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SOCIAL SERVICE RESEARCH NETWORK (SSRN) 2015
"Mobilising Assets to Meet Social Needs"

Friday, 27 March 2015

Training Hub, Level 4

Social Service Institute

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Mobilising Young People as Community Asset

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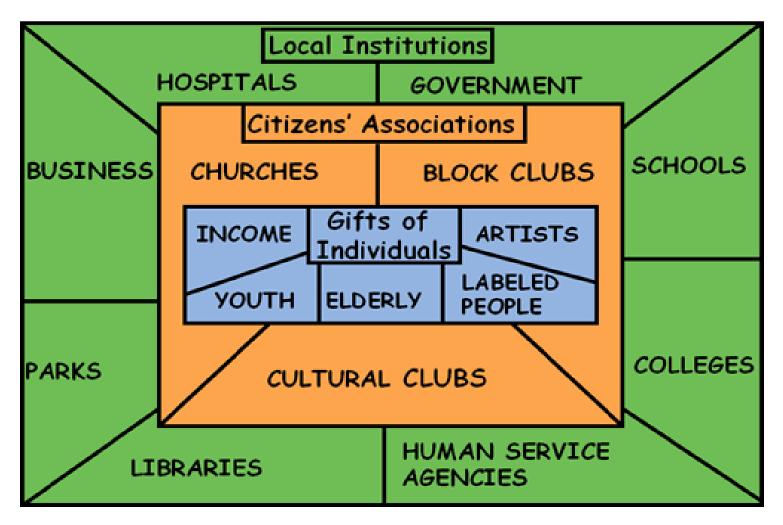**iPS** Institute of
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MOBILIZING YOUNG PEOPLE AS COMMUNITY ASSET

A Traditional Paradigm

COMMUNITY ASSETS MAP

Key Questions

Youth have always been acknowledged as part of community asset, but:

- How important do we consider young people as our asset? Or do we consider them more as a liability?

- How often do we make use of their abilities as asset in community development?

What roles do we assign them in community development?

Young People as Asset: The Rhetoric

Young people are the pillars of our future society

➡ should be given a voice and encouraged to participate in community development

Sadly, for most young people, their voice and participation in community development have been limited

Young People as Asset: The Reality

- Interests are often ignored or overlooked in community development

- Voices not heard, in development forums, either by design, or because of our assumption that they do not have any interest in community development issues

- Concerns seldom make it to the development or political agenda unless they become a 'problem'

- Intolerance of young people in the public arena

Young People as Asset: The Reality

- Often seen as unwanted intrusion, thus an issue requiring 'management' rather than an indication of poor design or planning

- In fact, many communities have been designed with little or no thought given to young people and their activities

- Conveniently forgotten if not systematically marginalized despite the rhetoric about how valuable they are as community asset

Contradicting Social Construction

We take pride in that they are put under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

i.   As individuals their dignity must be respected

ii.   Their procedural rights to express their views on matters that affect them should be taken seriously

BUT …

Contradicting Social Construction

- They often lack access to most of the processes through which adults can articulate their concerns

Example:

i. They lack power to lobby and influence government

ii. Rarely members of trade unions or professional organizations that can negotiate on their behalf

- Moreover, particularly in Asian societies, they are considered too young to be an adult and too old to be a dependent

Reaction

- They remain apathetic and choose not to be involved in community matters because they have no place in the decision-making process

- They actually do not see themselves as "apathetic" but they do see the disconnection between policy decisions and their lack of ownership that affect their well-being

The New E-Generation

Now let us try to answer the questions we pose earlier:

- Are young people community asset?

- If they are, how do we mobilize them and make the best use of them in community development?

Whether or not young people are community asset really depends on one's mindset – i.e. if we perceive and accept them as such

The New E-Generation

- Young people in this generation are VERY different from what we know for a number of reasons

- I call them the new E-Generation

- The E is not only for their excellent knowledge in digital technology as in E-mail or E-commerce but also for their EDGINESS:

the frustration they have been experiencing and their readiness to take whatever action to make their voices and presence known

The New E-Generation

- What defines the new E-Generation is their deep involvement with the digital world

- Unlike their parents/carers, most young people use technology 'holistically' : learning, socializing, playing, researching, and doing homework, so that their online lives blend seamlessly with their offline lives

- Some young people do not have a clear demarcation between the online (virtual) world and the offline (real) world

The New E-Generation

- Ready and demand to "participate" and make their presence felt either because:

a) Better access to all kinds of information

b) Can see how hopeless their future will be (especially in terms of dealing with issues like employment, housing, poverty)

The New E-Generation

- Cynicism and lack of active engagement in existing political structures do not mean that they are not interested in political issues

- In fact, as the recent Sunflower Student movement in Taiwan and the Umbrella movement in Hong Kong have demonstrated, if they feel edgy about the issues, they will take things into their own hands and start mobilizing among themselves

The New E-Generation

- So it is not an issue whether they are the asset of community, they make themselves an asset without our mobilization

- And this is where they have also made the conventional paradigm of community development irrelevant

    - Whether we like it or not, because they have shown they have the capacity to develop their vision, organization, networks and strategies in creating change

Implications and Lessons

- While it is true that young people nowadays are not a homogenous group, many of them share a certain edginess about where our society goes and they are not only ready but want to make changes

- Many are not happy with their traditional role of being pigeon-holed as volunteers or interns especially when they find themselves having better competencies, more confident and growing bolder to experiment

Implications and Lessons

- Many are also the product of affluent society, who have grown disillusioned, frustrated and are willing to make sacrifice in finding bold alternatives to build their future based on post-materialist values ('small but certain happiness' 小确幸 in Taiwan and 'core values' 核心价值 in Hong Kong)

- There has been a proliferation of youth initiated and youth led-processes in these two societies

Implications and Lessons

- These included not only new social movements but also new channels and new roles for young people to conduct:

  - Policy research and analysis
  - Programme design for community development
  - Social media campaign and lobbying
  - Conferences and rallies

- In other words, they have moved themselves away from wanting to be consulted to participation and empowerment

Implications and Lessons

- In Hong Kong, the most popular slogan one often hears from young people (particularly among students) is "You don't represent me 你不代表我"

- This signifies that young people are no longer seeing themselves as the incompetent, illegitimate actors in socio-political development arenas exclusively occupied by adults

Implications and Lessons

- Demanding respect as social agents and partners of change for finding approaches and trajectories best suited for their unique situations and concerns

- It is not a matter whether as adults we would like to collaborate with the new E-generation but whether we can afford not to work with them because there is not a better time than now to take advantage of their determination, commitment, energy and inventiveness which they have displayed

Implications and Lessons

- For young people of this generation, token participation is meaningless

- If our goal is to build and enhance a sustainable future of our society, it is not enough to regard young people only as an asset; we'll need to allow them to take ownership of their own lives and community

Thank you