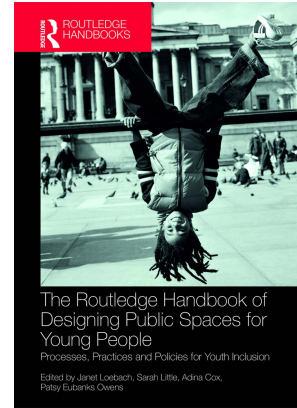


The Routledge Handbook of Designing Public Spaces for Young People

Processes, Practices and Policies for Youth Inclusion

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TAKEAWAY: CHAPTER 12

How to engage youth in the study of positive neighborhood change that is just, equitable, and inclusive

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KEY TALKING POINTS

- Low-income youth, some without citizenship, encountered neighborhood change as an overwhelming force that was re-shaping their day to day experience in the community.
- After-school and summer programs for youth in a faith-based community setting engaged youth in participatory action research about the neighborhood change
- Staff at community center, in collaboration with university partners, created activities to help the young residents explore the “what” and “why” of in-fill development, rising home prices, and changing business practices.
- The most positive, sustained outcomes from this intervention were the creation of clear pathways for youth engagement in the planning and civic process. Youth became aware of new ways to be involved in public efforts to strengthen the community, such as at the recreation center and library.

SUMMARY OF STEPS

- Assess key concerns of youth participants (e.g., cost of housing, school closures, lack of access to businesses or public space). Then, define the research questions around these concerns.
- Use these research questions to inform the research methods (e.g., mapping, counter-mapping, PhotoVoice, journaling, yoga and mindfulness).
- Share youths’ collective findings at a public presentation.
- Work with youth to identify next steps for communicating their findings to decision makers.

TIPS

- Youth engagement is rooted in trust; therefore, this is the first priority.
- Funding and committed program staff are essential to developing concrete action steps that both engage youth and are sustainable over several years
- University partners who value youth participation and also understand youth life stages are critical to the success of this form of engagement
- Practitioners and scholars must be open to different outcomes than what they anticipated at the outset.
- Be prepared for turn-over in the program participants. Youth involvement changes frequently in communities where economic precarity and migration-related challenges are common.
- Balance research and action goals with immediate takeaways for youth. They may not see the long-term goals as being valuable as their current day to day reality.
- Provide youth with skills and tools that they can apply in many settings (e.g., public speaking practice, storytelling techniques, digital mapping, and photography).
- Create frequent and interim opportunities for participants to share their findings with peers, family members, and policy makers. Social media, web-based map platforms, and public gatherings can be valuable spaces to celebrate the work and to share back with constituents.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

- Practitioners should spend time cultivating trusting relationships with youth in order to hear their concerns, hopes, and dreams. These perspectives can then be incorporated into planning and decision making about places and spaces where they live, work, study, worship, and play.
- Policymakers should welcome collaborations with community-based organizations who have created safe spaces for youth to share their views on their neighborhoods.
- Consistent, mutually beneficial conversations with young people will yield stronger planning outcomes and greater buy-in from the later adults who will be voters, taxpayers, and users of the built environment.

SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLES

- Philadelphia Youth Call for Change
<https://citizensplanninginstitute.org/citizen-planners-in-action/bethany-welch>