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# Apathetic or Engaged?

## Exploring Two Paradigms of Youth Civic Engagement in the 21st Century

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### Abstract

*The majority of academics studying the field of civic engagement would concurrently agree that there is a decline in conventional forms of civic engagement, such as voting, keeping informed with current affairs, or membership in civic organisation, especially among young people. However, disagreements begin when advocates for traditional forms of engagement discount evidence of new, evolving patterns in youth civic engagement. Reviewing literature on civic engagement, this paper offers an examination of the congested debate on the 'two paradigms' of youth civic engagement, the disengaged paradigm and the engaged paradigm.*

### 1. Introduction

The term 'civic engagement' was born from a movement that decried the decline of democracy and sought to investigate, promote and invest in the revival of democratic participation (Berger 2011, p.1). However, concern over civic engagement is not a new phenomenon and can be traced back as far as the 1800s, from Tocqueville's study of America (The Illinois Civic Engagement Project 2001, p.1). In an address to the French Academy in Paris in 1790, Nicolas de Condorcet, a French philosopher and mathematician, highlighted that every generation has a propensity to accuse itself of being less civically engaged than their predecessors (Stolle and Hooghe 2004, p.149). Four decades have passed since this address and the notion of a 'crisis' of civic engagement has gained precedence across varying academic disciplines, policies and institutions once again (Brady et al 2012, p.2), (Stolle and Hooghe 2004, p.149), (Bellah 1985), (Putnam 1993, 2000).

The term has gained fresh precedence after Robert Putnam (1993, 2000), in his famous books, *Making Democracy Work* (1993) and *Bowling Alone* (2000), decried that civic engagement and social capital levels were at record lows in most western democracies. In *Making Democracy Work*, Putnam (1993) 'married aspects of Coleman's social capital theory to propositions about voluntary associations taken from Alexis de Tocqueville' (cited in Skocpol and Fiorina 2004, p.5). While in *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam (2000) specifically focuses on how younger generations, socialised during a time of vast economic growth from the 1960s onward, are considerably less likely to become civically or politically engaged when compared to previous generations (Stolle and Hooghe 2004, p.149). Following this, a large amount of literature on civic engagement has been published, each attempting to define, investigate, explain, or oppose its 'decline' and propose how these trends can be prevented (Banjai 2008, p.543). In fact, what has occurred between academics and across various disciplines is, as Stolle and Hooghe (2004, p.150) aptly analogise, akin to 'a kind of trench warfare, with fiercely opposing sides bogged down in the mud of an antagonistic duel about the validity of democratic political culture in Western Societies'.

The majority of these incongruities among academics can be reduced to disagreements over the concept of citizenship and whether citizenship is or indeed has, undergone change in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Bennett 2008). This paper will begin by exploring the various definitions of civic engagement; from the very specific to more inclusive definitions. Disagreements over the alleged 'crisis' of civic engagement often stem from the disputes over defining civic engagement. The various definitions of civic engagement have led to opposing results in research, as academics are using different definitions and different measurements (Banjai

2008), (Bennett 2008). There is an apparent divide among academics on whether there is a decline in civic engagement, or whether there is evidence of new forms of engagement developing that conform to the values of a post-materialist society (Inglehart 2008), (Forbig 2007, p.7), (Harris 2005, p.35-37), (Sherrod et al, 265), (Power 2012, p.2-4), (Turner-Lee 2010, p.20-24), (Walker 2002, p.183-187). The paradigm divide, according to Bennett and Wells (2009, p.1) highlights 'fundamental epistemological conflicts over what counts as civic and what counts as engagement in various settings, from games to encounters with news'. The second section of this paper focuses specifically on the youth civic engagement debate, examining the two paradigms, the decline paradigm and the new engagement paradigm.

## **2. What is 'Civic Engagement'?**

The word 'civic' derives directly from the Latin terms for both 'city' and 'citizenship', and is defined in dictionaries as 'that which pertains to political communities, citizens, or citizenship' (Gehring 2005, p.1). Furthermore the term also implies a notion of morality, embodying a sense of the 'public good' (Banjai 2008, p.552). Citizens are 'civic minded' when they care about their community and are prepared to act benevolently for the common good, even when it might come at a personal cost (Gehring 2005, p.2). Nonetheless, when it comes to defining what constitutes as 'civic engagement' definitions can vary from very specific parameters of civic behaviour to very vague, all inclusive definitions (Stolle and Hooghe 2004), (Berger 2011). An internet search for the term civic engagement brings up over 400,000 citations and voluminous literature relating to the topic. A review of literature on the concept quickly highlights the wide range of definitions of civic engagement, with various methods for measuring civic behaviour, thus showing a complete lack of consensus on the topic (Alder and Goggin 2005, p.237), (Norris 2002), (Gibson 2000 cited in Alder and Goggin 2005, p.237), (Berger 2011), (Ekman and Amna 2012), (Levine 2008).

As mentioned, there are some rather explicit definitions of civic engagement, which limits the meaning of the term to very specific forms of engagement (Adler and Goggin 2005, p.239). For example, the majority of political scientists tend to focus explicitly on forms of political participation and attention to and knowledge of political processes, as 'civic engagement' (Berger 2011, p.4), (Pritzker 2008, p.3). For Diller (2001 cited in Adler and Goggin, 2005, p.238) civic engagement is based on the concept of citizenship and is 'an individual's duty to embrace the responsibilities of citizenship with the obligation to actively participate, alone or in concert with others, in volunteer service activities that strengthen the local community'. Some definitions of civic engagement specify a necessity for collective action, discounting individual action, towards improving societal ills (Van Benschoten 2001 cited in Adler and Goggin 2005, p.238), (Ekman and Amna 2012, p.285). While other definitions also specify the need for collective activities but, collective activities that are specifically political in nature (Diller 2001 cited in Adler and Goggin 2005, p.238), (Ronan 2004 cited in Adler and Goggin 2005, p.238).

Nevertheless, supporters of a more inclusive definition of civic engagement generally oppose reductive definitions of civic engagement that are simply based on the constraints of citizenship. As Levine (2011, p.3) points out, if you interpret the civic in civic engagement to signify the requirements of citizenship, then the term would only apply to the political sphere, and volunteering, while it might manifest into civic engagement, would not be considered civic behaviour. Citizenship is a social construction and is not static (Bennett 2008). What constitutes the 'good citizen' is in a constant state of flux, changing with the political, social and communications structures of each era (Bennett, Wells and Rank 2008, p.6). While some might view the citizen who volunteers as a 'good' citizen, for others, it must also include active participation in the political processes (Westheimer and Kahne 2004, p.1). According

to Bennett, Wells and Rank (2008, p.6) nations are constantly imposing definitions of citizenship that are generally out of touch with modern society. 'The commonly endorsed dimensions of citizenship (rights and responsibilities, identity and a community/polity) are in late modernity no longer static and clearly defined but constantly fluctuating between a series of oppositions through which citizenship is constantly being re-invented and re-positioned with regard to traditional institutions and practices' (Furlong and Guidikova 2001, p.7).

What leads others to broaden their definition of civic engagement is the hypothesis that engagement in the public sphere, whether political or not, can promote social solidarity, and can be considered valuable in itself as a form of pre-political behaviour that has the potential to manifest into political participation (Levine 2011, p.3). For example, Zurkin et al (2006, p.7) define civic engagement as 'organised voluntary activity focused on problem solving and helping others. It includes a wide range of work undertaken alone or in concert with others to effect change'. For Zurkin et al (2006, p.50), civic engagement can be expressed in a myriad of behaviours, from donating to a charity, protesting, and raising community concerns to local politicians, volunteering or electoral participation. The Innovations in Civic Participation (2010, p.8), in a report of youth civic engagement based on 101 countries defined civic engagement as 'individual or collective actions in which young people provide opportunities for reflection'. Fiorina (2002 cited in Jenkins et al 2003, p.1) maintains that most civic activity can range from being very politically motivated to being non-political. However, the majority of what occurs in the civic domain always end up crossing paths with the political domain, whether intentionally or unintentionally (Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001 cited in Jenkins et al 2003, p.1). Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995 cited in Jenkins et al 2003, p.2) highlight that civic activity manifests into political activity when citizens develop relevant skills and experiences from being active in the civic domain where most activity crosses paths with the political domain.

Berger (2011, p.4) and Sartori (2012, p.64) argue that the concept of 'civic engagement' has undergone a 'conceptual stretching' or a 'conceptual straining', leading to an ill-defined, amorphous concept of civic engagement. As Ekman and Amna (2012, p.284) point out 'if civic engagement is used by scholars to mean completely different things, it is basically a useless concept - it confuses more than it illuminates'. Berger (2011, p.4-5) calls for the one size fits all buzzword 'civic engagement' to be abolished and instead to focus on the distinct political (engagement with the political processes, such as voting), social (engagement at a social level, such as joining groups, attending meetings) and moral forms (attention of and adherence to a specific moral code and principles) of engagement that promote and foster a democratic society. Zurkin et al (2006, p.9) also believe that while trying to decipher what constitutes as civic engagement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, research should also focus on what forms of engagement are 'best' for both individuals and the state. If declining levels of civic engagement are indeed a threat to the effective functioning and survival of democracy, then it is surely imperative to clarify what actually is declining or, what it is that is so urgently needed in order to reverse the situation (Ekman and Amna 2012, p.284). This lack of consensus on defining civic engagement, from some using very specific parameters of civic engagement to others advocating the inclusion of more latent civic engagement, has led to a divide among academics (Rheingold 2008), (Bennett 2008), (Putnam 1998, 2000), (Andolina et al 2002). This debate becomes even more congested when trying to understanding youth civic engagement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Banaji 2008).

### **3. Youth Civic Engagement**

When the topic of declining civic engagement is brought up, it isn't long before the focus shifts towards the alleged failure of younger citizens to engage in conventional politics and

government in comparison to past generations (Dayrell, Leao and Gomes 2009, p.32), (Edwards 2007 cited in Banaji 2008, p.544). ‘The idea that young people are disengaged from politics and civil society, indeed from the entire public sphere – through no fault of their own or systemic constraints, or because of something that typifies that particular age group – has become something of a mantra now in this field’ (Banaji 2008, p.543). According to Brady et al (2012 p.14) in order for a democratic society to survive, its citizens must be active participants and the participation of young people is paramount to ensure its continuation. Throughout history, young people have represented both the hope for the future survival of democracy, as well as a threat to its stability and existence. The future of democracy depends on the next generation taking on the role of their elders (Utter, 2011, p.2).

Disengagement of youth can lead to alienation from their communities and wider society, where they are rarely given the opportunity to be involved in decisions which, directly or indirectly, affect their lives (Carnegie UK Trust 2008, p.5). If young people become disengaged from civil society, their valuable contributions become missing, losing out on their innovative ideas, creativity, energy and social networks (Flanagan et al 2009, p.10). ‘If today’s disengaged citizens have legitimate interests that do not wholly coincide with the interests of the participators, those interests cannot shape public decisions unless they are forcefully articulated. ‘The withdrawal of a cohort of citizens from public affairs disturbs the balance of public deliberation, to the detriment of those who withdraw’ (Galston and Lopez, 2006 p.2). Citizen participation is considered the lifeblood of democracies and unequal participation will ultimately lead to gaps in representation and negative political consequences for these specific groups of the population, such (Norris 2002, p.9), (Levine 2007, p49-50.), (Zukin et al 2006), (Galston and Lopez 2006, p.2), (Flanagan et al 2009, p.10).

However, as Barber (2007, p.21) highlights, ‘a nation’s youth are usually the vanguard of social change and the shifting trends in society, this makes them particularly susceptible to criticism’. Today’s young generation are heavily criticised for their lack of participation in conventional forms of civic engagement and are often labelled as apathetic (Putnam 2000), (Bellah 1985). Nevertheless, others have challenged this view of apathetic youth by providing evidence of youth involvement and participation in more personal politics, such as political consumerism or online activism (Stolle and Hooghe 2004), (Zurkin et al 2006), (Norris 2000), (Bennett 2008). Disagreements between academics begin, when advocates for traditional forms of engagement discount evidence of new, evolving forms of youth participation as not desirable based on concepts and measurements that were popular forty years ago (Friendland cited in MacArthur 2006, p.2), (Carpini cited in MacArthur 2006, p.4), (Bennett and Wells 2009, p.1). This gives rise to the dual paradigm debate on youth civic engagement, the disengaged paradigm and the engaged paradigm (Bennett 2008), (Dalton 2008).

#### **4. The Decline Paradigm**

Putnam argues that the generations born from the 1960s onwards, the replacement generations, are to blame for the steady decline of civic and political engagement in modern society (Stolle and Hooghe 2004, p.149). According to Putnam (2000 cited in Skocpol and Fiorina 2004, p.5) and his supporters, citizens are increasingly ‘going it alone, rather than cohering in groups such as bowling leagues, or churches, or unions, or civic associations’. Changing postmodern values in advanced industrial societies are moving ‘away from acceptance of both traditional authority and state authority...for the past several years, political leaders throughout the industrialized world have been experiencing some of the lowest levels of trust’ (Norris 1998, p.243). Concern over the disengagement of youth is

reasonable, as youth dissatisfaction with conventional political processes and political parties is occurring in both the United States and Europe concurrently (Bennett 2008, p.1). It is statistically apparent that young people have the lowest level of political engagement, especially in electoral voting, and disengaging from traditional forms of political participation (Pritzker 2008, p.3), (Bennett 2008, p.1), (Zurkin et al 2006, p.4), (Stolle and Hooghe 2004, p.149). For example, the voting turn out for 18- 25 years older is usually 20% lower than the average (Fieldhouse, Tranmer and Russel 2007, p.797). The majority of the crisis of decline is focused specifically on the political arena, its declining electoral participation, political apathy among young people along with relatively low levels trust and political knowledge (Galston 2001 and Milner 2002 cited in Tourney-Purta 2002, p.264), (Pritzker 2008, p.3).

Focusing on Ireland in particular, the government, NGOs and most political parties have all expressed concerns over the declining levels of youth electoral participation and at their alleged growing apathy towards politics (O'Leary 2001, p.8). Past research conducted by the National Youth Council of Ireland on young people aged 18 to 25 found that 'slightly more than one-third (35%) of that sample group said that they had voted' (NYCI 2009, p.15). Of those that didn't vote, almost half (49%) stated that they were unable to vote due to work, college or exam commitments. According to Leahy and Burgess (2011, p.6) 'the government of the time resisted calls from student groups and the opposition to conduct the poll on an alternative date that would not clash with college exams'. In Australia, where participation in voting is compulsory, non-participation resulting in a fine, young people are still less likely to register to vote than adults. In the UK, there has been a sharp increase in people who have claimed not to have voted in general elections since 1992, the highest cohort being the youngest generations (Furlong and Cartmel 2007, p.128).

'Loss of community ties, little interest in and knowledge of political process, low levels of trust in politicians and growing cynicism of democratic institutions are often seen as indicators of the younger generations' weakened sense of citizenship and political engagement' (EACEA 2013, p.2). It is argued that these traditional indicators and measurements of civic engagement show signs of a significant decrease in civic engagement among younger generations (Stolle and Hooghe 2004, p.149), (Flanagan et al 2009, p.8). Pessimistic authors conclude that young people are abstaining from engaging with democratic political processes and are therefore showing signs of disinterest with politics (Hooghe and Dejaeghere 2007, p.250). The only area of civic participation that has increased since the 1970s is volunteering, which highlights the importance of developing future policies to incorporate civic engagement education and interventions for young people (Brady et al 2012, p.11), (Bennett 2008, p.2). It is uncertain, however, whether these changing patterns in civic engagement are actually a cause for concern (Stolle and Hooghe 2004). Schudson (1999, p.3) would argue that the decline thesis is based on the postulation of a single utopian definition of 'civic engagement' and 'citizenship' that is ignorant to the cultural changes that have taken place in post-industrial societies. Those who reject this reductionary definition of civic engagement challenge the decline paradigm and call for a more inclusive definition of civic engagement suitable for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Schudson 1998), (Howland and Bethell 2000), (Zlotkowski 2010), (Dalton 2008).

## **5. The Engaged Paradigm?**

Traditionalists posit that youth engagement, specifically, is rapidly declining and suggest that preventative measures to increase traditional forms of engagement are needed to prevent current trends of decline (Banaji, 2008 p.544). McDonald and Popkin (2001 p.963) directly challenge the methodology of those purporting a decline in voting, they argue that the use of

the 'voting-age population as a denominator of the turnout rate' has created this illusion of decline. They argue that the VAP (voting age population) includes people who are ineligible to vote, from those who have not gained citizenship and cannot vote, to convicted criminals. When measuring voting participation with the VEP (voting-eligible population) from the VAP since 1972, they claim that the ineligible voting population is increasing at a faster rate than the eligible population, and this creates the illusion of a decline in participation (McDonald and Popkin, 2001 p.963).

Schmitt and Holmberg (1995 cited Norris 1998, p. 5) maintain that the only trend that complies with the decline thesis was a 'general cross-national weakening in attachment to political parties'. Edwards (2007 cited in Banji 2008, p.544) and Howland and Bethell (2000, p.15) also highlight that the phenomenon of declining voter turnout cuts across all age groups, meaning being 'young' cannot be the only explanation. Schudson (1999, p.16) offers a different perspective on Putnam's evaluations of civic engagement levels between 1945 and 1960. Schudson (1999) agrees with Putnam that this period in time saw higher levels of participation in civic life. However, he critiques Putnam for ignoring the context surrounding this era. Schudson highlights the valuable point that 'Putnam is not otherwise curious about this group or whether they, rather than their successors, might be the outlier, but clearly, four years of mobilization for war, followed by prosperity and among other things by 1955 the highest level of union membership in American history, all of this surely strengthened this 'long civic generation'' (Schudson 1999, p.17).

At the Wingspread Conference Centre in Wisconsin in 2001, a group of thirty three student leaders stated that 'for the most part, we are frustrated with conventional politics, viewing it as inaccessible...however...we are deeply involved in civic issues through non-traditional forms of engagement. We are neither apathetic nor disengaged' (cited in Zlotkowski 2010, p.204) in an article in *The New Student Politics*. Other analysts of youth civic engagement accept that there is a decline in traditional forms of engagement but maintain that there is growing evidence of youth activity in alternative and innovative democratic forms of engagement (Banjai 2008, p.544), (Bennett 2008, p.2), (Norris 2002, p.4), (Dalton 2008), (Zlotkowski 2010), (Rheingold 2008), (Howland and Bethell 2000, p.15-16), (Stolle and Hooghe 2004, p.159). A recent study by the EACEA (2013, p.6) found that 'a clear majority of young people ask for more – not less – opportunity to have a say in the way their political systems are governed. However, young people tend to choose new forms of political participation'. Challenging the supposition of a vicious cycle of political apathy this alternative perspective highlights new, unconventional forms of political engagement that are surfacing in post-industrial societies (Demetriou 2012, p.3).

Inglehart (cited in CarnegieUK Trust 2007) maintains that there has been a revolution in cultural values in post-industrial societies, especially among the younger generations, which has impacted on political participation. Citizens in affluent western societies are becoming more concerned about 'postmaterialist' values, such as, that that impacts on their personal development and quality of life, from environmental issues to human rights. A lot of research has highlighted this paradigm shift in value patterns in postindustrial democracies, whereby citizens, especially younger citizens, are more motivated to become engaged in political issues that directly relate to their individual lifestyles rather than ideological programs and political parties (Bennett 2008, p.21), (Stolle and Hooghe 2004, p.149). Parallel to these developments, are declining civic engagement in public spaces and an increase in engagement in online spaces, where any form of political engagement online is often connected to personal or lifestyle concerns, generally outside of governments' domain (Bennett 2002, p.2). Dalton (2004 cited in Loader 2007, p.2) argues that traditional forms of

political socialisation and engagement no longer capture or motivate young people in contemporary society.

Many young people argue that youth civic engagement is not declining but that their patterns of engagement do not 'fit stereotypical political behaviour – they are focused on local projects instead of national causes, their activity is more informal, their means of acquiring information are more web based' (Andolina et al 2002, p.189). Many observers properly note that there are impressive signs of youth civic engagement in these nongovernmental areas, including increases in community volunteer work, high levels of consumer activism, and impressive involvement in social causes from the environment to economic injustice in local and global arenas' (Bennett 2008, p.2). Young people are showing signs of increased awareness and participation in uncontroversial and individualised daily political actions such as recycling, signing petitions, raising or donating money to charities (Dalton 2008), (Harris et al 2010 cited in Manning and Edwards 2013). In modern society young people are increasingly engaging and mastering the use of media applications in order to explore their identities, express themselves and communicate with their peers (Rheingold, 2008, p.97). Gibson et al (2005 cited in Brodie et al 2009, p.23) conducted research to analyse the patterns of online political participation and found that young people, aged 15-24, were the most likely to politically engage online. Gibson et al (2005 cited in Brodie et al 2009, p.23) also found that young people's civic engagement online is far greater than their offline engagement, with 10% politically engaged offline compared to 30% who were engaged politically online. There is growing evidence that young people are also expressing themselves politically and morally in the market, by boycotting specific companies based on their ethically policies, or consciously buying products that are, for example, fairtrade (Norris 2002), (Stoole, Hooghe and Micheletti 2005, p.246). Manning (2013) also highlights how young people are incorporating their political and moral views into their daily routines, such as practicing vegetarianism or environmental conservation.

Zurkin et al (2006, p.89-95) maintain that there is a renaissance in political engagement, concluding that today's youth are no less civically engaged than their elders, they are just engaging in alternate forms of participation (Zlotkowski 2010, p.204). According to Jochum et al (2005, p.31), consumerism has altered the ways in which people in modern society engage. They posit that engagement is now more episodic and forms of engagement that require long term commitment are, such as joining organisations, are less attractive. A combination of consumerism and individualism has led to patterns of selective engagement, with higher participation in forms of engagement that are both rewarding and self-expressive for the person getting involved. 'Increasingly, various socio-political causes and movements have harnessed the market as a tool for political activism, taking advantage of a permeable public/private divide and melding consumer/citizen identities' (Edwards and Manning, 2013). Many theorists, for example Harris (2004), Coleman (2005), Livingstone (2005) and Selwyn (2007), who have conducted studies on specific areas of youth civic engagement, all conclude that young people need to be represented in a positive light, with accurate and fair evaluations of this participation, whether it is online or offline (cited in Banaji 2008, p.546). According to Demetriou (2012, p.3) conventional indicators of political participation, such as voting, unionism or membership of political parties, need to be expanded to include the realm of "informal politics". The fundamental critique of the decline thesis is that its promoters only capture a relatively small section of civic engagement, the decline of traditional forms of engagement, detected from what is a far more complex social trend (Stolle, Hooghe, Micheletti 2005, p.249-250). As Norris (1998, p.258) highlights, by the end of the century citizens interest in joining organisations, striking and protesting may be declining, but, in



much the same way that they are no longer interested in 'hula-hooping or watching sputnik or going to discos'.

## 6. Conclusion

The Carnegie UK Trust views the rising culture of individualism as the primary influence that is shaping civil society in the United Kingdom and Ireland in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (CarnegieUK Trust 2007, p.17). Arguments generally arise when 'modernists' decry that this decline is a cause for concern, while the postmodernists are more optimistic about the future of engagement. 'The 'modernists' are accused of remaining hooked on the traditional forms of sociability and political behaviour characteristic of the 1950s and 1960s, while the 'postmodernists' are more sanguine about the opportunities and possibilities being created by the current trends in political behaviour' (Stolle and Hooghe (2004, p.150). Nevertheless, as Schudson (1999, p.16) and Skocpol and Fiorina (2004) highlight, here we are in a society that is now rights-conscious mourning the civic engagement of the 1950s through a nostalgic lens. Questions should be raised when we are in an age of increasing inclusion and equality for minorities and women, and we are mourning the loss of a world organized by exclusion, by sexism. Should young people be expected to do the same as generations before and have a sense of duty towards traditional forms of participation, even when they are developing in environments that no longer seem to reinforce these traditional dispositions (Bennett 2008, p.9). Zurkin et al (2006, p.9) argues that certain types of civic engagement should not be viewed as superior to other forms, such as voting classed as more valuable than volunteering, and instead should be viewed as a life cycle of participation behaviours of citizens that are circumstantially suitable at different stages in their lives.

This paper highlights the lack of consensus on the current status of civic engagement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It remains unclear and unexamined whether these changing patterns in engagement has to be cause for concern (Schudson 1999), (Inglehart 2008). However, there are elements of truth and points worth noting in each argument for and against the decline thesis. What is apparent is the decline in youth participation in traditional forms of civic engagement and a growing distrust and cynicism towards government, institutions and authority in general (Norris 1998). However, traditional forms of engagement remain important channels of democracy and a lack of influence from a specific age cohort could have political impacts for their future (Galston and Lopez 2006, p.2), (Flanagan et al 2009, p.10). Furthermore, it is important to note that 'the nature of political participation actions has changed significantly; they have become more individualised, ad-hoc, issue-specific and less linked to traditional societal cleavages' (EACEA 2013, P.2). The change in culture it is proposed, from collectivism to individualism, has not as such affected the rates of traditional participation as it has altered the ways in which citizens approach their participation in civil society (Rochester 2006 cited in Brodie et al 2011, p.9). However, while these new forms of engaged are often innovative, creative, can challenge wider society and create change, they are also mostly done alone, more than likely at a computer (Stolle and Hooghe 2004, p.162).

Although there is an evident divide and lack of consensus on the current status of civic engagement, there is agreement from all sides of the debate on the need to nurture civic engagement and higher education institutes are expected to take the leading role (Ostrander 2004, p.77-78). The interactions between new generations of developing young people and the key institutions for socialisation, the family, educational system, media and friends, have undergone many important changes in modern society (Gimpel et al 2003, p.7). Do higher education institutes and their structures produce a suitable environment that can nurture civic engagement of youth, from traditional to unconventional (Manning and Edwards 2009, p.33)? 'Proponents of civic engagement argue that higher education has historically had a role in

fostering democracy and citizen participation and providing social value through both its educative function and its production of knowledge. They argue that this role has been lost in recent decades' (Sax 2000 cited in Ostrander 2004, p.77). Ostrander (2004, p.77-78) fears that tertiary education institutes have become more inclined to adopt an educational model that simply caters for the goals of the market. Levine (2008, p.125), Gehring (2005, p.1) and Stoneman (2002, p.224) all concurrently agree that youth civic engagement does not occur by itself and yet the majority of institutions are structured in a way that suppress youth involvement at most levels. As Keeter et al (2002, p.5) state 'engaged citizens do not create themselves. We should no more expect spontaneous engagement than we do spontaneous combustion. The norms of the culture are against the former, just as the laws of physics are against the latter'. Instead of highlighting the apparent lack of youth engagement in specific areas, we also need to question whether there are the conditions and environments available to influence a movement towards all forms of civic engagement among young people, both socially and politically (Dayrell et al 2009, p.32-33).

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