities within very busy teaching days, so lack of time was an issue for them.

Spaces and Time for Change?

On the surface, the purpose of involving children and young people in policymaking was clear within the Participation Initiative: Children and young people's participation should have an impact on policy decisions. In practice, other purposes may well support or run counter to this. For example, government consultations can provide a funding stream for

individuals and organizations; it can be astute, when there is a political rhetoric of involving children and young people and potential media attention, to be seen to do so (see Tisdall & Davis, 2004). These later purposes emphasize the process, rather than the impacts, of involving children and young people.

The purpose of school councils is not necessarily clear or consensual. As discussed in more detail in Tisdall (2012), a range of purposes apply to children and young people's participation generally:

1. To uphold children's rights and to fulfill legal responsibilities
2. To improve services and decision making, particularly in relation to consumer and service user involvement
3. For democratic education, to familiarize and inculcate children and young people into the ways of democracy
4. To improve children and young people's well-being and development.

In the research, the first of these was rarely referred to and was seldom influential.¹² Of more significance was consumer and service user involvement. In the school survey, school councillors stated that representing their fellow pupils, and making their school better, were the most important things that school councils should do. Further, some local authorities used school councils as a consultation network, and case-study schools showed how pupil councils were regularly used as consultation fora for school staff's ideas.

Adult advisers were worried about school councils being "whinging" forums, and research observations of school councils found that some were dominated by pupil council members passing on complaints. As a complaints mechanism, school councils

potentially provided the space-time to raise but not always to resolve such complaints, nor to ensure action was taken elsewhere. The school survey, for example, showed that a wide range of issues were discussed in school councils—but this range shrunk when it came to decisions being made, and even fewer decisions were implemented (a common finding across school council research—see Wyness, 2005; Wyse, 2001). More positively, certain school councils took pride in their achievements (e.g., improvements in playgrounds and school gardens). At its most positive, the consumer and service user discourse lead to personal problems being recognized as public ones, resulting in collective responses and responsibility.

The two purposes of democratic education and children's well-being and development were the dominant ones. School councils were predominantly seen as vehicles by which children and young people could practice formal democratic practices in terms of representation and meetings. Members would gain skills and confidence. The school council research confirms findings elsewhere that children and young people value participatory processes, when they are undertaken well, and the skills and positive feelings that result (Davies, Williams, & Yamashita, with Man-Hing, 2006). There can be, however, an emphasis on process and not actual influence on decisions. The head teacher in School A neatly captured this:

. . . I think the process in itself is worthwhile. Whereas for them [the school council] it's probably the outcomes; it's in their mind. But if we can get them some of their outcomes and allow them to take part in the process at the same time, I think that's a reasonable trade-off.

School councils in the research were more concerned about outcomes (what actions they would take and goals they would accomplish), while adults involved were more focused on processes within, and the symbolic value of, school councils. This led to frustration for some pupil council members.

Most school councils start anew each year, with fresh selection or elections. While this increases the number of students who have the chance to serve as a member,¹³ the case-study schools showed how this renewal led to a lack of continuity from the previous year's council. For example, in the case-study schools, explicit, robust handover processes did not exist between one year's council and the next. When asked about the achievements of last year's school council, the current year's council members had great trouble identifying any specific achievements. Current members had no structured mechanism to learn from, or shadow, the previous year's members. Similarly, should an adult adviser leave or take on another role, how councils functioned could change substantially. Success, therefore, was highly individualized due to a lack of connections over time, rather than being structurally supported and continuous.

In participation projects, the organization of participation space-times worked in at least three different ways for children and young people's groups. One way was to bring together children and young people, drawing typically from networks or services, in regard to a particular policy issue. A typical example would be the Children's Parliament, which was commissioned by the Scottish government to produce generally available consultative materials, and then itself consult with a range of groups across Scotland, for the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill consultation.¹⁴ This way of working is often a reactive response, particularly in terms of government funding (despite NGOs'

pleas to plan such activities long in advance) (Tisdall & Davis, 2004). A second way is to establish time-boundaried groups, like the Scottish Borders Youth Commission on Bullying,¹⁵ with the time tied to a particular remit to investigate an issue and make recommendations. This was a proactive commitment by the policymakers to give a set amount of resources (e.g., time, space, money, advice) to children and young people, and the time for setting up and establishing the group was accepted before proceeding on to their focused work. A third way is to have “standing groups” of children and young people who can be called upon to respond to particular issues. The most prominent in Scotland is the Scottish Youth Parliament,¹⁶ which brings together elected representatives aged 14 to 25. It provides regular briefings and responses to policy, has various set interactions with policymakers, and has well-developed systems to consult with children and young people more widely through face-to-face and social media methods.

In each way of organizing a participation space-time, examples can be found of having impact on policies. For example, one can track how children and young people’s views, with considerable support of the children’s sector, did eventually influence additional support needs policy (Tisdall & Davis, 2004) or provision for young people leaving care (Regulation of Care [Scotland] Act 2001). This is a reactive response to policy. The time-boundaried group has shown demonstrable “celebratory” successes. For example, the recommendations of Voice against Violence led to a ministerial announcement of funding for children’s support workers (Houghton, 2013). Standing groups notably have the capacity to react to a range of issues with relative speed and efficiency. A caveat would be that school councils in our research—an ideal standing

group from a policymaker's perspective—can be frustrated by being constantly asked to react to consultations, feeling that time for their own issues is limited.

Even if children and young people's views were being taken seriously by the decision makers, the institutional processes can seem lengthy to children and young people. Often, if changes are made, they are made well after such changes will have an impact on the children and young people involved. The institutional processes can mean that going back to the children and young people to let them know how their views were weighed and the results can fall into two categories. First, the feedback is timely, in terms of meeting children and young people's time spans, but superficial: The children and young people are thanked, headline findings are shared, but decisions are still in process. Second, the feedback is given after decisions are made, but the time has been so long that the children and young people may not be easily contacted to receive it (e.g., they have moved schools, services, or locations) and/or the length of time is frustrating. In neither case does feedback satisfy the children and young people involved.

Participation spaces for children and young people are regularly separated out from adults' participation spaces (see Morrow, 2005; Percy-Smith, 2010; Tisdall, 2008). School councils do not represent all the school stakeholders (e.g., teachers, support staff, parents); they consist solely of pupils. Positively, this can give children and young people their own spaces and time, ensure that their views are not overridden by adults, and encourage ways of communicating, sharing, and deciding that suit the children and young people (Cornwall, 2008). They can be places of resistance, laboratories of self-interest, or empowerment spaces (Kesby, 2007). Negatively, children and young people are removed from the space-times where decisions are made. Some power over decisions may be

given or taken by school councils: They regularly undertook fundraising efforts, and decisions were common about playground equipment. But a host of other decisions were not within their remit, from toilets to teaching to the curriculum; these were decided elsewhere. Unlike in some other countries (see Dürr, 2005), school councils in Scotland have no right of membership in school governance and were not included, in our research, on school management teams. Similarly, many participation activities are exclusive to children and young people, with adults present as facilitators but not participants themselves. With their views formed, children and young people may well then go and present their views in various ways (written, oral, using audiovisual or other media) to adult decision makers.

Exceptions to this segregation both illuminate the typical absence of adult–child space-times and the potential repercussions of this absence. For example, the Youth Commission on Alcohol¹⁷ recruited an advisory group, with members from the Scottish government, media, business, education, health, police, and NGOs. The contact with the advisory group proved pivotal, according to one of the youth commissioners:

This face-to-face exposure helped us to not only gain an insight into the key issues, but also to interact throughout the process with greater confidence so that we could maximise the opportunities presented to us.

(Paul, 2011)

The contact, reported Paul, was not only in advisory group meetings but also in one-to-one visits and discussions between youth commissioners and advisory group members. In another example, young people from Who Cares? Scotland (a national NGO providing a range of advocacy, advice, and support services across Scotland for children and young

people with experience of care) engaged with the Education and Culture Committee of the Scottish Parliament over time as the Committee undertook its inquiry into taking children into state care. In itself, this inquiry has resulted in recommendations rather than action, but *Who Cares? Scotland* was able to leverage the political commitment of the Committee to gain some further amendments to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 for young people leaving care. What both these examples show is that by bringing people together in time and spaces, children, young people, and adults built up relationships that were meaningful on both sides—and had an impact on decisions.

Invited Spaces

Most school councils and policy participation activities are “invited spaces.” Schools are where most children and young people spend many of their daytime hours—but the school councils themselves tend to be for the selected, representational few. The average number of council members per council was thirteen in the school survey. Although there were exceptions, most councils were deliberately balanced, by school staff, by age and gender. The perceived “fairness” of elections was statistically correlated with the perceived “effectiveness” of a school council in the school survey—irrespective of a school council having accomplished a great deal. When pupils were surveyed who were not currently on their school council, fairness in selecting members was central to their perception of the council.

What constituted “fairness” was explored in the case-study schools. In five of the six schools, the adult advisers considered the selection process fair because every pupil who expressed a desire or who was nominated to be on the school council had the chance

to be elected. Advisors also cited diversity (e.g., age, gender, academic standing) as additional evidence of a fair election. Still, both advisers and council members expressed reservations about procedural fairness. For instance, there were low levels or no competition for some council seats. Some members shared the following: They felt they had been elected with little effort (e.g., because of being popular); they had been asked by a teacher to become a candidate; and the actual election mechanics were flawed (e.g., lack of secret ballots or half the class was not present). Only in one case-study school did all the council members view the selection process as fair because they felt all had a chance to be nominated and elected.

The power of invitation and the potential exclusion of a representative structure are brought out in a related, representative survey of secondary school pupils across Scotland (Tisdall, with Milne & Iliasov, 2007). Pupils who were not currently council members were asked why they were not on the council. The replies included the following: No one had asked them to be a member; they were put off by having to be elected; the teacher had not picked them as a candidate; or they did not know how to become a member. These findings underline that processes of nomination and election have layers of invitation and selection, inclusion and exclusion, that can underlie a seemingly “open” and fair representational process. Not everyone feels invited to be a representative, leading to problems with the legitimacy and symbolic value of school councils.

The Scottish Youth Parliament seeks to be a representative body of young people in a conventional democratic way. However, it lacks the infrastructure of an electoral roll and other institutions, so it relies on networks and marketing to encourage young people

to vote for their representatives. Further, the Youth Parliament is for those aged 14 and up; younger children have no equivalent body. Other participation activities and projects engage with groups of children and young people on a variety of bases, often recruiting children and young people from their various services and related organizations. Thus, these activities themselves are either “invited spaces” or—something not considered by Cornwall and Coelho (2007)—captive or at least contained spaces (e.g., children who are in residential homes or in services).

The Drama of Impact

At certain spectacular space-times, impact was dramatically indicated by public and policymaker attention. These examples of success were related or observed when a key decision maker agreed with a recommendation from children and young people. In the participation projects, both the Youth Commission on Alcohol and Voice against Violence reported such successes. This involved a government minister unexpectedly (from the young people’s perspectives) and publicly announcing an initiative that directly fulfilled a particular recommendation. The minister linked the announcement to the young people’s contributions. The young people were euphoric about the sudden and very public announcements. In the school council research, one school council had set up a campaign that gained national prominence. While little action was in fact forthcoming nationally, the localized attention in the school led to a consistent description of the effectiveness of that year’s school council.

These dramatic moments generated a widespread view, by the children, young people, and adults involved, that the children and young people’s participation had been meaningful and effective. In none of these examples, however, was there sustainable and

sustained engagement over space-time. In all three cases, the groups of children and young people disaggregated (when we contacted the school council the subsequent year, it had different members and was not viewed as particularly effective by adults or members). The “drama” may be inspiring to many, but it does not encompass the plethora of decision making that might be relevant. While we are just ending a decade in Scotland where children and young people’s participation has been promoted, participation risks being a policy “fad” and a public “performance.” Once no longer as novel and innovative, it could become marginalized and unsupported.

Space-Time and Participatory Institutions

How, then, do these findings match up with Cornwall and Coelho’s five requirements for participation-sphere institutions to be inclusive and effect change?

1. People need more than invitations to participate: they need to recognize themselves as citizens rather than beneficiaries or clients.

When we consider the participation activities described here, children and young people are generally not in any of Cornwall and Coelho’s cited roles: They are not beneficiaries, clients, or citizens. Children and young people may want to be decision makers at times, in the school councils, but usually are very aware that they are not. Children and young people tend to be mostly “consultees” in school councils and participation activities more generally, with all the weaknesses of that category in terms of lack of influence on setting the agenda as well as the eventual decisions. Children and young people appear to be the most effective in the role of peer researchers or peer experts, in the currently popular co-production model (for a critical discussion, see Tisdall, 2013).

2. Representative claims must be considered critically, and mechanisms to be representative must be in place.

Adults have considerable concerns about who is invited into participation spaces and who is not. If adults do not want to listen to children and young people's views, the criticism of being "unrepresentative" will frequently be given—although it is often unclear about whether the criticism is about being statistically unrepresentative of the population of children or young people or unrepresentative in a democratic sense. Participation activities generally, and school councils in particular, are frequently criticized for only including certain children and young people. School councils are criticized for comprising only the "articulate elite." Although we explicitly sought to investigate this in the research, evidence was not found (HASAS, and Tisdall with Milne & Iliasov, 2007). School staff explicitly sought to encourage diversity, by encouraging certain people to nominate themselves, by requiring classes to elect a girl and a boy, or through other selection processes. Funded consultation exercises frequently set out requirements to consult a range of children and young people, by location, minority and ethnic backgrounds, and other characteristics.

School councils in the case-study schools spent a great deal of time trying to be representative democratically. This was difficult to achieve across the space-time available. The research suggests ways that certain processes could be improved, but the findings raise questions whether the efforts to be representative, in this very traditional democratic way, are worthwhile. The attempt to replicate formal meeting structures, with minutes, agendas, chairs, and committee roles, can effectively train participants to organize, participate in, or indeed lead such meetings in the future. But, in terms of

children and young people having an impact on their school, other ways of involving a wider range of children and young people may be more effective (see Whitty & Wisby, 2007). Ironically, the school councils observed followed a traditional model of democracy rather than the “deliberative turn” associated with the rise of the participatory sphere.

School councils could draw on methods used in the wider participation activities—from the Scottish Parliament’s use of social media to engage with young people across Scotland, or the arts-based activities facilitated by organizations like the Children’s Parliament, or the focused co-production model of the Youth Commission on Alcohol. While these methods may be worth considering, these activities all lack the foundation in everyday spaces for most children and young people (Percy-Smith, 2010). Children and young people are extracted out of their communities to participate, raising ongoing issues of sustainability and representativeness.

3. Structures are not enough. The motives of those who participate—including state actors—can be competing and are in constant negotiation.

4. Three factors are essential for change: involvement by a “wide spectrum of popular movements and civil associations, committed bureaucrats and inclusive institutional designs” (p. 9).

Cornwall and Coelho argue that structures are not enough. This is evident in the school council research—even though at least 90 percent of schools in Scotland have a council, many are not considered effective in terms of either process or outcomes. But structural changes could be made for school councils that would enhance their potential effectiveness—such as making them less reliant on individuals and more structurally

robust in terms of continuity, adult support, and links into decision making. Most other participatory activities lack sustainable structural support at all, particularly as budgets are contracting. Children and young people's participation has been highly reliant on NGOs for both funding and to carry out such participation, and as such organizations are squeezed themselves, funding and support may well diminish. In response to Cornwall and Coelho, structures are not enough, but some structures are beneficial for sustainability and effectiveness.

The ideas of space-time, as generated by human geographers, show the relational aspects of participation. When participation seemed to have an impact on decisions, space-time combined in two ways. First, there was a sequential model: The government supports creation of the project, the young people carry out the project, and then the young people re-enter the governance space to present their findings. Second, there was a more co-terminous model, where children, young people, and adults come into relationship with each other and meaningful dialogue seems to occur.

5. Participation is a process over time and must be situated alongside other political institutions, within their own social, cultural, and historical contexts.

The findings underline and amplify Cornwall and Coelho's last requirement. Time emerged as critical throughout both projects—the lack of time, the time of day, and institutional timings and their fit or not with the everyday lives of children and young people. A spatial lens underlines the tendency to separate out participation activities from children and young people—which has some advantages of potentially making them

child-friendly, cohesive, and generative—but divides them from spaces of governance and government (and thus from decision making).

This analysis suggests possibilities for children and young people’s participation. The enthusiasm about co-production needs to be evaluated robustly for its strengths and weaknesses. School councils could be developed more creatively, as well as complementary or alternative participation activities in schools. Stronger structural support would benefit school councils and other participatory activities, with more continuity and less reliance on individuals. Consideration should be given to greater linkages and more joint spaces-times between adults and children to avoid the “ghettoization” of children and young people’s participation. The relational aspects of participation must be factored in because it is through effective relationships, either sequentially or co-terminously, that participation appears to have an impact on decision making.

Conclusion

The experiences in Scotland, both of school councils and of participatory activities more generally, are not yet ones of consistent celebration. The list of barriers continues to be relevant and endlessly repeated in fora that seek to promote children and young people’s participation. There continue to be dramatic successes, which are powerful for those involved and inspirational to others.

It is capturing this potential for inspiration, for cultural change, that is perhaps the most promising. This potential was expressed at the Think Tank in the Participation Initiative, with an articulation of current strengths (Barnardo’s Scotland, Children in Scotland, and CRFR, 2011):

- **Government commitment.** It is now expected that children and young people will be involved in the decision-making, and children and young people themselves increasingly expect it.
- **Enthusiasm of the converted.** An ever-growing number of practitioners, managers and policy-makers are committed to children and young people's participation and ensure it is central to their work.
- **Creative, inclusive and productive approaches.** Children, young people and those supporting their participation have developed effective ways of working together.
- **Use of technology.** This allows for inclusive, larger-scale consultations.

As more and more children and young people, and thus their parents and communities, are exposed to ideas of children's rights in their schools or policy discourses, the more possibilities there are for generational shifts. As more and more of those involved in organizations and government institutions articulate the barriers to participation, the more potential there is for barriers to be lifted, taken down, and moved. As experiences of participation accumulate, people may be more open to flexible, inclusive, and meaningful space-times of participation—recognizing that participation is not static but involves relationships over time and spaces.

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1. This article generally uses the phrase “children and young people”; this is typically what young people prefer to be called in the UK. Broadly, “children and young people” refers to children up to the age of 18, following the definition in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
2. This discussion of participation in development studies draws on the chapter by Teamey and Hinton (2014), which emerged from the “Theorising Children’s Participation” network.
3. The terms majority world and minority world refer to what has traditionally been known as the Third World and the First World or more recently as the Global South and the Global North. This acknowledges that the majority, in terms of population, poverty, land mass, and lifestyles, is located in the former, in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and thus seeks to shift the balance of our worldviews that frequently privilege Western and Northern populations and issues (Punch, 2003).
4. <http://www.pupilvoicewales.org.uk/english/grown-ups/get-involved/the-school-council/> (accessed Sept. 13, 2013).
5. Local education authorities are part of local councils. They have the legal duty to provide schooling to children in their areas. There are thirty-two local councils across Scotland.
6. In Scotland, primary schools cover the year levels of P1 and P7, which broadly equate to the ages of 5 to 11. Secondary schools contain the year levels of S1 to S6, which broadly equate to the ages of 12 to 18.

7. <http://www.havingasayatschool.org.uk/documents/HASASTechnicalReport.pdf>
(accessed Sept. 13, 2013).
8. <http://www.childrenscotland.org.uk/html/to-ScotlandsChildrensSectorForum.htm>
(accessed Oct. 2, 2013).
9. <http://www.crrf.ac.uk/projects/completed-projects/> (accessed Sept. 13, 2013).
10. Compulsory schooling ends at age 16, although children and young people frequently continue in education past this age.
11. Voice against Violence (<http://www.voiceagainstv violence.org.uk/>) is a project of the Scottish Government and is located at CRFR.
12. This may be an outdated finding, with the recent influence and growth of the Rights Respecting Schools program supported by UNICEF UK.
13. From a representative sample of secondary school pupils in Scotland (aged 11–16), one third of respondents been a pupil council member at some point in their schooling (Tisdall, with Milne & Iliasov, 2007).
14. See <http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/children-and-young-people-bill.html>
(accessed Oct. 2, 2013).
15. This followed a co-production model. Twelve youth commissioners were appointed (aged 14–24 years). From July 2011 to March 2012, they gathered evidence through interviews, focus groups, surveys, observation, and secondary sources. They analyzed this evidence and presented thirty-three recommendations. The Council accepted the recommendations and proceeded to develop its policy on bullying. This development was overseen by an implementation board including

education staff, local politicians, parents, and children and young people (Robb, 2012; Scottish Borders Youth Commission on Bullying, 2012).

16. See <http://www.syp.org.uk/about-syp-W21page-94-> (accessed Oct. 2, 2013).
17. The Youth Commission on Alcohol was funded by the Scottish government and supported by Young Scot, an NGO. Sixteen young people were recruited onto the Commission through an open recruitment process. Running over a year, the Youth Commission undertook consultations, surveys, investigations, and study visits.