



“Democracy in Danger? Democratic participation and the role of education”

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Is Democracy in danger?

Three key trends in literature (Bessant et al., 2024)

- i) Decisive shift away from institutionalised forms of political and civic engagement often associated with declining trust in elected representatives. In UK, 12% of people believe the government would act in the needs of the nation above the interests of their own party 'just about always/most of the time' compared with 40% in 1986. (NatCen, 2025)
- ii) Rise in populist/authoritarian governments and political polarisation (e.g. In UK, anti-immigration demonstrations/'Operation Raise the Colours')
- iii) Young people disengaging from political participation e.g. 2024 European elections 36% 18-25yr olds voted (Eurobarometer, 2024).



Whose fault?

- The blame or ‘sickness’ is often laid on the society/individual rather than elected representatives. ‘Democratic deficit’ (Norris, 2011) gap between the aspirations of functioning democracies and current levels of satisfaction with the performance of liberal democratic countries.
- What does it mean to be burnt by democracy? Stephanie (USA, 21 yrs old) describes democracy as the ‘the façade of equity’ (Kennelly, 2024).
- Rising social and economic inequality and climate instability *is being driven by government policy*. This is despite calls for action by [young] people to address these challenges (Bessant et al., 2024)



Young People, Radical Democracy and Community Development

Edited by Janet Batsleer, Harriet Rowley and Demet Löküslü



What can be done? Democratic participation and the role of education.

Partispace (2015-2018- EU Horizon) called for a 'Reawakening in Europe to the democratic potential of the role young people can play in civil society.'

Broadened definition of 'what counts'. Practices are social, relational and relevant to their daily lives, often driven by their search for identity and belonging.

Erasmus+ (2019-2024) creative experimentation through partnerships between higher education, youth work and young people.

In book, authors present examples of how young people and youth workers are prefiguring experiments in radical democratic practice. Using 'The Principle of Hope' (Bloch, 1986 [1958]) reinvention of forms of solidarity, care and connection to go beyond limitations of liberal democracy (Batsleer et al., 2023).



Key messages

- Stop infantilising young people
- Stop trying to teach democracy
- Create ‘breathing spaces’ for experimentations in how to relate across difference especially for marginalised young people.

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