***Young People’s Involvement in Democratic Structures in England***

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**Abstract**

This article explores children and young people’s engagement with democratic mechanisms in England, including the potential and limitations of `democratic mechanisms’ in including the voices of children and young people. The research by utilising 4 contrasting case studies looks at what children and young people think of democracy and their attitudes to a broader sense of `active citizenship’. The article explains the reluctance of most young people to engage with formal institutions by arguing: a) Their previous experiences of `democracy’ has led to poor well-being be it through experiences with schools, authority figures such as police and local authorities and their own family experiences; b) the spaces for participating in citizenship and democracy are not appropriate to young people; c) the model of democracy in England around representation does not encourage `direct, participative citizenship but a more passive role of merely voting.

Where young people have seen little evidence of adults actually *listening* and acting upon their voices a cynicism emerges towards democracy in general. The young people in the study assumed that their voice will make no difference and there is little to choose between the mainstream political parties. In this light, and if the situation in Europe is similar to England, it is therefore unsurprising that there are discussions of a `democratic deficit’ in young people within European societies.

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