Including Youth in the Ladder of Citizen Participation

Adding Rungs of Consent, Advocacy, and Incorporation

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ABSTRACT

Problem, research strategy, and findings: Youth are traditionally excluded from participation within planning venues, though planners increasingly recognize the value and knowledge that youth can bring to planning efforts. Yet planners struggle to find ways to incorporate youth ideas and decision making that are not exploitative, tokenizing, or coercive. Arnstein's "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" provides useful insights into how youth can participate in decision making through partnerships with adults for whom the ladder was designed. In this article, we use case studies of youth-focused planning initiatives to examine the potential for including youth in Arnstein's original ladder. These include Youth–Plan Learn Act Now (Y-PLAN), Youth Engagement and Action for Health (YEAH!), and Growing Up Boulder (GUB). Within each case study we analyze the goals, methodology, and projects of each program to determine how each expands or limits youth participation. The case studies vary based on the degree of participation, youth experience, and their geographical and institutional bounding. We then propose new rungs located between "placation" and "partnership" that offer youth an opportunity to partner with adults to engage in a planning project. Each new rung offers youth opportunities to participate in the planning process, though adults retain decision-making power. These rungs are divided by their directionality of power and whether youth are granted power to participate or seek it themselves. Further research could refine these rungs, especially within larger contexts of planning theory and the history of shared decision-making processes. Methodological challenges to this study could be addressed in some of these future research efforts.

Takeaway for practice: Practicing planners are challenged with ways to authentically include youth voices in productive and nontokenistic decision-making frameworks. Planners can apply these lessons to engage youth in different contexts to support the elevation of their involvement, voice, and power in the planning process.

Keywords: citizen participation, community participation, youth in planning, youth participation, youth programs

The idea of youth participating in planning processes is like eating kale. As Arnstein notes in her 1969 article, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," "No one is against it in principle because it is good for you" (p. 216). The article "juxtaposes powerless citizens with the powerful" in citizens' attempts to access "the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process" (p. 217). Arnstein's "citizen" directly engages in a committee, attends meetings, responds to surveys, or revises citizen participation plan sections. Citizens are encouraged to participate given the context of maximum citizen participation and the Model Cities program that dominated the planning work of the time. In so doing, the citizen engages in a low- or high-power

position to have his or her concerns, needs, and values known and possibly included in decision making, typically by the government or a corporation (Creighton, 2005). Citizens who engage in the traditional planning participation venues are older Americans with privilege but, most important, they are adults, not youth. Despite a traditional disenfranchisement of youth, modern planners recognize that young people can improve decision making in the planning process, although they generally operate only as high as "placation" on Arnstein's ladder (American Planning Association, n.d.). Planning practitioners and scholars often lack an understanding of how youth engagement can operate beyond the normative position of "placation" to that of "partnership."

There are many barriers to youth operating at Arnstein's "partnership" rung or above. Primarily, youth are not considered "citizens." Instead, they are considered incapable of receiving information and processing it to make a rational decision on an issue under consideration. Developmentally, youth are not fully developed to engage in the required information receipt, processing, and decision making until late adolescence. Before adulthood, youth require a level of facilitation from adults to effectively participate in shared decision-making processes as a means to bridge gaps in their abilities simply based on developmental trajectories. Youth often engage via adult proxies or "allies," which could be a parent, guardian, or other adult who can provide consent (Checkoway, 2011).

We examine the intermediate steps on the ladder of citizen participation that do more than placate children and adolescents, including the roles of mentors, teachers, and adult leaders who support youth participation. First, we review the literature on youth participation and explore international policy on societal roles for youth. From there, we review Arnstein's original article and Hart's ladder of youth participation (Hart, 1992) and then outline our study's methodology. We conducted case studies of three youth-focused programs, noting which fall closest to placation and partnership. This gives rise to new "rungs on the ladder" that illustrate what can happen between placating youth and giving them "control," specifically, shared decision making. We conclude with a discussion and takeaways for practice about how to engage youth within productive and nontokenistic decision-making frameworks.

Evolving Conceptions of Youth's Role in Society

First published in the *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Arnstein's (1969) "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" has profoundly influenced the fields of urban planning, social work, public health, and related disciplines that involve citizens and engage communities. Many have adapted Arnstein's ladder for specific purposes and audiences, including Hart's ladder of youth participation (Hart, 1992), which proposes a framework for assessing degrees of youth agency within the field of youth-focused programming. In this section, we evaluate the development of approaches toward youth planning over time, various benefits and barriers to youth agency in planning processes, degrees of agency, and recent trends in this established yet evolving field.

Two historical events produced shifts in perspectives on youths' rights and autonomy, especially in Western societies. The first major shift occurred following World War II, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) passed the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. The second major shift was the 1989 adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which was signed and ratified in 1990 by a majority of countries (though, notably, not the United States). The UDHR states all children have a right to social protection and parental rights include choice over their child's education. These two clauses deviate sharply from Industrial Revolution and wartime conceptions of youth as high-functioning "little adults" and regular contributors to the workforce. Postwar policy mandates, including but not limited to the UDHR, began to disseminate the idea that children are "victims of urban-industrial society," in need of legal protections to shield them from abuse (Checkoway, Pothukuchi, & Finn, 1995, p. 134). Early attempts at planning and designing spaces for children, such as Kevin Lynch's (1977) seminal work, *Growing Up in Cities*, adopt this protectionist perspective, as do recent examples (ARUP, 2017; de Winter, 2012) in many Western nations. Conversely, Hart (2008) reminds us that structures of apprenticeship and higher degrees of child responsibility and independence are still upheld in many non-Westernized or Westernizing parts of the world.

The CRC states that people under the age of 18 are considered children, except in cases where national policy dictates that children become adults before 18. To the question of youth agency, CRC states that children have the right to express any views they are capable of forming and ought to be honored "in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (United Nations General Assembly, 1989, p. 4). Many authors recognize CRC as the basis for a rights-based approach to children's participation (Chawla, 2001; Checkoway, 2011; Frank, 2006; Hart, 1992), and adults have a duty to offer methods for children to make decisions about their own lives, communities, and environments. Rights-based frameworks vary in their approaches, with some authors focusing on ways in which adults can best facilitate youth planning processes (Chawla, 2002; Derr, Chawla, & Mintzer, 2018a; Driskell, 2002; Francis & Lorenzo, 2002), whereas others argue for youth control with minimal or selective input from adults (Fox et al., 2010; Head, 2011). Underlying these frameworks is the notion that locations and geographies will be designed better following honest attempts to involve youth in the planning process.

Involving youth in planning processes brings invaluable benefits for the health and wellbeing of communities, individual youth development, and society at large (Checkoway, 2011; Driskell, 2002; Frank, 2006;

Knowles-Yánez, 2005). Communities with strong youth participation demonstrate greater civic capacity and increased intergenerational understanding (Frank, 2006). In addition, communities that integrate input from youth often discover a greater compulsion to put their ideas into action. Many scholars hypothesize that youths' lack of cynicism about official processes contributes to this enthusiasm (Knowles-Yánez, 2005; Linton, Edwards, Woodruff, Millstein, & Moder, 2014). Checkoway et al. (1995) hold that community advocacy structures that bring adults and youth together create an acceptable political arena for youth where none existed before, bringing a new benefit to policymakers and policymaking.

Youth also see individual benefits to their psychological, social, and educational skills and wellbeing, which can counteract social isolation, powerlessness, and underdeveloped self-confidence and self-efficacy (Checkoway et al., 1995; de Winter, 2012; Driskell, 2002; Francis & Lorenzo, 2002; Frank, 2006). Youth participants in planning processes develop heightened senses of personal responsibility, open-mindedness, social competence, and connection to their community and various environments where they live and play (Checkoway et al., 1995; Frank, 2006). Moreover, children who are involved in their community grow academically, learn how to work effectively in groups, and develop a new understanding of their place within civil society (Frank, 2006; Knowles-Yánez, 2005). As children develop new skills and understanding of what youth participation means for them, they gain more competency toward becoming citizens, rather than simply passive recipients of services (Checkoway, 2011).

In their extensive reviews of literature regarding youth participation in planning, Knowles-Yánez (2005) and Frank (2006) highlight persistent barriers to youth participation. Knowles-Yánez (2005), with a focus on land use planning, finds that youth are usually rendered invisible by planners and community engagement processes because of "historical conceptualizations" (pp. 3–4) of children, assumptions about who has the interest and capacity to plan, specific laws and regulations governing where children can play and linger, and the lack of a coherent approach to involving children in planning processes.

Frank (2006) categorizes historical resistance to youth participation into four "views" of youth: developmental, vulnerable, legal, and romantic. The *developmental* view held by planners argues that youth do not have the psychosocial capacity to participate meaningfully in planning process. The *vulnerable* view assumes that youth, through no fault of their own, will be taken advantage of by adults within planning processes.[1] The *legal* view holds that planners and other powerful stakeholders do not see youth as full citizens. Last, the *romantic* view insists that youths' values are significantly different from those of adults and must be treated as such, causing confusion within joint planning processes and preventing any meaningful decisions. Frank (2006) concludes her categorization by agreeing with Knowles-Yánez that these "reservations" (p. 353) derive from historical conceptions and are not rooted in current experiences based in practice.

Although these reviews are thorough, they lack discussions about differences between youth with privilege and those at higher risk of marginalization and manipulation. More recent scholarship illuminates the experiences of youth with marginalized identities, including youth of color and immigrant youth. Studies have also shown that lower income youth participate less than higher income youth do in formal politics but engage prolifically through nontraditional planning mechanisms, such as direct organizing or artistic expression (Checkoway, 2011; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). Fox et al. (2010) scrutinize literature characterizing youth as a uniform group and emphasize the importance of acknowledging forms of privilege and oppression in planning processes. They argue for critical youth engagement through a youth-focused praxis called youth participatory action research. Youth participatory action research frameworks encourage youth to study social issues and organize solutions while also learning about privilege, power, and systems of oppression. Youth are also encouraged to take action that leads to systemic transformation (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). These authors support a new and strong strand within the literature of addressing intersectionality, identity, and oppression within youth groups (Checkoway, 2011; Fox et al., 2010; Hart, 2008; Osborne, 2015).[2]

Despite these barriers, it is clear from the literature that studies involving youth in civic engagement and decision-making processes are evolving and that discussions about youth agency continue to push the field of planning toward greater youth involvement. It is also evident that Arnstein's original ladder has had a great impact on the field of youth participation through Hart's (1992) adaptation.

Arnstein's "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" and Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation

Arnstein's ladder (Arnstein, 1969) has been widely cited for its deconstruction of levels of citizen power, captured through the accessible metaphor of a ladder (see Table 1). She categorizes her rungs as follows:

Table 1

Typologies of participation: relative placement of level of participation from Arnstein and Hart.	
Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969)	**Hart's ladder of youth participation (Hart, 1992)**
Citizen control	
Delegated power	
Partnership	Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults
	Child-initiated and directed
	Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children
Placation	
Consultation	Consulted and informed
Informing	Assigned but informed
	Tokenism
Therapy	Decoration
Manipulation	Manipulation

manipulation and therapy are considered levels of non-participation; informing, consultation, and placation are degrees of tokenism; and partnership, delegated power, and citizen control are degrees of citizen power.

This typology is useful on its own. However, the ladder's larger context has powerful implications when applied to youth. Arnstein (1969) holds that citizen power is the "redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future," which "can induce significant social reform" (p. 216). Other authors have demonstrated that, when included, youth develop competencies in civic engagement, group cooperation, personal responsibility, individual duty, and self-confidence (Checkoway et al., 1995; Frank, 2006; Knowles-Yánez, 2005). Based on Arnstein's interpretation, it is possible to effectively address social reform regarding youth-specific issues when youth are included at high levels of citizen power. Arnstein (1969) also highlights broader issues of power and

participation, especially the *perception* of who has power and who does not. Typically, neither the wielders of power nor those typically excluded from decision-making processes are "homogenous blocs" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217). However, she adds, "in most cases the have-nots really do perceive the powerful as a monolithic 'system,' and powerholders actually do view the have-nots as a sea of 'those people'" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217). This assertion resonates with traditional responses to youth involvement in planning and civic engagement from adults, particularly the "developmental" and "vulnerable" views that Frank (2006) describes.

Of the many adaptations that followed Arnstein's ladder, Hart's ladder of youth participation (Hart, 1992; see Table 1) is one of the most notable and widely cited, especially in the fields of clinical psychology, planning, and social work. Although Hart's ladder added nuance to the emerging field of youth involvement in shared decision making, his findings are more concerned with allowing for youth creativity and agency

within play, considered the "work of the child" (Hart, 1992, p. 20). This conception is supported by Hart's rights-based approach, arguing that youth are often silenced or prevented from making their opinions known even when they could enhance family life and recreation. Similarities between Hart's and Arnstein's ladders include their ordering of power, as well as their classification of several rungs into categories indicating nonparticipation and participation. One notable divergence includes Hart's rung of "tokenism," sitting at third position; Arnstein dissects tokenism into three separate rungs (informing, consultation, and placation). In addition, Hart's conception of partnership is more nuanced than Arnstein's, reflected in the sixth and eighth rungs in his ladder, labeled as "adult-initiated" and "child-initiated shared decisions." Hart would explain years later that shared decisions are the most important component of partnership between youth and adults. Shared decisions involve recognition that decisions made by those in power affect others as well, which demonstrates heightened emotional maturity and psychological development (Hart, 2008).

Hart (1992) struggles to find examples of "true" youth participation, noting that children rarely participate without adult co-optation or control, except during "play," where children engage in participatory exercises that give them full control. In official planning processes, however, barriers affect children's abilities to fully share in decision making, including social and emotional underdevelopment, perspective-taking ability, and differentiated abilities to participate based on social class and gender.[3] Youths' limited ability to think beyond their own self-interest underlines their need to operate with adult partners who should be more mature and consider broader perspectives that benefit a broader public.

The literature on youth participation in planning and other civic processes has evolved over time from an advocacy approach to a rights-based approach. Scholars have proposed frameworks that draw near to Hart's highest rung, "children-initiated, shared decisions with adults"; however, progress toward changing how adults conceive of children is slow. Moreover, Hart (2008) reminds practitioners that, where appropriate, pursuing lower rungs on the ladder may be necessary depending on the types of projects and communities seeking planning services. Recent trends demonstrate that children's concerns regarding planning are of critical importance to many planners, but approaches to involving children still vary widely from little control to child-led initiatives (ARUP, 2017; Derr et al., 2018a; Driskell, 2002; Fox et al., 2010). We demonstrate through the case studies below that there are additional rungs

and forms of participation and power that remain unaccounted for throughout the literature. Our analysis ushers "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" into "the real world of people and programs" where, Arnstein says, "there might be 150 rungs with less sharp and 'pure' distinctions among them" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217).[4]

Three Case Studies of Youth Planning Programs

In recent years, scholars, planning practitioners, and other professionals interested in children's participation in planning processes have developed many youth-focused planning programs and initiatives. These programs have their origins in historical examples of youth advocates campaigning for more livable cities. The most prominent—and perhaps the earliest—example is *Wacker's Manual for the Plan of Chicago* (Moody, 1911), an instructional curriculum for middle-schoolers that taught both history of urban form and its application to Chicago (IL) and mobilized youth and their parents to promote the 1909 Plan of Chicago. One passage from the *Manual* reads, "Our children must be led to recognize their duty of looking to the future, knowing that to be unmindful of the needs of days to come is to be unfaithful of obligations to themselves, their communities and their Creator" (Moody, 1911).[5]

As demonstrated throughout the literature, the role of youth within planning has shifted according to broader cultural norms governing children's rights, opinions, and visibility. Today, there is a renewed focus on incorporating children's ideas, desires, and proposals for how to improve their urban environments, often in a setting that promotes children's autonomy and leadership (Derr, Chawla, & Mintzer, 2018b; Driskell, 2002; Francis & Lorenzo, 2002). However, concerns persist about youth agency, co-optation, and manipulation, especially given the tumultuous history of urban planning's disregard for community wishes and demands (Arnstein, 1969; Davidoff, 1965; Jackson, 2008; Zapata & Bates, 2015). Determining how youth-focused planning programs expand or limit participation in planning processes will help planners, teachers, and parents improve the pathways for youth civic engagement. Arnstein's (1969) and Hart's (1992) ladders are important for understanding how to classify levels of participation within planning initiatives. As planning efforts have evolved and youth have been involved, new levels and formats of participation have emerged that are not captured in these ladders.

To help describe these new forms, we identified three programs for case studies that exemplify the struggle to design planning efforts that expand youth

leadership and participation. We investigated youth programs and interventions highlighted on professional blogs and reference material from scholarly articles. Our selections are all prominent within the literature exploring the involvement of youth in planning initiatives. Beyond prominence, our criteria for selecting the cases were broad. First, the programs' missions needed to highlight equity challenges in planning and provide examples of urban planning projects or engagements. Next, they had to also possess an educational curriculum component. Last, we looked for cases where local decision makers (i.e., principals, neighborhood leaders, or local politicians) were involved, either as a receptive audience or as the initiator of these youth-led projects. We also looked for cases that had been implemented consistently or repeatedly, either in one setting multiple times or in multiple settings, and that engaged youth across a wide age range, from late elementary to high school.

Out of the cases identified ($n = 18$), we selected three exemplary programs for further study that met all criteria. These include Youth–Plan Learn Act Now (Y-PLAN), Youth Engagement and Action for Health (YEAH!), and Growing Up Boulder (GUB). Many cases were suitable but did not have extensive enough information to provide a thorough analysis or had not been replicated. Impressively, 75% of cases involved planning practitioners, decision makers, or both, an encouraging sign for the development of youth planning initiatives.

Once we selected these cases, we examined literature, data, and narratives produced by each program. As the oldest program, Y-PLAN has the largest collection of literature. GUB also has an abundance of material for analysis from its projects and various multimedia resources. YEAH! is still in its infancy, with few findings published on project outcomes and decision makers' reactions to youth groups. Though reliance on secondary sources presents limitations, the information that each program presents was generally forthcoming about the program's challenges and shortcomings, which provided a nuanced understanding of each. Upon completing this analysis, we derived new rungs between placation and partnership on Arnstein's ladder from these cases. These constitute only some of the "150 rungs" that Arnstein suggests could lie between the rungs she establishes. Table 2 provides details about each program, including the location(s), goals, organizational structure, and other key information about each program, which we supplement with analysis on their project involvement and each program's ability to expand or limit youth shared decision making.

Y-PLAN

Y-PLAN is a youth-focused curriculum that teaches adolescents about civic and municipal issues while empowering them to work on real-world problems affecting their communities. The program began in California but has since expanded to sites across the United States and the world. Y-PLAN groups typically consist of a coalition of high school students and graduate students, with high schoolers as the principal planners and graduate students as their coaches. Groups typically consist of 30 to 40 students (McKoy & Vincent, 2007). Some Y-PLAN projects have involved elementary and middle schoolers as well (McKoy, Buss, & Stewart, 2014).

Y-PLAN's early projects faced roadblocks to youth participation. In 2000, the Y-PLAN project director proposed a planning exercise to coincide with the redevelopment of the MacArthur Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station. Students gathered information and used their own experiences of the area to propose redesigns for the station, which they then presented to city leaders. However, their recommendations were not "considered in genuine decision-making processes" (McKoy & Vincent, 2007, p. 399). In 2001, program leaders proposed a similar process for the redevelopment of an Oakland Housing Authority site but with the client on board before the project's start, incrementally increasing community buy-in to Y-PLAN activities. Then, in 2002, a joint venture between Y-PLAN and BART was initiated to propose plans for a new West Oakland Transit Village, though researchers learned later that BART was in talks with other design firms at the same time and did not use youth feedback. McKoy and Vincent (2007) analyze three more projects from 2003 to 2005, remarking that governmental agencies and adjacent bodies actively sought Y-PLAN's input on these redevelopment projects, including another Oakland Housing Authority site and the redevelopment of a minipark. Later projects include fourth-graders' feedback for a housing redevelopment, including a vast amount of open space for play and relaxation (McKoy et al., 2014), and efforts by high schoolers to improve the built environment and contribute to sustainability in their community (McKoy, Stewart, & Buss, 2015).

Y-PLAN contributes to increased youth participation in both theory and practice. Theoretically, the combination of citizen participation and community of practice models creates a strong, active learning environment for youth. Situating youth planning efforts within a community of practice enables improvisational social learning for both youth and adults. Moreover, building partnerships between youth and civic leaders enables a space of mutual respect and encourages a successful project where everyone learns from each other.

Table 2

Summaries of details of Y-PLAN, YEAH!, and GUB.		
Y-PLAN[a]	**YEAH![b]**	**GUB[c]**
What does it do?		
Youth-focused curriculum that teaches youth about civic and municipal issues while empowering them to work on real-world problems affecting their communities.	Youth educational program that encourages advocacy for policy, systems, and environmental change around health and physical activity.	Boulder's (CO) "child- and youth-friendly city initiative" that put children's rights at a forefront of local planning, laws, policies, and budgets.
How was it created?		
Began in 2000 through the Center for Cities & Schools at the University of California at Berkeley.	Designed by the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, expanded by the Physical Activity Research Center.	Founded in 2009 as a partnership between several institutional actors.
Where is it in operation?		
Expanded from West Oakland to other California cities and New York (NY), Detroit (MI), New Orleans (LA), and Beijing (China).	Expanded from San Diego with active projects in California, Georgia, Florida, Hawaii, Maine, and Virginia.	Only located in Boulder, but its framework is based on international United Nations initiatives.
What are its goals or mission?		
(1) Engage youth in community development projects that also create a learning experience for adults and civic leaders. (2) Transform redevelopment projects into "catalysts for community revitalization" with a focus on a holistic urban growth model.	Through community empowerment and youth engagement techniques, YEAH! encourages youth to advocate for neighborhood improvements that will promote physical activity opportunities and uptake.	(1) Ensure opportunities for young people's participation in decision making in Boulder. (2) Foster inclusion for youth of various income levels, ethnicities, and abilities. (3) Give voice to all partners when deciding on projects and strategic aims. (4) Disseminate lessons learned.
Who does it involve, and in what capacity?		
High school youth as principal planners, graduate students as coaches, city leaders as clients, and the university as observer. Supported by adult staff of 20+, including an executive director, a creative director, consultants, and paid coaches. Funding in part by	Youth, middle schoolers, and high schoolers determine the policy or built environment they want to investigate. Adult leaders guide youth by teaching advocacy strategies, urban planning practices, and the built environment's influence on health behavior.	Youth aged 3 to 18 partner with institutions, teachers, and adult leaders acting as program facilitators. Supported by a paid staff, including a program director, education coordinator, program associate, interns, and visiting scholars. Funded

(Continued)

Table 2 (*Continued*).

Y-PLAN[a]	YEAH![b]	GUB[c]
the California Endowment and various corporate foundations.	Decision makers hear youths' proposed projects and solutions.	by the school district, City of Boulder, and University of Colorado.
Which theoretical foundations support the program?		
Arnstein's and Hart's theories of citizen and youth participation and the community of practice model.	Social cognitive theory and empowerment theory.	Based on the United Nations CRC and Growing Up in Cities.
How is the program structured?		
(1) Identify group goals, strengths, and areas for growth. Contact client and develop a work plan. (2) Collect data and intelligence using mind-mapping, PhotoVoice, and built environment audits. (3) Put plans in action with design and planning professionals. (4) Present their vision to the public. (5) Reflect on next steps based on successes and challenges.	(1) Perform assessments of the built environment, typically around their school or neighborhood. (2) Identify problems created by the built environment and/or the policies that govern their communities. (3) Work with adult mentors to devise solutions and proposals for improvement. (4) Present solutions to a local decision maker.	Projects are initiated by GUB's core partnership and two part-time employees who coordinate the program's administration. Projects vary in length and scope, with some smaller scale projects lasting a month and larger initiatives, like comprehensive plans, designed and implemented over several months or longer.

Sources:
a. McKoy and Vincent (2007); McKoy et al. (2014, 2015).
b. Linton et al. (2014); Millstein et al. (2016); Millstein and Sallis (2011).
c. Derr et al. (2013); Derr and Kovács (2017); GUB (2018).

In practice, Y-PLAN projects have demonstrated that they can both expand and limit youth participation. Generally, the content of the curriculum offers unique opportunities for youth to learn about their communities and engage with decision makers. It empowers youth to assume leadership roles within their communities, offering suggestions and pathways for how they can influence policy and environmental conditions. The design and implementation of the curriculum and individual projects determines whether youth participation is encouraged or restrained.

Early Y-PLAN projects limited participation (McKoy & Vincent, 2007). In the early years, university leaders and graduate students were largely responsible for which redevelopment sites were chosen for Y-PLAN activities and which aspects of the sites were addressed. McKoy and Vincent (2007) find that students' feedback was "more token than genuine" (p. 397) in this phase of Y-PLAN's evolution. However, they also argue that positive experiences between client and youth built a positive reputation of Y-PLAN's potential for authentic community engagement (McKoy & Vincent, 2007). Projects between 2003 and 2005 offered youth more power within planning processes, and they slowly expanded power to eventually approximate partnership.

YEAH!
YEAH! is an educational and advocacy-based program that encourages middle- to high-school youth to advocate for policy, systems, and environmental change pertaining to health, obesity, and physical activity. The program began as part of the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative (CA) before expanding to locations throughout the United States by faculty at Georgia Tech and San Diego State University. Youth receive lessons in advocacy and empowerment as they begin the process of determining which aspect of the policy or built environment they want to investigate.

Adult leaders—who include educators and community leaders—guide youth, teaching advocacy and empowerment strategies along with knowledge of urban planning practices and how the built environment influences our health behaviors. The last group involved includes decision makers, who consider youths' proposed projects and solutions at the end of the program.

Less has been written on YEAH!, and there are few resources describing exact projects. Linton et al. (2014) provide numbers for how many groups participated in the e-YEAH! Evaluation Study they undertook but do not describe projects in detail. They find that most groups completed school assessment projects, which evaluated characteristics of the school's immediate built environment, as well as its internal food system. Other groups assessed parks, advertising patterns, and community-based retail environments (including fast food restaurants, corner stores, and liquor stores). Linton et al. (2014) conclude that groups identified many issues with recreation facilities and school food. Slightly more than half of the groups "reported a change implemented as a result of their advocacy," whereas some reported pending changes and others reported no change. Changes included the installation of a salad bar in one school, additional lighting to promote walking to a community center, and the implementation of female-only swim hours at a YMCA (Linton et al., 2014). All of these have the potential to promote physical activity and built environment conditions that contribute to healthier communities.

The structure of YEAH! projects expands youth participation, but the character of that participation diverges from that of other youth planning programs. YEAH! youth initiate the planning process; typically, a project or policy change is not proposed until *youth* seek it out and propose it themselves. Through assessments of the built environment around their school, community center, religious institution, or neighborhood, youth decide what needs to change and how to change it. This allows for an activist approach in which the community petitions the decision makers who represent them for changes that will improve their constituents' lives.

Conversely, YEAH! arguably limits participation in Arnstein's and Hart's conceptions because youth have very little control over the successful implementation of their ideas. Although advocacy can contribute immensely to personal growth and positive health behavior change (based on self-efficacy and positive attitudes), the potential for environmental change is inconsistent and often operates on a different track than other forms of participation.

Growing Up Boulder

GUB is an initiative of the City of Boulder (CO) that describes itself as the city's "child- and youth-friendly city initiative." Child- and youth-friendly cities and locations put children's rights at a forefront of local planning, laws, policies, and budgets (GUB, 2018). The program involves youth across a wide age range, from 0 to 18 years, as potential partners in urban planning activities and education. The main institutions that form the partnership are also involved as potential partners, though they have more technical expertise and power than do the youth involved. Teachers and adult leaders are involved as program facilitators in many projects, especially those located in schools.

According to the GUB website, the program has successfully executed more than 40 projects, with many more currently in the design phase (GUB, 2018). Projects typically focus on one aspect of city planning efforts, including transportation, housing, sustainability, arts, and parks and greenspace. The program makes special efforts to incorporate feedback and participation from minority and underprivileged youth. Projects use a variety of creative techniques to capture youths' ideas and suggestions for design and policy change, including PhotoVoice, mapping, reflection essays, films, physical models, and traditional city assessments developed by the Child Friendly Cities Initiative (Derr & Kovács, 2017). Efforts are made to provide educational resources for children about the benefits of urban density, mixed use, increased greenspace, and active transportation. At the end of each project, students present their findings and recommendations to city and project staff, as well as relevant partners within the University of Colorado and the Boulder Valley School District.

GUB mostly expands youth participation as it provides a strong argument for a balanced distribution of youth- and adult-led planning efforts. By fostering a sense of partnership and mutual respect, youth feel empowered to approach city leaders about desired changes or visions to improve their community's environment. Within GUB projects, youth act in ways similar to adult community members. By centering youth feedback and opinion within a larger urban planning process and strategy, their participation is encouraged by staff, but youth may choose not to act on this opportunity for various reasons.

There are two drawbacks with GUB's model, both of which carry limits for youth participation. The first is that civic leaders must understand the importance of youth participation to build a relationship with youth. As explained by Derr et al. (2013), GUB formed after city leaders recognized the untapped potential of youth participation. Conditions that encourage this kind of

partnership-based arrangement are quite rare, as elaborated by the other two cases we examine in this study. Second, GUB's model is geographically bounded, making it harder to draw conclusions regarding the power of the program versus the power of the institutional context that allows the program to flourish.

Three New Rungs

Though different in their goals, structure, methodology, and results, Y-PLAN, YEAH!, and GUB all adopted youth participation strategies that fall between rungs 5 and 6, placation and partnership, of Arnstein's ladder. Arnstein's conception of placation is realized when certain citizens are selected to serve in isolated positions of "power," usually following community demands for inclusion in planning processes. These positions are most often volunteer based, with no remuneration, and situated within larger governmental structures. Though community members may have a voice, the larger web of institutional relationships lowers the volume of their voice, though the appearance of power redistribution is present. Yet this is the first rung where citizens have some degree of agency and power to influence change. Here, adults can provide youth access to participation. Youth are not qualified agents to climb the ladder of citizen participation independently and thus require the sponsorship of adults to have a voice in decision making.

Meanwhile, Arnstein's conception of partnership is realized when there is collective bargaining power between the have and have-not citizens. Citizens are able to negotiate with city/community leaders, especially if those leaders are accountable to them in some way, perhaps through elections or the power for citizens to hire and fire them. Often, ground rules for operation are established between actors through official documentation. Arnstein (1969) finds that partnership is granted only after severe pressure from community groups, and it is not conceded to citizens willingly.

Although these new rungs may seem parallel to rungs on Arnstein's ladder, they are the only rungs available to youth. Each new rung carries a requirement for adults to maintain the ultimate decision-making power. Adults scaffold opportunities for youth to contribute to the project under consideration. This sharing or ceding of power to youth distinguishes these rungs from the original rungs of Arnstein's ladder, not only because her ladder is intended for citizens, but because the new rungs describe a form of participation that approaches partnership but falls short.

For example, placation on Arnstein's ladder refers to the idea that planners make a perfunctory effort to

demonstrate their inclusion of community feedback with no intention of honoring community members' ideas in the long term. Whereas it is easy to placate vulnerable populations, youth, by virtue of their dependent status, already have no expectation that their feedback will be incorporated because of the inherent power dynamic that exists between them and adults in various roles. Youth cannot be independent participants in planning decision-making processes for the same reason: An adult must make the case for their feedback to be incorporated and taken seriously.

Y-PLAN, YEAH!, and GUB all have elements of both placation and partnership in their structures. Y-PLAN and GUB claim to put youth in partnership with city leaders, with GUB closest to true partnership. However, GUB lacks mechanisms that guarantee the genuine consideration of youth feedback (McKoy & Vincent, 2007), and no ground rules for joint operations are established with youth specifically (Derr et al., 2013). Meanwhile, YEAH operates outside of partnership, focusing on a petitionary structure instead. This grants youth more power than through structures of placation because advocacy amplifies their voices. However, the inconsistency of decision makers' receptivity or effectiveness in bringing about change reduces YEAH!'s participation level to below partnership. Therefore, we propose three new labels for youth-focused planning programs that operate in between placation and partnership: *consent*, *advocacy*, and *incorporation*. We summarize these concepts in Table 3.

Consent

Y-PLAN best exemplifies consent, which refers to approval given from one person to another. Under this framework, adults provide youth with an opportunity to share their visions for a space that will change. Given permission to work on projects directly, youth rise above consultation and placation on Arnstein's ladder by becoming an active part of the planning process for each project. Youth still do not reach partnership under either Arnstein or Hart's conception because they only advise on components of the project and are not able to inform the direction of the project itself.

Evidence for this phenomenon can be found in Y-PLAN literature. Early in the program's history, institutions misled youth regarding how much impact their designs will have, which caused project leaders to rightfully label these efforts as disingenuous (McKoy & Vincent, 2007). Others required sustained interaction between Y-PLAN leaders and representatives from civic institutions, without continued youth input.

Table 3

New rungs of youth participation.			
New rung	**Definition**	**Youth roles**	**Adult roles**
Incorporation	*To unite or work into something already existing.* Youth participation is a consistent presence throughout all stages of planning work, though adults are still the leaders of the process. The institutional context must value the idea of youth participation and integrate it fully into their activities.	Youth advise on plans and designs for the city, but more holistically than in consent. They form part of the planning ethos and provide their perspective and vision for their communities from start to finish. Planners often approach youth where they are, rather than vice versa.	Adults facilitate interactions with youth and ask directed questions about youths' visions, perspectives, and criticisms. Adults remain in charge of institutions responsible for the youths' participation.
Advocacy	*The ability to support, argue, or plead in favor of a policy, systems, or built environment change.* Youth bring proposed plans or design changes to decision makers directly. Decision makers usually do not solicit these ideas, which the youth campaign for.	Youth develop plans through various activities, with the intention of giving a presentation to a decision maker. Youth choose their own projects to undertake that affect their community.	Adults help guide the program and facilitate group discussions among the youth participants. Decision makers receive the youths' ideas.
Consent	*Approval given from one person to another.* Leaders give youth explicit permission to work on a planning or design project, mostly for their perspective. Granting power in this way is often opaque, with decision makers able to mask their intentions regarding what to do with the information. Youth only know what they need to know to complete their analysis, plan, or design but are free to propose any intervention they wish.	Youth advise on plans or designs for a site, sharing their perspective and knowledge of community and proposing solutions that they believe would benefit their community. In Y-PLAN, McKoy and Vincent (2007) find that, over time, youth were given more latitude, perhaps due to building reputation or trust with government officials.	Adults take on two roles: (1) Decision makers provide youth with the context, goal, and parameters for their site plan or design. They do not promise consideration or implementation of this plan or design. (2) Program staff are responsible for making arrangements with decision makers for youth to advise on projects. Over time, decision makers may reach out on their own if youth build a reputation for urban planning competency.

Although in many cases city leaders and university scholars encourage and endorse youth participation within Y-PLAN, that participation is often *granted to* youth rather than *sought by* youth. The sites that Y-PLAN addressed were often already slated for major planning improvement projects and could move forward without youth input. Youth were brought into the process later, after Y-PLAN program leaders suggested to civic leaders that it would be prudent to do so.

One barrier to fostering youth participation is rooted in Y-PLAN's complex structure. Composed of

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graduate students, university faculty, civic leaders, and the program's own staff, the high concentration of adults puts the program at risk of replicating existing power imbalances, knowingly or unknowingly. Actors with varied goals possess many opportunities to influence the outcomes of a Y-PLAN project. Indeed, McKoy and Vincent (2007) name burdens placed on educators as a principal challenge for Y-PLAN project success, which emphasizes the central position of power that educators have over each project. This is not surprising, considering educators have a large amount of responsibility and power over the education of their students already; however, it requires significant restraint and creative guidance on behalf of the adults involved for youth to operate with agency and freedom during a Y-PLAN project.

Overall, Y-PLAN youth are provided the opportunity to submit designs for redevelopment proposals, which more often than not will be adopted, fully or partially. The variability across Y-PLAN projects, the different degrees of influence that adult leaders wield, and the absence of the expectation that their feedback will be adopted can lead to imbalances of power and distrust between youth communities and civic leaders.

Advocacy

Advocacy is best exemplified by YEAH!. *Advocate* refers to the ability to support, argue, or plead in favor of something, in this case, a policy, systems, or built environment change. Youth participating in YEAH! operate from outside standard participation channels, instead petitioning for changes that they wish to see in their school, neighborhood, or community environments. They focus on projects and issues unknown to or ignored by civic leaders and propose redesigns or improvements directly to decision makers. This expands youth participation in one crucial way: It ensures that *their* voice is heard.

Advocacy falls outside of Arnstein's or Hart's conception of partnership because there is no presumption of partnership between individuals who petition for change and those with the power to make changes. Like adults who petition civic leaders for policy or environmental changes, youth rely on decision makers' receptivity, their political will, and the confines of their role within institutions of power. Partnerships may evolve between groups, though it would require considerable willingness on behalf of the decision maker.

YEAH! is informed by advocacy's history of variable success as a youth participation method. Fox et al. (2010) detail how youth participatory action research methods operate outside standard engagement structures but also acknowledge persistent barriers to

implementation. *Wacker's Manual* (Moody, 1911) brought hundreds of youth together to promote an urban vision of Chicago, leaving a visible impression on the city's form and construction. YEAH!'s version of advocacy takes youth's role a step further by enabling them to *design* a vision, rather than promote one already in existence. In this way, youth seek participation before it is granted to them, an important distinction between YEAH!'s and Y-PLAN's methodologies.

Incorporation

GUB best exemplifies incorporation. *Incorporate* in this case means to unite or work into something already existent. GUB's unique formation process situates their youth-focused planning program onto this rung. In GUB, youth participate in projects on an ad hoc basis as they are proposed by city and university leaders. As opposed to Y-PLAN, youth are under the impression that their feedback is valuable and will be incorporated into future planning processes for Boulder (CO). Although city leaders still make final judgments, adults and youth are united behind similar goals that fuel GUB's work.

GUB leaders acknowledge that careful planning and intentional inclusion are crucial for true partnership to flourish. Derr et al. (2013) share several lessons learned from early GUB projects regarding how and when city planning offices should invite youth to participate. Most important, "engagement needs to be on youths' terms, with methods that they find exciting and relevant" (Derr et al., 2013, p. 499). In addition, goals must be consistently agreed upon for partnerships to bring benefits to all parties.

Incorporation is the closest approximation to partnership possible. GUB narrows the gap between adults granting participation to youth and youth seeking it for themselves. Incorporation contrasts with consent in its scope. Under GUB's model, youth are routinely brought into planning design processes at all stages of the city's planning process, from initial visioning to project design. Consent, meanwhile, gives youth permission to affect planning projects piecemeal, with little sway over projects outside of their scope of work.

However, adults continue to set the rules of engagement for ad hoc projects they propose, upholding power differentials between adults and youth. There is also no guarantee that youths' ideas will be implemented. Arnstein's (1969) conception of partnership involves accountability of powerful actors toward those without power. In GUB's case, the City of Boulder is not accountable to youth in ways indicative of balanced partnership. Rather, GUB exists because of city leaders'
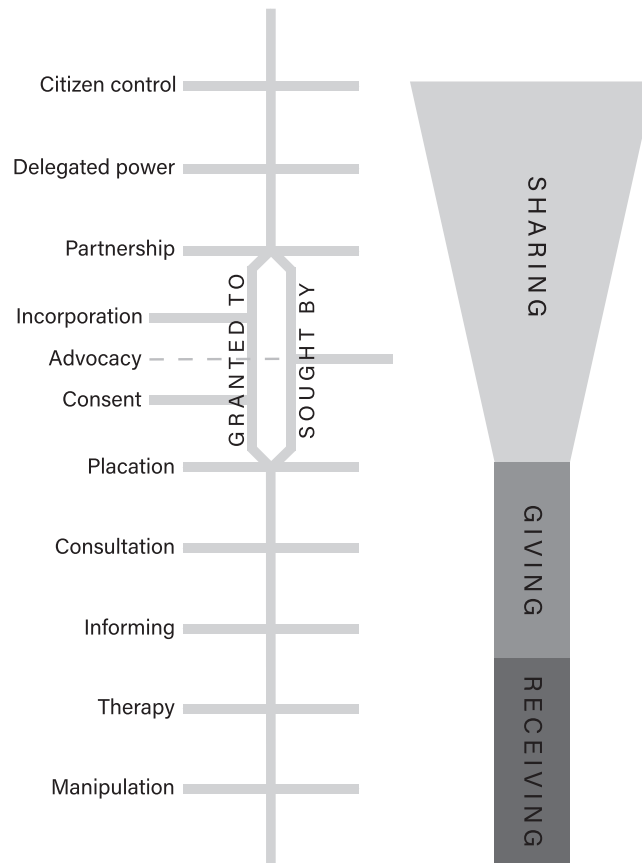
Figure 1. Our revised ladder, indicating a forked structure between programs that grant participation to youth versus programs where youth seek participation.

benevolent priorities, which could fade with elections, new appointments to leadership, or programs becoming politically or monetarily infeasible. Thus, youth feedback is incorporated into planning efforts, and they become an integral part of planning projects. However, their position is not secure, and power imbalances remain between civic leaders and youth.

Where Do These Cases Sit on the Ladder of Participation?

Figure 1 illustrates where these new categories fall on the ladder, with a fork between placation and partnership that indicates the directionality of power in these three cases.

On the left side of the fork, power flows from adults, government officials, and institutions to youth, offering them space in which to participate in planning processes. Consent and incorporation reside on this side of the ladder, with consent closer to placation and incorporation closer to partnership.

On the right, power flows from youth to adults, government officials, and institutions. Youth take space for themselves to participate, and they bring their

proposals to those with power and knowledge to implement them. Advocacy resides on this side of the ladder and rests somewhere between consent and incorporation in terms of its inherent "level" of participation.

Last, we reframe Arnstein's categorization of the rungs. "Manipulation" and "therapy" consist of youth *receiving* information from adults. "Informing," "consultation," and "placation" involve youth *giving* information to adults with no control over how that information is used. Starting at "consent," the highest rungs involve youth and adults *sharing* information and decision making, with youth gaining power as they ascend.

This directionality of power and these new rungs serve as a modern update to both Arnstein's and Hart's ladders of participation. It is possible that Hart's ladder captures these ideas in the form of his top three rungs distinguishing three forms of youth partnership. We assert, however, that these new rungs of consent, advocacy, and incorporation do not reach true partnership due to the inherent power dynamic between youth and adults. These additional rungs emphasize the reality that for both Arnstein and Hart's ladders, citizen power and partnership,

*Color version available at **tandfonline.com/rjpa***

respectively, can never be reached in democracies where agencies are rightly constrained by mandates to retain the ultimate decision-making power and thereby work on behalf of the public good, not that of a few self-selecting, self-interested participants (Creighton, 2005). Based on these findings in combination with the literature, youth-focused planning processes still resist expanding youth participation and power.

It is worth remembering, however, that Hart (2008) does not conceive of his ladder as a progression, where the higher rungs indicate the ideal or most appropriate form of youth participation. Certainly some, like manipulation and therapy, have more negative implications than others. Instead, different forms of participation are appropriate in different circumstances. The same holds true for these new rungs. In cases where city leaders cannot form institutional and long-lasting partnerships across city departments, a participatory structure that most resonates with incorporation may not be possible; instead, a consensual structure could be pursued. Similarly, advocacy could be most appropriate for situations in which decision makers ignore youth or do not seek their input at all.

Most important, the opinions, feelings, and perspectives of youth should be centered in conversations about youth participation. Based on their developmental stage, youth may prefer that adults take a more active or passive role in community engagement facilitation. As youth get older, they may prefer autonomy to design urban spaces for themselves and seek to participate in advocacy activities over consensual or incorporated ones. All three of these participation levels have a common origin point: the needs and desires of youth to participate at an appropriate level for their ability.

Takeaways for Practice

Our study fills a gap missing in research on youth participation in planning activities by identifying and deconstructing levels of participation between placation and partnership from Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation. Through case studies, we identify three new forms of participation appropriate for youth interested in planning their community. The directionality of decision-making power shapes how youth are empowered within planning processes either because they took the initiative and sought it out or because planning professionals led and shared it with them. Some models, like GUB, allow for a higher level of participation but are geographically and institutionally bounded. Others, like YEAH! and Y-PLAN, operate at wider and more varied scales but achieve lower levels of participation.

We conclude that the planner's role in supporting youth is being deliberate in determining which forms of participation are more appropriate than others for youth given different planning contexts, but that various ways of participating must be made available to youth who want to be involved. Planners must expand their engagement objectives in settings where youth are present but not included. In the context of community meetings where youth are often in attendance but distracted or encouraged to behave, planners can direct youth-focused planning discussions and activities. Planners must explore new styles and techniques of engagement that cater to youth. These could include creative exercises, including PhotoVoice or gamification, that appeal to youth. Last, planners must listen when youth are exercising the right to express themselves. Youth have much to teach planning practitioners about their neighborhoods and play spaces.

Further research could refine these takeaways, especially as they apply to specific techniques and strategies, and the intersectionality of youth, race, ethnicity, nativity, and geography in the past and how that differs today. It is also important to consider how the changing technological landscape affects the ways in which youth choose to engage in shaping the world around them. This analysis could open further opportunities and innovations in the realm of youth participation within planning processes.

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NOTES

1. This view echoes the arguments that youth were once seen as "victims of urban-industrial society" found in Checkoway et al. (1995, p. 134).

2. Osborne (2015) defines intersectionality, through critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw's framework (1991), as "a way to approach and understand intragroup difference and the existence of multiple axes of identity that may govern an individual's relationship to power" (p. 132).

3. Arnstein (1969) and Hart (1992) can also be compared with Rocha's "ladder of empowerment" (Rocha, 1997), which seeks to unify discourse about empowerment through a similar ladder typology. Rocha's ladder mirrors Arnstein's in the amount of power held by citizens, but does not characterize the participatory structure in which this power is exerted.

4. Though we review the popular conceptions of youth and how they have evolved over time in this study, we do not explore the evolution of the planning profession, especially how social and political contexts have shaped planning structures. Modern planning has transitioned from a primarily state-led enterprise to one based on partnerships between many institutional actors. The public–private partnership model has been criticized for limiting participation through tokenistic appointments to advisory boards, placative listening sessions with communities, and elaborate networks that create citizen confusion (Ghose, 2005).

5. The Chicago Architecture Center provides an invaluable resource for planners who work with youth. Full scans of *Wacker's Manual* (Moody, 1911) can be found on their website, as well as information about *No Small Plans*, a graphic novel that teaches youth about planning.

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