



United Nations
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- UNESCO Chair in
- Children, Youth and Civic Engagement
- Ireland
- **CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTRE**

Social capital and civic engagement in Irish youth services

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Core question

- ▶ How can youth services build the social capital (SC) and civic engagement (CE) of young people?
- ▶ Firstly, define the concepts
- ▶ Introduce Foróige
- ▶ Highlight how 4 models of service provision contribute to the building of SC and CE
- ▶ Sum up key points



Social capital

- ▶ Social connections and networks between people (membership)
- ▶ Based on principles of shared norms, trust, reciprocity (psychological)

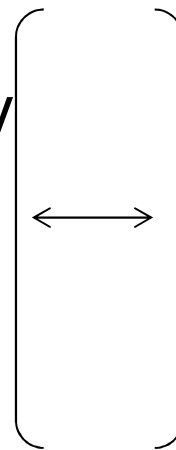
'the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures' (Portes, 1998, p.6)



Dimensions of social capital (Oynx & Bullen, 2005)

Capacity Building Blocks

- ▶ Trust
- ▶ Social agency
- ▶ Tolerance of diversity
- ▶ Value of life



Arenas in which SC may develop

- ▶ Community connections
- ▶ Neighbourhood connections
- ▶ Family and friends connections
- ▶ Work connections

All relate to personal attributes and connectivity with social world



Features of social capital

- ▶ Bonding social capital
'getting by'
- ▶ Bridging social capital
'getting ahead'



Civic engagement

Describe people's status as active participants in their community and the democratic life of a nation state

'the voluntary capacity of citizens and communities working directly together, or through elected representatives, to exercise economic, social and political power in pursuit of shared goals' (Taskforce on Civic

Engagement, 2007, p.5).



Barriers to youth civic engagement

- ▶ Societal attitudes to young people
- ▶ Young people sense their participation is not valued
(Hart, 2009; Stoneman, 2002)
- ▶ They are told what citizenship is rather than encouraged to create their own vision
- ▶ ‘Adulthood’ – tendency of adults to control the content of youth civic engagement activity
- ▶ Lower participation among low income groups



Research shows

- ▶ Current generation less likely to exhibit 9/10 indicators of citizenship (Flanagan and Levine, 2010)
 - ▶ Experiences of enjoyable civic engagement during youth predicts later civic activity (Finlay et al, 2010)
 - ▶ More likely to be involved if in formal setting- such as school, college, community group
 - ▶ Organised efforts are required to promote youth civic engagement
 - ▶ Programmes should be grounded in action
 - ▶ Need for clarity regarding the degree of youth ownership
-
- ▶ Encourage exposure to diverse social networks

Typology: Forms of engagement

Concept of CE has a broad scope –
can include informal voluntary activity
as well as political activity

| Non-participation | Civic participation (Social involvement) | Civic participation (Civic action) | Political participation |
|---|---|--|--|
| No group or political interest or involvement | Belonging to a group with a societal focus | Volunteering Community work Activism | Membership or engagement in political activity |

Ekman and Anna (2009)



Models from Irish youth services

Foróige

Context: Foróige



- ▶ Ireland's largest youth organisation
- ▶ Established in 1948 to provide non-formal education to young people
- ▶ Over 50,000 young people engaged
- ▶ Core philosophy – ***enable young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and in the development of society***
- ▶ Key services: local youth clubs run by volunteers, youth projects run by staff



Model 1: Youth club

- ▶ 480 clubs in 26 counties, 12-18 year olds
- ▶ Provide a safe place for young people to hang out, meet friends and have a voice
- ▶ Generally meets 1 night a week for 2 hours
- ▶ Committee elected by the members themselves & supported by the leaders to manage the club



Theoretical view

- ▶ Social involvement
- ▶ Bonding social capital – builds relationships and a sense of belonging
- ▶ Encourages initial engagement and experiences of governance
- ▶ Encourages inclusion and participation



Model 2: Community based youth mentoring



- ▶ One to one relationship between an adult and young person aged 10-18
- ▶ 300+ matches every year
- ▶ Recent RCT study – evidence of increase in support and hopefulness



Theoretical view

- ▶ Social involvement
- ▶ Builds bridging social capital –links young people to adults with different resources / world views
- ▶ Exposure to difference, connect to external networks, mediates acquisition of social capital

Models 1 & 2 – adults provide and youth receive benefits



Model 3: School based mentoring

- ▶ Older school students provide support to new students
- ▶ One-to-one relationships in a group setting
- ▶ 50 schools in Ireland involved
- ▶ Emphasis on celebrating and recognising contribution of mentors



Theoretical view

- ▶ Civic engagement (action)
- ▶ Young people volunteering to support others
- ▶ Early experience of volunteering, being a role model
- ▶ Adult defined and managed



Model 4: Youth Citizenship Programme

- ▶ Run through youth clubs and projects
- ▶ Empowers young people to become leaders in their communities
- ▶ 3 step model – awareness, action, evaluation
- ▶ Programme manual developed, investment by bank, TV programmes ‘Ireland's top teens’
- ▶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmiLJnjMzws&playnext=1&list=PL8E51F5509AE74489>



Theoretical view

- ▶ Civic engagement (action)
- ▶ Action is initiated and delivered by youth
- ▶ Involves bonding and bridging social capital
- ▶ Makes young people aware of their power and provides the skills to exercise power
- ▶ Gives messages to the community that young people can make a positive difference



| Model | Social Involvement (Bonding social capital) | Social Involvement (Bridging social capital) | Civic engagement of youth (action) | Political participation |
|--------------------------------|---|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Local youth club | √ | | | |
| 2. Youth mentoring | √ | √ | | |
| 3. Schools peer mentoring | √ | √ | √ | |
| 4. Youth citizenship programme | √ | √ | √ | |

Key points

- ▶ All forms of participation valuable and serve different purposes
- ▶ Bonding social capital required to build trust and provide a safe context to learn how groups work
- ▶ Bringing social capital can provide learning about opportunity and difference
- ▶ Need for a variety of provision to suit needs and abilities of young people at different ages
- ▶ Important to consider whether youth are given leadership roles
- ▶ Conceptual framework helps to conceptualise continuum from social involvement to political participation

