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The Social Exclusion of a Youth Population in Scotland:

Is the 'Framing' of the Problem the Actual Problem?

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Is the 'Framing' of the Problem the Actual Problem?

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Executive Summary

Evidence demonstrates that youth exclusion is an intractable problem that has not been successfully managed into non-existence by established legislative approaches.

One avenue for enquiry is to compare how policy makers and youth work organisations (that work in this area) frame the nature of the youth exclusion problem and to study and understand whether conflict between framings exists.

This research involved documentary analysis of key policy literature from the Scottish Government and the City of Glasgow Council. In addition, we worked with three organisations involved in youth exclusion initiatives in Glasgow to understand how these organisations interpreted and framed the problem of youth exclusion.

From the policy documents from the Scottish Government and City of Glasgow Council, some descriptions hint at complexity but when we 'drill down', youth exclusion is largely articulated as a tame (management) problem with significant measurement, targets and outputs.

In contrast, in analysing the narratives from the three youth work organisations, the language suggests a wicked problem framing. This, we consider, leads to three conclusions:

- There is a difference in problem framing between policy and youth work.

- There is a difference in success criteria: the policy documents have clear quantitative goals. In contrast, for the three youth work organisations, goals and success are also focussed on the development of less easily measurable outcomes such as kindness, empathy and caring.

- The different problem framing and success criteria led to some of the youth workers' core activities being under or un-funded. While this has clear implications for young people, it also has implications for the youth workers and relied on their unpaid overtime working.

Recommendations

- Putting the young person at the centre of policy design, not just in intent but in person, will make young people the agents not the objects of policy.

- Youth workers recognised the utility of measurable targets but questioned whether the 'right' targets were in use as a result on not facilitating young people to be the agents of policy. A remedy would be to include young people's stories as relevant data in policy design and outcomes — not just statistics, measurement and targets.

- It will be important to revisit the policy of funders in awarding grants. For example, in embracing a different and greater variety of outputs i.e. young person's experiences and stories.

- Youth workers and youth work organisations need recognition (in professional and in financial terms) of the capacity developing and support work that they do. It will, therefore, be important to revisit the policy of funders in awarding grants to recognise youth workers' insights into 'what works' and to adequately fund this work.

- There is a need for a new design and way of thinking that taps into young people's experiences, stories and humanity that can address such complexity — this will involve, and is an objective for, wider society so that citizens understand the issue and be committed to what it might involve for them.

- We need to understand, fundamentally, why this problem is framed differently — in addition, is this difference in framing prevalent throughout Scotland?

Introduction

Youth exclusion is an intractable problem that has not been successfully managed into non-existence by established legislative approaches (The Sutton Trust, 2012)[1]. Given the increasing amounts of government policy designed to facilitate poverty reduction and social mobility, this is a concerning lack of change. Such intractable problems — which are complex and messy — are increasingly recognised as 'wicked problems' needing novel and innovative solutions.

We consider that one avenue for enquiry is to compare how policy makers and youth work organisations (that work in this area) frame the nature of the youth exclusion problem and to study whether a lack of success in improving 'inclusion' and social mobility can be partially explained by a mismatch or even a conflict between framings if, and where, they exist [2].

In this research project, we aimed to examine how public and third sector organisations frame problems in relation to youth exclusion. In detail, we worked with three youth work organisations involved in youth exclusion initiatives to investigate how they understand and construct the problem. The way in which these organisations then frame the problem is contrasted with the approach adopted by the Scottish Government (the legislator) and the City of Glasgow Council (a funder).

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[1] According to the Poverty and Social Exclusion website (http://www.poverty.ac.uk/), and based on a comprehensive review of the literature in 2007, Levitas et al. (in their report The Multi-dimensional Analysis of Social Exclusion for the last government's social exclusion task force) take as their working definition of social exclusion:

Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.

[2] In this research, we are particularly interested in youth exclusion. We consider that youth exclusion is a form of social exclusion in which youth are at a social disadvantage in joining institutions and organisations in their societies. Many governmental policies dealing with social exclusion are targeted at youth since this demographic of people face a transition into adulthood. Such transitions (for example, career and lifestyle choices) that will affect the future culture and structure of a society (McDonald, 2010).

The Issue

Complex issues such as the provision of health and social care, youth exclusion and crime are increasingly being viewed as wicked problems (Rittel and Webber, 1973; Grint, 2005).   For a wicked problem:

• there is no easy solution or even any end point;
• it does not respond to a 'one size fits all' approach;
• it involves multiple publics and forms of knowledge;
• has no simple or predictable solution; and
• is often based on competing or uncertain causes.

In contrast, a tame problem may be complicated but:

• it is manageable;
• it has a solution and, therefore, an end point;
• activity needs to be focussed on collecting the correct information to facilitate the solution; and
• solutions can be replicated.

In effect, therefore, the/a problem is socially constructed (Grint, 2005). For example, the setting of targets for performance and establishing a requirement to plan and to coordinate suggests the construction of an issue as a tame problem — to be managed, planned and coordinated where change is seen as linear.

Of note, how a problem is understood (and interpreted) by different parties may result in differing interpretations, which may result in differing expectations of what an appropriate action is.

In this regard, we suggest that the use of Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) will cast a new light on the issue of how the nature of a problem is constructed socially by different parties. Framing theory — in suggesting that the way an issue is presented (framed) influences the choices people make — allows our research to explicitly consider the power implications underlying the social construction of an issue such as youth exclusion.

Where collaborating parties have differing understandings of the nature of the issue, the impact of different problem framing — and outcomes for people and problems — is unknown. Our research project suggested that we might encounter youth exclusion issues that are framed as wicked by some parties and as tame by others.[3]

Research Objectives

To investigate how youth exclusion practices and policies are being framed at the governmental, local authority and youth work-levels by asking the following questions:

- How do organisations charged with implementing youth exclusion policy frame the problem?

- Is the framing of the issue in policy documents accepted as the only logic in responding to, and understanding of, the issue of youth exclusion?

To 'triangulate' how youth exclusion is understood and framed by three stakeholders: the Scottish Government, Glasgow City Council and youth work organisations.

To listen, to offer voice and to build relationships with youth work organisations involved in youth exclusion in Scotland.

To consider the implications of this for policy and practices.

[3] Indeed, Dumas and Anderson (2014) offer that the issue of framing at the youth exclusion problem definition stage is poorly understood.

Research Method

The research involved three phases:

Phase One: Desk-based exploration and analysis of the websites of the Scottish Government and the City of Glasgow Council for policy and guidance relating to youth exclusion. These documents were explored for language used to understand how they frame the problem of youth exclusion in Scotland (relevant websites are detailed at Annex A).

Phase Two: Field work. This phase was designed as a set of three case studies with youth work organisations in Glasgow. In detail, we interviewed 8 personnel who worked in these organisations. Appointments included: Project Coordinator; Generational Project Worker; Senior Youth Worker; Project Manager; and Project Youth Worker.

Phase Three: Data analysis involved detailed qualitative analysis of the interviews with key personnel in the three youth work organisations.

Research Findings

Our findings are detailed in two sub-sections: 1) Problem Framing and 2) Barriers to Change.

In each sub-section, we start with our findings from Scottish Government and City of Glasgow Council policy literature. We then compare these findings with those established from interviews with the youth work organisations.

1) Problem Framing

The documents produced by the Scottish Government and City of Glasgow Council recognise that there is a problem with youth exclusion. Indeed, there is clear evidence of industry, focus and funding directed at youth exclusion and 'disadvantage'. What is, however, interesting is how the problem is framed in the documents.

This framing contrasts with the accounts we collected from personnel from the three youth work organisations involved in youth exclusion in Scotland.

a) Documentary Analysis of Policy Literature

Throughout the policy documents that we examined, we suggest that a tame framing is dominant. There is recurrent reference to measures, targets and performance objectives. This dominance of a tame framing of the issue in the policy documents suggests that the problem can be managed into non-existence. To achieve this manageability, clear quantifiable measurements are required:

> The process of identifying and recording the participation of young people has to be prescriptive and has to be replicated on a national level.
> *(Post-16 Transitions: Data Practice Framework)*

Indeed, the underlying assumption appears to be that more quantitative and standardised data is needed to allow a solution, or a 'fix', for the problem:

> We are working with local authorities and HM Inspectorate of Education

(HMIE) to understand and deploy data on the lowest performing 20% more intelligently. *(More choices More chances)*.

To improve youth employment <u>levels</u> beyond where they were pre-2008. *(Developing the Young Workforce)* (Emphasis added by authors).

We now set ourselves the <u>target</u> of reducing 2014 levels of youth unemployment by 40 per cent by 2021 and we will report annually on progress. *(Developing the Young Workforce)* (Emphasis added by authors).

The Government will publish an annual report on our progress in relation to implementing the developing the young workforce programme, which will <u>evidence the year on year progress towards these headline targets</u>. *(Developing the Young Workforce)* (Emphasis added by authors).

And in monitoring how well targets are met:

Modernising the improvement framework to focus on securing better outcomes for children, requiring the adoption of more flexible performance indicators which <u>track and monitor</u> the achievement of individual children. *(Developing the Young Workforce)* (Emphasis added by authors).

This focus on the manageability of youth exclusion was reflected in managerial language or jargon in the texts. For instance, the use of the word 'client' *(More choices, More chances, 2006)* and repeated references to "quality improvement processes ", "the bottom line", "audit activity" and "details of stock and flow".

The one area of exception appears in documents associated with youth offending where there is a recognised need to "adapt to different conditions and local demands, including variations in local authority size, scale and structure" involving "a holistic understanding of the events, environment and situations surrounding individual children" where the "importance of a sustained, preventative approach … cannot be a one-off activity." *(Whole system approach to young people who offend: evaluation)*. This approach incorporates multiple participants and constant "ongoing work". We suggest that this wicked problem language is further reflected in the documents' focus on "priorities" rather than targets, articulating activity with less of a traditional managed approach.

b) Interviews with Youth Work Organisations

In contrast to the dominant theme of tame problem framing in the policy documents, the interviewees' narratives portray youth exclusion as complex and messy, with multiple causes, interdependencies and voices. For example:

I think if it was simple, it would have been resolved many, many years ago.

In addition, and in contrast to the dominance of quantitative targets represented in the policy documents, the outcomes our interviewees focussed on included soft skills such as kindness, empathy:

I am proud of the fact of how kind and caring and compassionate they are.

Change the mindset [to] 'we young people like to be kind, caring, compassionate, willing to give our time to others'.

Help others without expecting anything in return.

it's … about empathising.

There's humility.

Work around building their confidence and their self-esteem.

2) Barriers to Change

a) Lack of young person's voice and definitions of success in policy documents

At present, there is limited voice for young people in the policy documents and limited opportunities to set their own criteria for success. There is an over-arching 'top down' approach in policy; for example, while 'partnership working' was a theme across all documents, most often this excluded young people's direct voice or participation. In addition, often experts spoke for the young people:

> Why not pick out some of the vulnerable people to say actually, what are your aspirations, and how do we get you from there to there?

> Success needs to be measured as well on the basis of what the young people themselves see as a positive.

Moreover, different ideas about success would involve different outcomes and these outcomes would need to be evidenced differently, perhaps as young people's stories and experiences:

> Why do Scottish Government, why do they not measure some of the softer outcomes? I don't know, is it too hard to capture all of that, or are they not valued as much.

b) Funding Gap

Youth work organisations found it difficult to secure funding for all the activities that they considered essential:

> It's all number-related whereas, a lot of the time, the young person will just want you to be there, to listen. Who's going to fund that though? It's really, really hard.

But still, funding requirements meant that:

> Everything has got to have an outcome.

The difference between targets driven by a tame framing and the youth work organisations' wicked framing with its alternative goals meant that youth workers often had to self-exploit to achieve the soft skills work with young people because the funding did not cover this work:

> Simply being there for somebody and sitting down having a cup of tea or playing pool or just being in here… Being in here for somebody, can you write that in a funding application?

> You can be spending three hours dealing with somebody that's got an issue. And you've got other people like building up. But you're not going to turn round and say I'm too busy. We're not going to speak to you. That's where… And you'll find the time, even if you're working an extra few hours a week to then get everything done.

This was coupled with an element of fear, including the advent of the centrally funded 'Monitoring Officer'.

> That's probably why we spend a lot of time evidencing things. We're so conscious that somebody might say 'what have you been doing?' Everything that we do we evidence and probably we over-evidence things … we keep a record of it. Then we report on it, we write the monthly stats up and everything, so nobody can ever come in and say we never did it. Everything we say we're going to do we do and more. They have nothing to come back to us on.

As a consequence of the different problem framing, activities defined as essential by the youth workers were being under- or un-funded. While this had clear implications for the young people themselves, it also had implications for the youth workers and relied on their unpaid overtime working.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the different framing of youth exclusion problem — as a tame problem in the policy documents and as a wicked problem by the youth work organisations — was linked to how success was articulated. For policy, success involved quantifiable goals. In contrast, the youth work organisations articulated success as measurable achievements but also included young people's experiences and less-easily-measurable outcomes such as kindness, empathy and caring.

Recommendations

First, the current policy approach, by the Scottish Government and City of Glasgow Council, excludes the direct voice of young people — and we recognise that this is not easy to achieve. Putting the young person at the centre of policy design, not just in intent but in person, will make young people the agents not the objects of policy. In the same vein, youth workers recognised the utility of measurable targets but questioned whether the 'right' targets were in use as a result on not facilitating young people to be the agents of policy. A remedy would be to include young people's stories as relevant data in policy design and outcomes — not just statistics, measurement and targets. In line with this, it will be important to revisit the policy of funders in awarding grants. For example, in embracing a different and greater variety of outputs i.e. young person's experiences and stories (young people's self-defining notion of success).

Second, youth workers and youth work organisations need recognition (in professional and in financial terms) of the capacity developing and support work that they do. In line with the recommendation above, it will be important to revisit the policy of funders in awarding grants to recognise youth workers' insights into 'what works' and to adequately fund this work.

There is a need for a new design and way of thinking that taps into young people's experiences, stories and humanity that can address such complexity. But, as this is a wicked problem and not just the responsibility of government agencies or the youth population themselves, it involves, and is an objective for, wider society so that citizens understand the issue and be committed to what it might involve for them. Therefore, our third recommendation is to institute a public debate to generate collective responsibility for and action on youth exclusion. To achieve this, deliberative spaces utilising deliberative democracy practices are urgently needed to increase and engage collaboration to ask the 'right' questions of the appropriate publics.

Finally, we need to understand, fundamentally, why this problem is framed differently. In addition, is this difference in framing prevalent throughout Scotland? Further research will be required.

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Annexe A: Scottish Government and City of Glasgow Council Websites

	Subject Matter	Link
Scottish Government		
Education & Training		
A.	**Young People 16-24:**	
	Developing the young work-force: Youth Employment Strategy	http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/12/7750
	Scotland's Young People	http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/edandtrainingforyoungple/scotlandsyoungpeople
	Opportunities for All	http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0040/00408815.pdf
	Post-16 Transitions Policy and Practice Framework	http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0040/00408819.pdf
	Post-16 Transitions. Data Practice Framework (2012)	https://www2.gov.scot/Publications/2014/08/9352
	Partnership for Learning	http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/edandtrainingforyoungple/partnerships
	More Choices, More Chances	http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2006/06/13100205/0
	16+Learning Choices	http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2010/03/30180354/0
	National Youth Work Strategy 2014-2019	https://education.gov.scot/Documents/youth-work-strategy-181214.pdf
	A guide to GIRFEC 2012	https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/publications/practice-guide
	Data practice Framework	https://www2.gov.scot/Publications/2012/11/2173
	GIRFEC Leaflet	https://www.gov.scot/publications/getting-right-child-childs-plan-leaflet/

	Subject Matter	Link
Scottish Government		
Education & Training contd.		
B	**Skills and Training:**	
	Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy	http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2007/09/06091114/0
C	**Employability:**	
	Action for Jobs - Supporting Young Scots into Work: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy	http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2012/06/9210
	Achieving Our Potential: A Framework to tackle poverty and income inequality in Scotland	http://www.employabilityinscotland.com/policy-and-partnership/policy/achieving-our-potential-a-framework-to-tackle-poverty-and-income-inequality-in-scotland/
People and Society		
A	**Fairer Scotland:**	
	Tackling Poverty in Scotland	http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/fairerscotland/tacklingpovertyinscotland
	Child Poverty Strategy	http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0044/00445863.pdf
	Annual report for the child poverty strategy 2014	http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00457305.pdf
	Annual report on the child poverty strategy 2016	http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/12/6196
Law Order and Public Safety		
A	**Policies**	
	Preventing offending by children and young people	http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Justice/policies/young-offending
	Evaluation of the whole system approach to young people who offend	http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00479272.pdf
	Youth Justice Strategy 'Preventing Offending: Getting it right for children and young people' - Progress Report	http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00521348.pdf
	Preventing Offending: Getting it right for children and young people	http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/06/2244

	Subject Matter	Link
Glasgow City Council		
Schools and Learning		
	Standards, Quality, Performance & Research	https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=39046&p=0
	Standards and Quality Report	https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=37114&p=0
	Education Services Research	https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=18239
	Getting it Right for Early Child	https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=19760
	Developing the Young Workforce, Employability and Enterprise Programmes in Schools	https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=18325
	Secure your future. Glasgow's youth employment activity plan	https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=34178&p=0
	Impact report 2017: MCR pathways	https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=38545&p=0
Social Care and Health		
	Children and families:	
	Youth Justice	https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=26225&p=0