Barriers and enablers of youth as drivers of social change: University students' perspectives

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Background

- Is there an expectation for young people to become social leaders and innovators of the future? An inter-generational 'passing of the baton'?

- Do young people value social change and have the self-efficacy that empowers them to ignite positive social change?

- Do social constructs enable or hinder young people as change agents?

- How can Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) develop the capacity of young people for social change?

Definitions

- Social change- any action 'whether progressive or regressive, and whether "effective" or not, in changing particular outcomes' (Pratto et al., 2013, 139).

- Social innovation -the 'changes in the cultural, normative or regulative structures [or classes] of the society which enhance its collective power resources and improve its economic and social performance' (Heiscala, 2007, 59).

Research questions

- How do university students conceptualise social innovation and social change?

- What do university students perceive to enable young people to be agents of positive social change?

- What do university students perceive to hinder them being agents of positive social change?

'Everyone a changemaker…'

- University of Northampton = 1st AshokaU Changemaker Campus in UK

- www.ashokau.org

Unifying principles for 'everyone a Changemaker'
(Curtis, 2013)

1. **Believe in a responsibility to make positive changes in society.**

1. **Have the power and resources to make a difference (tangible and intangible).**

1. **Take initiative to bring about innovative change, local and systemic.**

1. **Work with others to maximise impact, working in groups and networks.**

1. **Know and live authentically according to one's values.**

1. **Practice empathy by engaging in another person's world without judgement.**

The role of the HEI in mediating positive social change through personal growth (Alden Rivers et al., in press, a)
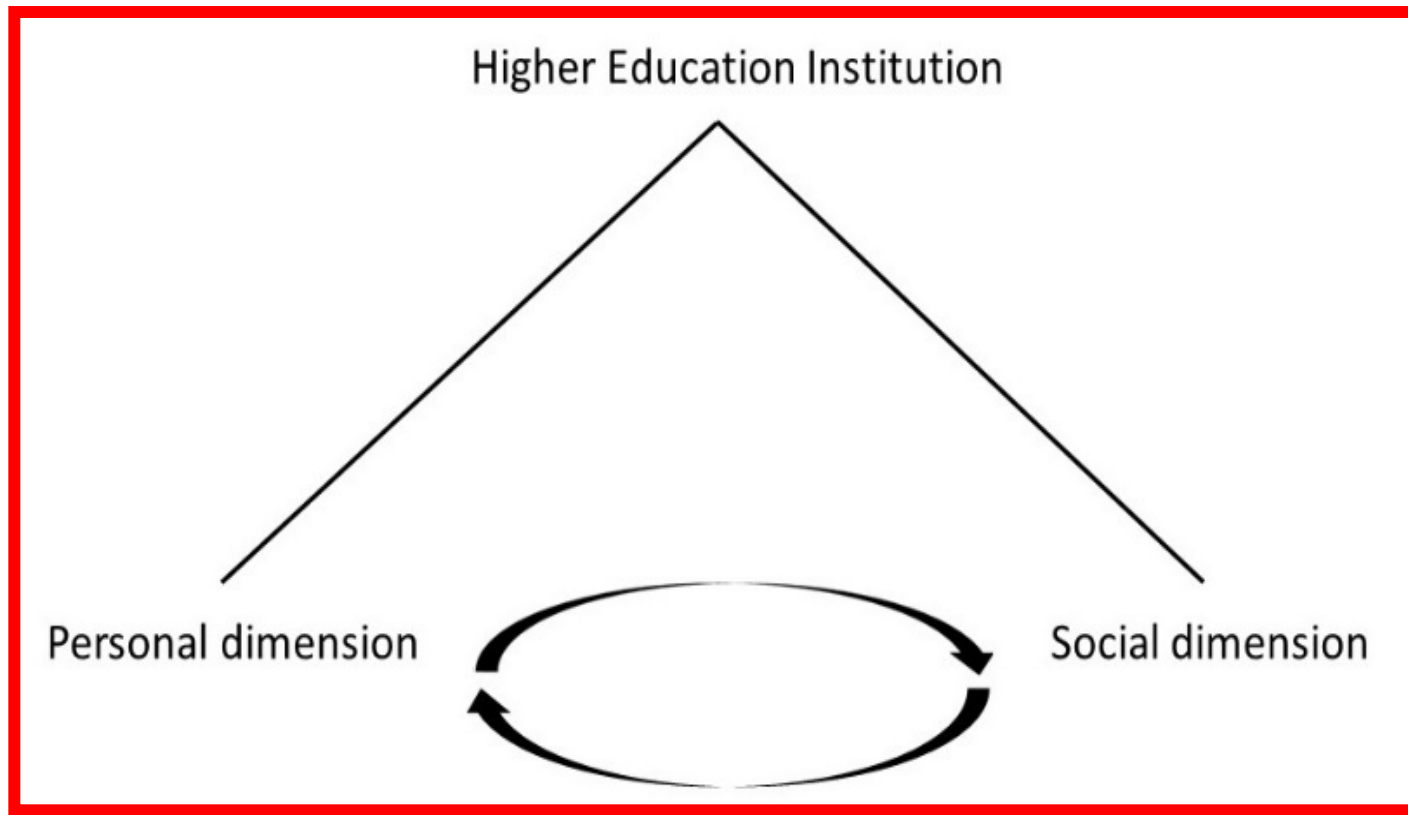
Literature review I

- ***Youth and social change***

- Youth participation in society is essential to promoting the identity of young people as citizens within a democratic context, to developing their skills in applied situations and to supporting their personal development (Checkoway, 2011).

- Through participation, young people become 'the frontiers and catalysts of positive social change' (Nejati et al., 2012, 411).

Literature review II

- ***Youth participation and the older generation***

- As humans move through their life stages into retirement, they are developing identities that are separate to youth, creating a sense of intergenerational detachment.

- Allison (2013) referred to a new generation of 'digital natives'—youth between the ages of 13 and 30—who share a preference for digital, 'across boundaries' communication.

- Some research points to a lack of political representation among young people (Henn et al., 2002), as well as an under-appreciation of how young people are affected by the socio-economic decisions of the older generations (Furlong and Cartmel, 2012).

Literature review III

- ***Youth participation and digital technology***

- Research suggests that the use of mobile devices provides an important means of escape and sense of belonging for young people (Cahir and Werner, 2013).

- Mesch (2012) claimed that the fast dissemination of information, ability to form and nurture social networks and the increased autonomy from parental figures, which are all affordances of the Internet and mobile phones, are also factors for enabling social influence.

- Social movements, such as the 2011 student demonstration in Chile (Valenzuala et al., 2012) and the 'Arab spring' in 2011 (Allison, 2012) were broadcasted and mobilised with the help of social media.

Literature review IV

- ***Youth participation and motivation***
- Nejati et al. (2012) – the more youth were aware of poverty the more they felt it was important to address poverty through collective action, the more engaged they were in such activities
- The motivation for a young person to participate in society is influenced by a variety of factors, including a person's values, goals, beliefs, expectations and the beliefs of others in their lives, such as their parents (Dawes and Larsen, 2011; Helve and Evans, 2013).
- Thomson and Holland (2002) when engaging in societal change through the reshaping of values and institutions, young people are, in effect, also engaging in their own moral development. This leads to 'institutional reflexivity' (Giddens,1991, 209) and the penetration of the 'local and the global' in which individual growth can also have macro-social effects both in communities and globally.

Literature review V

- ***The role of higher education***

- Bynner (2012) supported the idea that education and employment were the key starting points for renewing the social contract between generations.

- Arches (2013) suggested that positive youth development involves the developing of 'five Cs':

- 1. Competence for physical, social, cognitive, emotional, vocational and civic work

- 2. Connections to others

- 3. Character and integrity

- 4. Contribution (opportunities for)

- 5. Confidence

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Methods & analysis

- Two focus groups comprised of five students each who were randomly selected from the whole sample. These focus groups sizes are characteristic of 'mini-focus groups', which offer the participants more opportunities to share their ideas but may limit the overall pool of ideas (Krueger, 1994).

- Thematic analysis was carried out using the transcripts, which provided an iterative process for grouping data into meaningful categories, or themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Themes → **Codes** → **Child-nodes**

Findings - themes

Conceptions of social innovation & change	Enablers of change & innovation
Barriers of change & innovation	Attributes for change & innovation

Social change obviously is how what we do affects our surroundings and if we have objectives of changing our environments it is how we actually do it...But if there is a group of you it is better to make an impact.

It's [social change] what we do to affect the social community where we live. We want to include others to be part of what we're doing

Conceptions of social innovation & change

I always think that 'social change' sounds quite big, big idea, but actually the word 'social' includes all of us. So, that means everyone can start to do some kind of change and that can just snowball into a movement. But, social change is individual change to me

I don't think it would be a good idea for everyone to be a social innovator...I think you need a certain degree of inequality that entrepreneurs can take advantage of to exploit and to create wealth for other people and to address poverty. I think you need a certain degree of inequality

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Having Changemaker Weeks and having talks where you can talk directly to other people. Meeting other people who are interested in social change and social enterprise.

For me, this is how I think about it. Part of university is 'snoozing' life and when you're at university you have time to develop your ideas about the world. In real life you don't have time to develop your ideas and stuff like that

Enablers of social innovation and social change

Social change has to come from the family. Because the family make the community, from families coming together makes a nation. Change needs to happen in the family before it can change others.

Online campaigns, I've seen on Facebook with crowd-funding [laughing] like the ice bucket challenge. Arguably there is a very positive and negative affect. Online media's ability to communicate to young people is a huge opportunity

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I think we lack in confidence in ourselves. If we're able to put our idea on paper there's so much support that you can get and nowadays being your own boss is something that is advertised so much

I'll get to a point where I don't have the resources to go further. [Its] a lack of resources [and] knowledge

Barriers to social innovation and social change

It has a lot to do with your surroundings. I went to an all boys' school. It had a real mix of those who got in through scholarship and those who were well-off. You can see the comparison… But, if you come from a nicer background, you can travel the world, it broadens your scope

A lot of the time what motivates me to get involved is the sense of empathy, a shared set of values of knowing where you've come from… If you've got no concept of what the problem, then you've got no empathy of what's going on

Conclusions I

- Young people see social innovation & social change = individual and collective process

- Participants saw University as a crucial component in actualising young people's visions of social change and innovation recognising the role of education in shaping the identity of young people (Powell, 2014), in helping them develop an understanding of what their social contract should look like (Bynner, 2012)

- Universities can play a key role in enabling young people to deliver social innovation and positive social change either individually or collectively through the reordering of their life course perceptions (Powell, 2014).

- Participants also discussed the role of motivation, it was both extrinsic (i.e. through University programmes such as Changemaker Week) and intrinsic through the young person's 'buy-in' to a social issue.

Conclusions II

- Resources seen as crucial by the participants but not solely financial, other types of support, social and cultural capital, also important.

- Interestingly, there was a perception that class and socio-economic status (or habitus) (Bourdieu, 1990) were important in determining access to these types of capital. A university-led focus on increasing levels of social and cultural capital, particularly amongst students from disadvantaged backgrounds, could = powerful method of enabling social innovation.

- A university that wishes to drive social change on its campus must find ways to engage students with digital technology.

- Digital technology = platform to allow young people to reconcile their own moral biography with relational, collective action