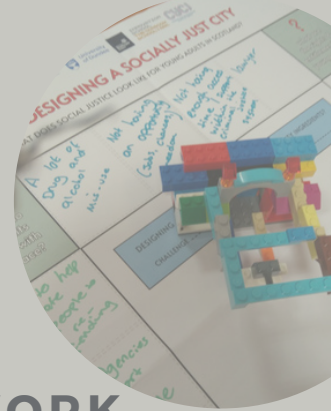


CO-DESIGNING SOCIALLY JUST JUSTICE FOR YOUNG ADULTS



AN INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH NETWORK

The Children and Young People's Centre for Justice, Universities of Strathclyde and Dundee, and Glasgow School of Art are establishing an interdisciplinary research network of around 20 academics, penal reformers, policymakers and practitioners. With funding from the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE), we are looking to connect, cement and establish new collaborations with colleagues who are interested in exploring a socially just approach to justice for young adults who are in conflict with the law.

The background to the network

Young adulthood is increasingly recognised as a distinct phase of development and young adults are frequently caught in a liminal space between child and adult systems in which they do not receive the special protections afforded to children nor the opportunities and entitlements that the majority of adults expect and receive. Young adults are frequently treated as adults in justice systems, yet are still developing the physical, emotional and social maturity to assess risks, consider consequences, make decisions or fully understand and participate in justice processes (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2018).

Socially Just Justice commenced in early 2020, funded by the Scottish Universities Insight Institute (SUII), with the aim of supporting young adults to co-design a vision of justice that upholds their rights, meets their needs, and contributes to a peaceful, socially just and inclusive society.

In order to identify and understand young adults' experiences of social (in)justice and to translate their experiences into a roadmap for socially just change, design-led approaches were used to facilitate participation, stimulate thinking and promote innovation. The project produced visual and other outputs from the activities to encourage practitioners, policymakers and academics to consider the policy, practice and cultural changes needed.

This phase of Socially Just Justice was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health restrictions. A reworking of the planned delivery mode and materials ultimately resulted in a 'workshop in a box' comprising the instructions, activities, snacks and data required to take part in an online workshop, delivered to participants in advance. This allowed us to engage remotely but remain firmly rooted in a participatory co-design approach.



Rich and reflexive data was produced in relation to the young adults' experiences of trauma, stigma, marginalisation, discrimination and inequality. Young adults identified key issues in relation to the community, the police, families, and a lack of meaningful opportunities or 'pathways out' as sites of injustice. It was clear that socially just justice would not be formed solely within penal systems, but around them. However, a deeper-seated challenge was the difficulty that the young adults had in envisioning a utopian or alternative desired future, the 'what could be' rather than the reality of 'what is'. The roots of this challenge lay not within the young adults, but instead reflected the extent of their marginalisation, a mistrust of authorities and a sense of hopelessness for and fatalism towards the future.

Socially Just Justice Phase 2



The second phase of Socially Just Justice, funded by a RSE Research Network Grant, has built on phase one and involved more intensive engagement with young adults over an extended period to try and build trust and address this sense of hopelessness. Since October 2022, we have been working with young adults alongside key professionals in one geographic area to understand, explore and prioritise the salient issues from the young adults' perspectives and to collectively prioritise an area for co-designed problem-solving and solution-thinking. We had anticipated, but perhaps underestimated, issues regarding group dynamics and the ability of the group to cohere around a single priority. However, the young adults worked hard and settled on the topic of employability and a lack of meaningful opportunities for employment which, while not the main priority for all, affected each and every one of the young adults.

While we have developed a deeper understanding around the specific issues for young adults on this topic, we have also encountered a similar lack of hope and trust in the process. Young adults' experiences of marginalisation and exclusion have led them to place great emphasis on self-reliance, and their prior encounters with services and systems leave them questioning whether the process will lead to tangible change. We have since been reflecting on the challenges and opportunities of codesign, especially in terms of ownership and the responsibility it places on a disparate yet connected collection of individuals in relation to some of society's most wicked and intractable problems.

The Research Network

In this inter-disciplinary research network we intend to explore socially just justice in terms of the thematic content arising from our work with young adults, but also the methodological learning and innovation that might result from reflecting with others on our collective experiences of participatory co-design. We want to draw upon network expertise and connections, as well as the evidence from our two socially just projects to date to:

- connect and learn from a variety of perspectives and experiences;
- develop methods, ideas and explore innovations;
- explore opportunities for future research collaborations.



Network Timetable

We propose three in-person network meetings as well as establishing a virtual space and online presence where we can continue to connect in between and beyond network meetings. Network events will be free, take place at the University of Strathclyde and refreshments will be provided.

Meeting 1: Bringing the Network Together. September 15, 2023

This meeting will be used to agree the terms of the network, build relationships, and share skills, knowledge and interests.

Meeting 2: Building on network expertise. November 2023

This meeting will be used to reflect on the emerging findings from socially just justice to date and to encourage dialogue and the sharing of different disciplinary perspectives to enhance understanding and identify commonalities and divergences.

Meeting 3: Taking the network forward. January 2024

This meeting will be used to develop ideas and explore methods for future research, and co-produce plans for innovation in research and practice.

Interested in Joining the Network?

Contact Nina Vaswani on nina.vaswani@strath.ac.uk

Socially Just Justice Team members:

Dr Nina Vaswani (CYCJ, University of Strathclyde)

Prof. Beth Weaver (University of Strathclyde)

Prof. Trish McCulloch (University of Dundee)

Madeline Smith (Glasgow School of Art, Innovation School).

