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# Everyday Ethics: Framing youth participation in organizational practice

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### Résumé de l'article

Une grande partie de la littérature sur les questions éthiques de la participation des jeunes et des enfants s'appuie sur des expériences sporadiques de recherche participative lors desquelles la vision des jeunes a été examinée, transcrite et représentée. Cette littérature se concentre notamment sur la dynamique de pouvoir et les dilemmes éthiques motivés par des rapports temporaires de type adulte/enfant, externe/interne. Ces sujets sont cruciaux et méritent plus d'étude ; toutefois, il est aussi important d'examiner les problèmes éthiques qui émergent dans la pratique « quotidienne » des organisations dans et à travers lesquelles a lieu généralement la participation des jeunes dans la recherche et le développement communautaire (e.g. organisations communautaires, écoles, agences municipales). Sur l'expérience de trois étés de travail dans la promotion de la participation au sein d'organisations dirigées par des adultes et ayant des missions, des tailles et des structures différentes, on propose un cadre dans lequel la participation est présentée en tant que pratique spatiale façonnée par cinq dimensions qui se chevauchent. Ce cadre est proposé afin de susciter la discussion et en tant qu'outil potentiel d'analyse dans l'examen des problèmes éthiques liés à la participation des jeunes et la pratique organisationnelle.

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## EVERYDAY ETHICS: FRAMING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICE

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### ABSTRACT

Much of the literature on ethical issues in child and youth participation has drawn on the episodic experiences of participatory research efforts in which young people's input has been sought, transcribed and represented. This literature focuses in particular on the power dynamics and ethical dilemmas embedded in time-bound adult/child and outsider/insider relationships. While we agree that these issues are crucial and in need of further examination, it is equally important to examine the ethical issues embedded within the "everyday" practices of the organizations in and through which young people's participation in community research and development often occurs (e.g., community-based organizations, schools and municipal agencies). Drawing on experience from three summers of work in promoting youth participation in adult-led organizations of varying purpose, scale and structure, a framework is postulated that presents participation as a spatial practice shaped by five overlapping dimensions. The framework is offered as a point of discussion and a potential tool for analysis in examining ethical issues for young people's participation in relation to organizational practice.

### RÉSUMÉ

Une grande partie de la littérature sur les questions éthiques de la participation des jeunes et des enfants s'appuie sur des expériences sporadiques de recherche participative lors desquelles la vision des jeunes a été examinée, transcrite et représentée. Cette littérature se concentre notamment sur la dynamique de pouvoir et les dilemmes éthiques motivés par des rapports temporels de type adulte/enfant, externe/interne. Ces sujets sont cruciaux et méritent plus d'étude ; toutefois, il est aussi important d'examiner les problèmes éthiques qui émergent dans la pratique « quotidienne » des organisations dans et à travers lesquelles a lieu généralement la participation des jeunes dans la recherche et le développement communautaire (e.g. organisations communautaires, écoles, agences municipales). Sur l'expérience de trois étés de travail dans la promotion de la participation au sein d'organisations dirigées par des adultes et ayant des missions, des tailles et des structures différentes, on propose un cadre dans lequel la participation est présentée en tant que pratique spatiale façonnée par cinq dimensions qui se chevauchent. Ce cadre est proposé afin de susciter la discussion et en tant qu'outil potentiel d'analyse dans l'examen des problèmes éthiques liés à la participation des jeunes et la pratique organisationnelle.

## ETHICS, PARTICIPATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICE

Ethics is concerned with issues of power. As Hugh Matthews reminds us, what we recognize as ethical “depends on values, moral judgments, perceived goals and intended outcomes.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, participation is concerned with issues of power, but focuses its attention on the structures, processes and methods through which power imbalances are alleviated (or not) and decisions are made with (at least an attempt towards) due consideration to the interests of those affected. Here, too, what we recognize as “participatory” depends on values, moral judgments, perceived goals and intended outcomes. Is it enough that space be provided for voicing concerns regardless of who might or might not speak, or be heard? Or does the project of participation require a more active approach, in which the unheard are sought out and “given voice?”

Participatory researchers, planners and designers concerned with the lack of voice for children and youth in understanding and shaping the city have embraced an active approach, seeking out young people and developing a range of methods through which their perspectives and priorities can be brought to light.<sup>2</sup> These efforts have helped increase young people’s visibility and voice in specific projects as well as within the field more generally, but have also raised a number of ethical concerns and dilemmas related to the ways in which young people’s participation is sought, facilitated, transcribed and represented. Of particular concern have been the inherent power issues encountered when adults seek to facilitate young people’s participation, and when “outsiders” (typically university-based and relatively privileged) seek to facilitate “insider” (local) knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Further concern has focused on the ability of these processes to affect meaningful change in young people’s lives (typically measured by the ability to act on the priorities identified by young people). These concerns have led to calls for such efforts to become less episodic (project-focused) and more enduring (program-focused).<sup>4</sup>

This shift in focus to programs over projects requires repositioning our analytical lens on the institutions and organizations in and

through which participation happens. In the larger literature on participatory processes, a small group of researchers has already begun to articulate institutional design and organizational factors as crucial to effective participation. For example, Fung and Wright<sup>5</sup> focus on the political principles and enabling conditions that establish new spaces of participatory governance with transformatory potential, while John Gaventa specifically takes up the issue of exploring spaces for participation.<sup>6</sup> In asking “how they were created and in whose interests and with what terms of engagement”<sup>7</sup> Gaventa draws on Andrea Cornwall’s work<sup>8</sup> to suggest that there exists a continuum of spaces in dynamic relation to each other, from closed spaces (which may open up possibilities for participation) to invited spaces (that widen participation by inviting people in) and finally, created/claimed or organic spaces (which the non-powerful create around a common purpose or through mobilization). The bulk of this work, however, remains within the realm of broad generalized principles that establish the ground-rules for participatory processes, and provide idealized models of democratic practice. In this article we are interested in the idea that organizations are central to opening up spaces where participation can take place, and wish to explore further how participatory practice is shaped in concrete organizational sites.

This interest emerges from our work as participatory planning practitioners and researchers, whose field experiences underscored how crucial organizational practices were in creating or limiting spaces for meaningful participation by young people in adult-led organizations, even as we noted the lack of attention paid to organizational practices by the literature on child and youth participation. Our approach is inductive, and the product of ongoing dialog between our fieldwork and observations on the one hand, and the theoretical literature on organizations and participation on the other.<sup>9</sup> It allows us to make sense of what we observed, and to articulate a vocabulary and structure through which we can better understand the ways in which organizations create spaces for participation and thereby shape participatory processes. In so doing, we hope to offer a potential tool for analyzing the ethical issues embedded within the everyday prac-

tices of community-based organizations, schools, municipal agencies and other entities in and through which young people's participation in community research and development so often occurs.

## ARRIVING AT THE FRAMEWORK: CONTEXT AND RESEARCH METHODS

The framework presented in the subsequent section of this article was constructed based in a five-site initiative in New York to facilitate young people's participation in community evaluation and action. Drawing on field-tested methods of youth participation in community evaluation and action<sup>10</sup> the initiative aimed to not only facilitate child and youth participation at the local level, but also to build a network of sites within the same city. The network model would create opportunities to compare the project's process and outcomes in varying neighborhood contexts, and build a coalition of groups and individuals committed to the project's principles of child- and youth-led research and action.

Organized as a university-community partnership, the project was active for three summers, beginning in 2005 when formal planning workshops were organized to agree on the project's cross-site goals, structure and core activities. Each neighborhood site was facilitated by one or two site-based community organizations that incorporated the project into their summer activities, with staffing assistance from a university student intern. Site-based organizations provided program space, staff (at least one regular staff usually supplemented by high school age summer staff), and funding for supplies and other site-based expenses. The university partner provided student interns as well as training, cross-site coordination, and documentation of the project's methods, process and outcomes (including evaluative interviews and surveys with participants and staff). In some cases, the university partner also provided assistance with fundraising to support site-based project implementation, though funds were allocated directly to site-based organizations and not via the university. In this way, the project aimed to create an environment in which each local organization would incorporate the program as part of its ongoing operations, rather

than as a special "add on" program funded by an external partner. The project was to be embedded in local norms, structures and operations, and shaped by mutual goals and expectations.

The site-based organizations were all non-profits and shared a commitment to child and youth participation. There was, however, significant variance in their size, scope and mission, as well as in their definition and practice of child and youth participation. This variation did not represent selection criteria for their involvement in the project, although it proved to be illuminating when it came to understanding outcomes. All of the sites were based in moderate to low income, ethnically diverse neighborhoods (although the ethnic mix, intensity and mix of land uses, and built character varied considerably between sites), with participants reflecting each neighborhood's racial, cultural and economic diversity. In every site, the community-based organization had evolved in response to a critical neighborhood issue of social or environmental justice during the past 10 to 20 years. In this sense, all of the organizations and participants were embedded in contexts in which issues of social and environmental justice were central to their work and experiences, engaging consistently with imbalances of power through community organizing and political action. All of the organizations saw youth participation as important to their long-term mission of community empowerment and change.

Each site recruited between 10 and 20 young people with approximately equal number of boys and girls from their local area, either through existing relationships with young people connected to their organization, through interaction with young people in local schools, or contacts within the neighborhood. Each site also established the functional parameters for their local program activities: the days and hours of operation, staffing, and facility arrangements. Working with the university partners, all of the organizations together decided upon a core set of initial participation activities to engage young people and a core set of goals that would guide their work as part of a shared initiative. When possible, young people from each organization were involved in these goal-setting workshops.

The overall aim of the project was to involve young people as co-researchers in looking at and understanding their local area, and then to support them in taking action on a community improvement project of their choosing. Every group would commit to helping young people take some form of action by the end of the summer. They would also commit to collaborating with the other project partners, and to documenting their project activities and results. Time was spent discussing the meaning of “participation” and the ways in which we could collectively help ensure that young people’s participation was real and meaningful.

Initial participation methods carried out at all the sites included one-on-one interviews with each participant (focused on their attitudes toward the neighborhood and daily life within it), youth-led walking tours of the local area, photography, and mapping.<sup>11</sup> Organizations were free to expand upon these methods and/or to connect them with other program activities. Following the first two to three weeks of initial explorations, young people considered their site’s findings and decided upon a priority issue, or short list of issues, on which they wanted to work. They then developed action plans, taking into consideration things they could do themselves, things they could do with help, and things they needed adults (or the government) to do for them. By the end of eight weeks in each summer program, all sites undertook some form of action. Examples of actions taken include holding a press conference on local garbage issues and lobbying for more trash receptacles in the area, developing a mural on local youth issues and perspectives, cleaning up a local park, and creating a video on gentrification’s impacts on young people.<sup>12</sup>

The university based interns kept detailed journals as participant observers and met with the project leader every week to debrief. He visited the sites on several occasions, and was additionally responsible for organizing cross-site meetings twice during the summer, and a two-day visit by all groups to the university in the fall. The field data which contributed to development of the framework presented in this article included: student reports, together with the project leader’s observations and notes following visits to the organizations;

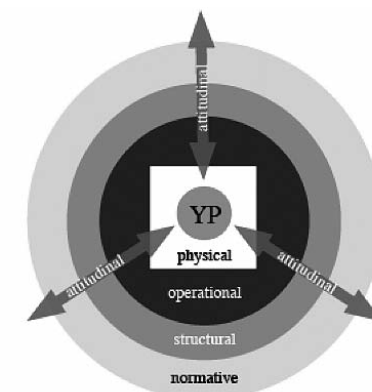
notes from in-depth interviews with student interns (16 in three years) placed at each of the five organizations; discussions with organization staff; and pre- and post- interviews with young people involved in the project at each site.

## THE FRAMEWORK: FIVE KEY DIMENSIONS OF PARTICIPATION AS SPATIAL PRACTICE

What emerged through our analysis and discussion of the organizational factors that supported or limited meaningful youth participation was a spatial model of practice with five key dimensions, each structured relative to the other: normative, structural, operational, physical and attitudinal.

Analyzing participation as a spatial practice helps us to understand the ways in which these different dimensions exist in relation to each other; an issue where conventional organizational analysis falls short. The five key dimensions we note intersect both to open and close-off opportunities for different forms of participation within a fluid, changing internal environment. Understanding the organization as framed by norms and values, organizational structures and physical plant, as well as by the interpersonal relations and identities of those who work within it, gives shape to these five dimensions that enable participatory space, briefly defined here and then illustrated in two case examples. **Figure 1** illustrates the conceptual relationship between the five dimensions, while **Figure 2** provides a summary table of their key characteristics.

**Figure 1:** Concept graphic illustrating the relationships between the five spaces of participation (for adult-led organizations committed to youth participation)



	TYPE OF SPACE	DESCRIPTION	MANIFESTATIONS
NORMATIVE SPACE	Conceptual	Expression of values regarding young people's participation	Organizational mission and goals; statements from the ED; etc.
STRUCTURAL SPACE	Tangible - bounded by normative space	Gives form to normative space, through organizational structure; programming, staffing and budget priorities	Dedicated staff positions for youth outreach; budget for youth-led programs; etc.
OPERATIONAL SPACE	Tangible + conceptual - bounded by normative and structural space	Everyday processes/mechanisms by which young people participate in decision making and management	Youth selection of representatives; youth facilitation of meetings; real weight given to youth input (or youth making decisions on their own)
PHYSICAL SPACE	Tangible - bounded by all of the above	An actual space that young people can claim as their own	A youth meeting room; youth-run center; dedicated (formally or informally) youth hang-out area
ATTITUDINAL SPACE	Conceptual - unbound though shaped in part by all the above, and vice versa	Individual and group interactions between adults and youth, and between young people	A general culture of acceptance and support towards young people, and between young people; youth expectations regarding their participation

**Figure 2.** Summary of the five spaces of participation (for adult-run organizations seeking to promote youth participation)



The *Normative* dimension captures the organization's expression of values as it pertains to young people and their participation. As such, it creates the conceptual boundaries for participatory practice as linked to the organization. Normative space thus produced is articulated most clearly in the organization's mission and goals. It is a public declaration of young people's participation as an organizational priority, including their participation in the community at-large as well as their status and roles within the organization. As such, it is the most critical spatial dimension for participation in organizational practice. Without the normative space of participation, there is little room for much else (unless embodied as oppositional politics within the organization itself, aimed at organizational change).

Normative space, while conceptual, is seen, heard and felt. If a commitment to meaningful youth participation is absent from the speeches of the executive director, the organization's website, or its promotional literature and fundraising proposals, then it becomes a phantom commitment: something we assume, but are never quite sure of. Participatory practice in this context becomes an afterthought, a nicety, or (rarely, but at times) an insurgent oppositional movement within the organization seeking to foment change. In this latter example, the normative space of participation is claimed by those within the organization, not proclaimed by those who lead it. While this can be powerful for those with the skill, energy and commitment to pull it off, it is rare among people, like youth, who have little to no experience in exercising their power. For an organization to support a meaningful and sustained participatory practice, it must define a palpable normative space within which it can happen.

The *Structural* dimension is embedded in normative space. It is embodied in the organization's programs, staffing and budget priorities. Without appropriate structures, normative declarations ring empty, and efforts towards operationalizing participation can go adrift. Examples of the structural dimension include dedicated staff positions for youth outreach and facilitation; resource allocations for youth training and youth-led program evaluations; and projects that are specifically intended to be either youth-run or youth-directed.

While structural space is not three-dimensional (in the sense of physical space), it is tangible. There is evidence of its existence, or lack thereof. Organizational commitments to participatory practice are given form in organizational diagrams, allocation of staff time, programmatic priorities, and annual budgets. In other words, participation doesn't just happen. Someone has to facilitate it. Someone has to pay for it. Someone should even be leading critical reflections on how to do it better. These commitments and their associated programs are the organizational practices that provide a structural dimension to the spaces of participation.<sup>13</sup>

The *Operational* dimension is the everyday practice of the organization in action, the mechanisms by which young people have a meaningful say in organizational decision-making and management. Operational space is embedded within structural space, but focused on "the way we do things" more than "what we're doing." It is concerned with actual decision-making practices rather than the codified structures for them. For example, while creation of a youth advisory board defines a structural space for youth input, the actual ways in which the advisory board works—its operational dimension—shapes its effectiveness as a space of participation. This includes functional dynamics (e.g., the ways in which the advisory board members are selected, and the role of youth in defining agendas and facilitating meetings) as well as political dynamics (e.g., the weight given to the youth board's input by adult leaders, or the overt or inadvertent silencing of some youth's voices in favor of others).<sup>14</sup>

Operational space is both conceptual and tangible. It is given tangible form by the agreed upon (and sometimes codified) processes for organizational decision-making. When these processes ensure that all voices are heard and considered, they give real space to participation. When they remain informal, operational space is less tangible, though it may be nonetheless real and meaningful depending on the particularities of the process and its dynamics. Even when tangible, it is shaped by the attitudinal dimension of participatory practice (described below), which opens the possibility for meaningful engagement or undermines it in insidious yet profound ways.

The *Physical* dimension refers to the provision of an actual space (be it a separate room, building, outdoor area or even a cubicle) that young people can claim as their own, where they can work independently as well as in collaboration with adults. It is the most tangible and measurable manifestation of organizational practice as it pertains to young people's participation. While the physical space for young people's participation does not require a youth-only zone, it does call for a designated territory in which young people are clearly in-charge, and where they can "hang out" on their own terms. When young people are integrated in all aspects of the organization, deeply embedded in its normative, structural, operational and attitudinal spaces, the physical space of their participation may extend to all corners of the organization's facility. This, however, is rare (and did not exist in any of our sites). While participatory practice with young people may exist without physical space, its absence typically undercuts the form and substance their participation might otherwise take.

The *Attitudinal* dimension, like the normative dimension is conceptual. But while the normative dimension of participatory space is revealed in organizational pronouncements, the attitudinal dimension is both more ubiquitous and less visible. Shaped by the multi-form interactions and identities rooted in interpersonal relations, the attitudinal dimension manifests itself in the dynamics of interactions between adults and young people as well as between young people themselves, enriching or undermining the normative, structural, operational and physical dimensions of participatory space. Attitudinal space, buffeted by individual attitudes and personalities, is the most fluid and immeasurable space of participation, but also the most commonly identified barrier to meaningful participation (based on young people's own evaluations). Attitudinal space is expressed in a general culture of acceptance, support and understanding by adults within the organization and the community towards young people's right to participate, as well as by their specific actions and interactions with young people (whether in groups or individually). It is also expressed in young people's own expectations of their right to participate, and their ability and commitment to claim that right.

These five dimensions of participatory space are mutually constitutive, and highly interactive. Together they create the organizational space needed to foster meaningful youth participation. However, the absence of one or the other does not preclude the existence of participatory practice. Meaningful youth participation in an organization or community can occur in specific moments in time due to a number of factors. But sustaining youth participation requires enmeshing it in organizational practice—a spatial practice that opens up opportunities for meaningful participation even while bounding it within organizational norms, structures, operations, facilities and attitudes.

Following are two examples to illustrate the spaces of participation in practice, using evidence from our field experiences. Our intention is to capture the fine-grained manner in which the various dimensions shaped participation to create different outcomes, and to show how the framework can be used as an analytical tool in understanding young people's participation in organizational practice. Implications for the examination of ethical issues in participatory practice are discussed in the conclusion.

#### EXAMPLE #1: BOUNDED NORMATIVE SPACE ALLOWS BUT CONSTRAINS PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE, AND ATTITUDINAL SPACE CREATES OPPORTUNITY

The first example is of a large youth development organization (relative to the other cases) that is part of a community-based network of child- and youth-serving agencies. Consisting of two distinct programs, the organization's primary charge is to promote positive youth development and academic success. Managed by full-time paid professional staff, and supplemented by part-time staff and university interns, the organization operates a year-round afterschool program and a multi-pronged summer program of which the subject project was one part. The agency is relatively well funded by a range of public and private sources, and has earned significant positive press in the community and youth development field.

Due to the organization's mission in promoting academic success, the ultimate measure of the agency's effectiveness is the number of young people who graduate from high school and go on to college,



technical training and/or a desirable job. Using a “positive youth development” framework,<sup>15</sup> young people’s participation is highly valued but not central to the agency’s mission. A professional adult staff makes decisions regarding budgets and staffing, and manages the agency based in part on directives from the central office of its network and on their own evaluations of program effectiveness (which can include youth input, but not necessarily).

Thus, while youth input and engagement is central to the organization’s activities, and participatory research is commonly practiced in its various programs, youth are required to abide by a clear set of “rights and responsibilities” defined by the organization’s management, and program participants are compensated for their time (in an effort to teach job skills, incentivize attendance, and acknowledge income needs). Participation is useful as a tool of youth development, but secondary in importance. The normative space for the organizational practice of participation is therefore clearly bounded, if not constrained.

This bounded normative space has led to similarly bounded structural and operational spaces of participation within the organization. Staffing and budgets support program units that are encouraged but not required to incorporate youth participation in their operations. The adult (or often young adult) staff for each program unit establishes its own plans and curricula to achieve defined youth development objectives. Young people who ultimately participate in the program unit might help shape specific aspects of the program—as a tool for achieving pre-defined objectives, often in the form of experiential education practice—but it is not required. This optional nature of structural and operational space creates the possibility of organizational practices that support participation, but does not guarantee them. In the event that a program unit chooses to adopt a program structure that prioritizes youth participation, young people may find significant opportunities for their genuine participation in shaping organizational practice *within* that unit. In the particular experience of the project described in this article, these bounded but considerable nor-

mative, structural and operational spaces were critical in creating an opening to advance young people’s participation.

Embraced as a central value by the organization’s program director, young people’s participation enjoyed the advantage of considerable attitudinal space, even if it was constricted to specific program units by the agency’s normative, structural and operational spaces. While this attitudinal space was uneven amongst program staff, the consistent priority and thoughtfulness given to it by the program director encouraged many young people to not only become engaged, but to step into roles of leadership. Finding that their voices were heard, and given serious consideration, these young people stepped into roles of greater and greater responsibility. Following the first summer of project work, several young people approached the director with the desire to define their own program unit for the following summer. They subsequently developed a proposal for the next summer’s program, building on outcomes from the first summer. While paid adult staff then developed the curriculum around the young people’s initial proposal, young people retained a central position in shaping and directing the second summer’s work. Further, the practice of participation within this particular project—supported by significant attitudinal space—prompted a more pointed focus on participatory practice within the agency, leading to the creation of a youth advisory board to provide a more consistent, sanctioned voice for young people in the organization’s decision making processes. Thus, the structural and operational spaces of participation were expanded, even though the normative space remained substantively unchanged.

The physical space of participation in this case may also have played a role, though our data are inconclusive. The agency operates in a large building with multiple rooms, with each room housing a program unit through the course of the summer. These program-managed rooms have specific rules of use, but also considerable latitude. Depending on the program staff (adults) managing a unit, the rooms may provide a physical space of participation, or not. Our evidence in this case does not point to the program’s room as being particu-

larly important in opening opportunities for participation, but neither does it discredit its importance.

## EXAMPLE #2: ISSUES OF ATTITUDINAL, STRUCTURAL AND OPERATIONAL SPACE COUNTERACT SUBSTANTIVE NORMATIVE AND PHYSICAL SPACE

The second example is of a small, relatively informal nonprofit group focused on the participatory design and management of public open space. As such, a commitment to participation—and specifically young people’s participation—was central to the organization’s mission, establishing a broad normative space for youth participation in organizational practice.

Lacking formal office space and full-time paid staff, the organization would typically meet in a community park space it had helped create and continued to manage, or in classroom space of two neighborhood schools with which it had close relations. While the classroom spaces were ephemeral as physical spaces of participation, the community park space loomed large as a youth-created and youth-run space, symbolic of the organization’s mission and embodying youth participation in its daily practices. On any given day, young people could be found hanging out in the park or engaged in any number of organized or informal activities. While overseen by a young adult manager (who had been involved in creating the park), it is a space of considerable meaning, and ownership, for young people. Thus, in addition to a broad normative space for youth participation, it exemplified substantive and meaningful physical space.

It is not surprising therefore that this case represented some of the highest levels of youth participation among the project sites. However, it was not trouble-free. Issues of structural, operational and attitudinal space created an environment in which participatory practices were sometimes unclear, and often uneven.

Due in part to the organization’s small size and informality, its organizational structure was not formally defined. While this could create openings for young people to take the lead, interview data show that confusion about leadership structures and decision making processes made young people feel less certain about their potential

roles, not more so. Despite encouragement from the organization’s leaders for young people to take the lead in directing the project’s activities, young people consistently defaulted to the organization’s directors on key project decisions. From the reflections of student interns at the site, this was primarily due to the inconsistent attitudinal space of participation created by the adult leaders’ words and actions. At numerous meetings at which the organization leaders and youth participants were all present, youth input would be countered or redirected by the organization leaders. Young people did not resent this interference; they sometimes appreciated the direction. But the lack of any formal structure or process, combined with what they perceived as mixed messages from the only clearly defined decision makers, served to limit young people’s participation despite the overt organizational commitment and access to youth-friendly space. In this example, the opportunities for participatory practice created through substantive normative and physical space were limited by undefined structural and operational spaces, and uneven attitudinal space.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This paper suggests that spaces of participation are created (and often constrained) by organizational practices that have five key inter-related dimensions defined here as normative, structural, operational, physical and attitudinal. This framework was constructed on the basis of our experience implementing a program of young people’s participation across adult-led organizations of varying purpose, scale and structure. Two examples are provided to help illustrate the framework’s utility as a descriptive and analytical tool in understanding youth participation in organizational practice.

So what does this have to do with the ethics of young people’s participation in understanding and shaping the city?

Returning to the point made in the opening paragraph of this article, both ethics and participation are concerned with issues of power, and what we define as “ethical” or “participatory” depends on our values, moral judgments, perceived goals and intended outcomes. If our intent is to ensure that young people’s voices are not only heard

but given due consideration in the city-shaping decisions that affect them, then our ethical considerations must extend beyond our own interactions with young people as participatory researchers and practitioners. Our ethical concerns must by necessity extend to the organizational contexts in and through which young people's participation can and should be sustained on an everyday basis.

By helping to unpack the ways in which organizational practices give shape to participation (from the organization's mission statement down to daily personal interactions), we hope to contribute to a larger project of refocusing debates on participation towards more careful consideration of the deliberate choices that shape organizations and to emphatically underscore the point: *participation does not just happen*. The design of public institutions and organizational practices serve to facilitate or constrain meaningful and sustained participation. As Fung reminds us, this is the result of "deliberate choices, rather than taken-for-granted habits."<sup>16</sup> While we do not propose specific sites or strategies for organizational change-making, and more work is needed to test and refine the proposed framework, we believe that a clear articulation of the spatial practices of participation opens new possibilities in this direction.

ARTICLES

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## NOTES

- 1 Matthews, Hugh, "Power Games and Moral Territories: Ethical Dilemmas when Working with Children and Young People," *Ethics, Place and Environment*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2001, p. 117.
- 2 For examples, see Checkoway, Barry and Gutierrez, Lorraine M., eds., *Youth Participation and Community Change*, 2006, Binghamton (NY), Haworth Press,; Hart, Roger, *Children's Participation in Sustainable Development: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care*, 1997, New York and London, UNICEF and Earthscan Publications, 1997; and Driskell, David, *Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth: A Manual for Participation*, Paris and London, UNESCO and Earthscan Publications, 2002.
- 3 Two recent special journal issues focus specifically on these concerns: Hopkins, Peter E. and Bell, Nancy, eds., special issue on "Ethical Issues and Child Research," *Children's Geographies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2008; and Cahill, Caitlin, Sultana, Farhana, and Pain, Rachel, eds., special issue on "Participatory Ethics: Politics, Practices and Institutions," *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2007.
- 4 See Chawla, Louise, et al., "Don't Just Listen – Do Something! Lessons Learned About Governance from the Growing Up in Cities Project," *Children Youth Environments Journal* special issue on Children and Governance, 2002, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 53-88, as well as Hart, *Children's Participation in Sustainable Development*
- 5 Fung, Archon and Erik Olin Wright, "Deepening Democracy: Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance," *Politics & Society*, vol. 29, no. 5, 2001, pp. 5-41.
- 6 Gaventa, John, "Towards Participatory Governance: Assessing the Transformative Possibilities" in Hickey, Sam and Mohan, Giles, editors., *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches in Participation*, London, Zed Books, 2004.
- 7 *Ibid*, p. 35.
- 8 Cornwall, Andrea, "Spaces of Transformation? Reflections on Issues of Power and Difference in Participation in Development" in Hickey, Sam and Mohan, Giles, eds., *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches in Participation*, London, Zed Books, 2004, p. 87.
- 9 In so doing, we draw upon the extended case method, as exemplified in the work of Buraway, Michael, et al., *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1991, and as discussed in Kudva, Neema, "Development and Democratization: A Contextual Critique of NGO Behavior and Practice through the Case of the Tribal Joint Action Committee in Karnataka, India," Unpublished Dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, 2002, pp. 7-14,.
- 10 See Driskell, *Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth*; Chawla, Louise, *Growing Up in an Urbanising World*, Paris and London, UNESCO and Earthscan, 2002; and Lynch, Kevin, *Growing Up in Cities*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1977.
- 11 *Ibid*.
- 12 Challenges faced in implementing these projects have been discussed in Driskell, David, "Growing Up in NYC: reflections on two summers of action research," *Children Youth Environments Journal*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2007, pp. 472-483.
- 13 While there is overlap with the idea of the organization's goals and values here (an important variable in organizational studies), our framework differs in that it focuses and relates both conceptually defined dimensions (goals) and actual actions in implementing goals.
- 14 In addition the operational dimension collapses both formal (codified) and informal practices, another distinction that some organizational studies follow.
- 15 Positive youth development proposes an assets-based approach to supporting young people in achieving success across a range of developmental outcomes. For more information, see Hamilton, Stephen and Hamilton, Mary Agnes, eds., *The Youth Development Handbook: Coming of Age in American Communities*, Thousand Oaks (CA), Sage Publications, 2004.
- 16 Fung, Archon, "Recipes for Public Spheres: Eight Institutional Design Choices and their Consequences," *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2003, p. 365.