



Towards a rights-based approach to youth programs: Duty-bearers' perspectives

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 May 2013

Received in revised form 27 October 2013

Accepted 16 January 2014

Available online 23 January 2014

Keywords:

Rights-based approach

Youth participation

Municipality

Accountability

Duty-bearer

ABSTRACT

This study applies a rights-based approach (RBA) to examine a municipal youth program in Montreal, Canada, from duty-bearers' perspectives – staff working in either municipal governments or youth organizations. Considering the complexities of actualizing the four dimensions of an RBA, we assess progress and ways of moving toward actualization. While embracing *universality and equality*, duty-bearers identified the challenge to mobilize youth and to respond to the changing ethnocultural diversity. *Collaboration* between local actors was considered most effective, although it required working through conflicting viewpoints. *Accountability* called for stronger relationships and sharing among duty-bearers across the city. *Youth participation* was most difficult because there was no consensus on its meaning or importance. Furthering an RBA requires supporting state and non-state actors by building capacity in multilevel skills, critical thinking, and broader approaches to assessment.

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1. Introduction

Urbanization, immigration, and changing lifestyles call for new approaches to designing and evaluating youth programs. Viewing youth as mere recipients of program activities and operating programs in isolation from other community processes is insufficient and ineffective for dealing with pressing social problems in urban areas (Hirsch, Deutsch, & DuBois, 2011; Urban, 2008). Nurturing youth's developmental pathways and citizenship calls for more responsive, engaged, and community-integrated activities (Mahoney, Larson, & Eccles, 2005; Strobel, Kirshner, O'Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2008).

In this article, we apply a rights-based approach (RBA) to examine youth programs in Montreal, Canada. The RBA incorporates human rights principles including those described in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, while considering empowerment, structural causes of problems, and process goals (Lansdown, 2005). This approach is relevant to studying Montreal's *Programme d'Intervention de Milieu Jeunesse* (PIMJ) which funds youth organizations to undertake after-school activities for 12- to 30-year-old youth across the city's 19 boroughs, based on a requirement for community mobilization, collaboration, and intersectorality. The approach resulted from a shift taken by the city in 2007 to deal with the growing diversity and complexity of youth's realities, including the rise in school drop-out rates, high unemployment rates, and inactivity (City of Montréal, 2013).

The RBA has become an integral part of the development lexicon, but remains nebulous in practice (Singh, Wickenberg, Astrom, & Hyden,

2012; Wearing, 2011). While the experiences of rights-holders are essential to understanding the implementation of an RBA, our study focuses on the perspective of duty-bearers from two entities: municipal governments and youth organizations. Their views on the opportunities and challenges of implementing an RBA are equally important because of their responsibility in the design and delivery of programs.

We found that the RBA provides a lens to understand what is working, while shedding light on moving toward a comprehensive approach to youth programs. Before presenting the findings, drawn from interviews, an on-line questionnaire, and a discussion group, we define the RBA as well as identify issues in applying its four dimensions.

2. Perspectives on a rights-based approach

Generally, there is agreement that an RBA acknowledges that people are key actors in their own development, and that duty-bearers have responsibility to enable rights-holders to recognize and exercise their rights (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). Given its focus on addressing key systematic obstacles that prevent people from exercising their rights, the RBA marks a shift away from a need and welfarist approach (Uvin, 2007). The approach has been heralded as a means of addressing inequalities by empowering marginalized groups and strengthening accountability (Offenheiser & Holcombe, 2003). Ife (2009) welcomed the move as an opportunity for human service professionals to embrace a strength-based approach to interventions, increasingly recognized as more effective than deficit-based methods that emphasize people's deficiencies (Saleebey, 2000).

In the absence of an authoritative definition, the RBA has been broken down in several ways (Gauri & Gloppen, 2012). UNICEF (2004), for example, identifies 6 core principles to guide understanding of

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rights: universal and inalienable; indivisibility; interdependence and interrelatedness; non-discrimination and equality; participation and inclusion; as well as accountability and the rule of law. Schmitz (2012) centers on behavior change and quality of services, inclusion, and sustainability, in analyzing use of an RBA by a child-centered international organization. Singh et al. (2012) focus on non-discrimination, participation, and empowerment to assess water access for children from an RBA. Others deal with the requirement and implications of an RBA for children's participation in research and evaluation (Ahsan, 2009; Lundy & McEvoy, 2009).

Drawing on our literature review, this study centers on four dimensions of the RBA (Collins, Pearson, & Delany, 2002; UNICEF, 2004):

- Universality and equality: the requirement to apply programs holistically to all young people, regardless of gender or ethnicity.
- Participation: recognizing program recipients as subjects of their own rights, placing an obligation on duty-bearers to give due consideration to young people's views.
- Collaboration: stakeholders work together to effectively form an intersectoral response to the political and social contexts of issues instead of developing narrow sectoral programming.
- Accountability: duty-bearers have obligations to act in the best interests of young people.

Considering that duty-bearers include both state and non-state actors, we focus on staff both with the municipality and with youth organizations. The RBA applies equally to non-state actors although the UNCRC emphasizes state obligations (Lundy & McEvoy, 2009). Several studies have focused on non-governmental organizations' application of the RBA because these operate at the interface between the state and rights-holders (see Kindornay, Ron, & Carpenter, 2012; Offenheiser & Holcombe, 2003; Schmitz, 2012).

RBA principles are in line with research on youth programming which has found that young people's participation results in greater effectiveness and relevance of programs and services, and that youth have knowledge, skills, and ideas that make them important actors in developing healthy communities (Checkoway, 2011; Hart, 1997; Wood, Larson, & Brown, 2009). But the principles also recognize that realizing children's participation necessitates the support of adults and their institutions; hence, the importance of duty-bearers (Author et al., 2013; Kirshner, 2007). When youth and adults work democratically over a sustained time period, they are in theory particularly powerful in promoting youth development within the concept and practice of youth-adult partnerships, which have gained credence in the field of positive youth and civic development (Zeldin, Petrokubi, & MacNeil, 2008). Also consistent with the research is the need for collaborations and new mechanisms of accountability between all actors who affect young people's everyday lives; this is a growing need given the increased complexity of young people's lives in urban areas (Blanchet-Cohen, 2006; Chawla et al., 2005).

2.1. Applying a rights-based lens

Moving toward an RBA entails profound shifts away from traditional practices that impact structures, resources, and work styles (Kindornay et al., 2012). The General Comment of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 2011) states: "A child rights-based approach to child caregiving and protection requires a paradigm shift towards respecting and promoting the human dignity and the physical and psychological integrity of children as rights-bearing individuals rather than perceiving them primarily as 'victims'" (para. 3b). The RBA is transformative, and hence, moves away from the historical role of adults as providers of services to young people who are in need of protection and are incompetent to make decisions (Linds, Goulet, & Sammel, 2010). In an RBA, duty-bearers have a responsibility to create opportunities for young people to exercise their rights and live up to their potential (Bennett, Hart, & Svevo-Cianci, 2009).

As normative principles, the four RBA dimensions constitute in many regards ideals which make it difficult to determine when and how the dimensions are achieved once and for all (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). Therefore, to apply the RBA dimensions as an evaluation framework, it would be inappropriate to use conventional forms of evaluation that judge programming based on predetermined and measurable outcomes related to these dimensions (Patton, 2011). Instead, similar to developmental evaluation, the principles are best used as powerful touchstones to determine whether the programming is on track, and most significantly, to orient ways of moving toward further realization of rights (Blanchet-Cohen & Salazar, 2010).

Actualizing the four dimensions of the RBA is indeed complex, and so it requires paying attention to what can facilitate the move toward an RBA. Wearing (2011), for instance, contends that a rights-based and inclusive practice for marginalized young people in Australia would require youth and social workers to develop multilevel skills that include building relationships with young people, having the capacity to manage and integrate services holistically, and advocating in the community and at the policy level. This type of holistic training for professionals is currently lacking in many places, including Canada, as noted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 2012). Below, we assess how the RBA is reflected in duty-bearers' perspectives and views that could inform further development.

3. Research design

3.1. Background

The PIMJ was created by the City of Montréal to respond to the growing needs and diversity of the youth population. One fourth of the total population is between 15 and 29 years old, and a third belongs to visible minorities (City of Montréal, 2013). The PIMJ approach has been applauded: it has been renewed since 2007, and informs the 2013–2017 *Montreal youth strategy*. Applying the RBA to duty-bearers' perspectives of the PIMJ was appropriate because funding requirements reflect certain dimensions of an RBA: community mobilization, collaboration, and intersectorality in a given territory of greater marginalization. Given that a primary objective is to "offer youth between 12 and 30 activities of quality, that are diversified, accessible, and adapted to their needs" (unofficial translation), the PIMJ also reflects the City of Montréal's "for, with, and by youth" policy. The program specifically requires that projects result from local action plans and consultative committees (i.e., *tables de concertation*). Proposals and reporting are jointly made by the individual boroughs and the local organization to the City of Montréal which manages the funding, with some financial support from Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

As such, selection criteria for the proposals are loosely enforced. The program operates in a context of decentralization, and the 19 boroughs are wary of interference. Our study was therefore not conducted on preselected duty-bearers, but instead reflects dominant views. While the funding is small (between \$5500 and \$33,500 per project), the PIMJ has contributed to activities throughout the city providing a unique opportunity to connect the staff from various boroughs and youth organizations to one another. More specifically, in 2010 the funding supported 47 after-school programs reaching over 6000 youth and involving 180 partners. One of the reasons for its broad impact is that PIMJ funding mostly complements other financial sources, and in only in one fifth of cases does PIMJ funding cover all program costs (Blanchet-Cohen & Bedeaux, 2011). The four priority areas for activities in 2010 were: social development (42%), leisure and culture (30%), physical activity and sports (26%), and the environment (2%). Examples of funded programs included supporting sport activities, posting a youth animator in parks where youth congregate, and offering job training to youth at-risk.

3.2. Methods and participants

This study used multiple methods consecutively over a one-year period to build greater understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). First, in-depth interviews and focus groups with duty-bearers from staff in various boroughs (also referred to as municipalities here) and youth organizations served to explore perspectives on the dimensions of the RBA. Based on these findings, we then created an on-line multiple-choice questionnaire which included a focus on ways of moving forward. Finally, we conducted a discussion group with duty-bearers for feedback on findings and recommendations. While choosing to undertake primarily a qualitative study, in order to explore and illuminate the meaning of certain social phenomena (Maxwell, 1996), our use of the quantitative questionnaire helped prioritize findings.

The fact that this study was part of an evaluation on impacts of the PIMJ conducted for the City of Montréal facilitated our access to duty-bearers and to documentation related to the program (Blanchet-Cohen & Bedeaux, 2011). To introduce the evaluation and the study, invitation letters were sent by the city center to staff responsible for the PIMJ in various boroughs. We requested separate interviews with staff from each of the boroughs and the organizations they worked with, given their different positions: staff from the borough have an administrative responsibility, often determine funding allocations, and are potentially in a position of power, whereas youth organizations are funding recipients who deliver youth activities. All boroughs accepted the invitation to an interview, except one, while another borough asked to conduct the interview jointly with the corresponding youth organization. Participants had to complete a consent form, adhering to Concordia University's ethical protocol specifying the voluntary requirement.

Thirty-nine interviews or focus groups were conducted over 4 months, with a total of 50 participants: 21 with 30 staff members of youth organizations, and 18 with 20 staff members of the boroughs. We used focus groups in some cases because 5 organizations and 2 boroughs chose to include other staff; one organization came to the interview with 5 people. Regardless, we retained the same questions as in the individual interviews, and in the analysis, maintained the borough or organization as the unit.

Interviews and focus groups explored perspectives of the RBA with open-ended questions such as: How do youth participate in the PIMJ? How does collaboration around youth issues operate in your borough? What is your leadership role? How do you feel the current relationships between the city center, youth organizations, and the borough meet young people's rights? To explore perspectives on participation, we included a question to solicit their views on the idea of giving grants directly to youth. Interviews took place at a local site of their choice, either the office of the borough or the youth organization, and lasted between 60 and 80 min. A research assistant was trained to conduct the interviews, with one of the two authors as observer for half of the sessions. Given the choice to have the session in French or English, all but two interviews were conducted in French, Montreal's official language.

The on-line questionnaire was sent by email to participants by the lead author. The multiple-choice, Likert-type questions dealt with profile, impacts, and perspectives on youth programs, as well as recommendations for capacity-building. Thirty-seven completed it, 21 of whom were from boroughs and 16 from youth organizations. According to the questionnaire results, the majority of participants had more than one year of experience with the program, which would be expected given recurrent funding. Half (49%) had between 5 and 12 years of experience in the youth sector and only 5% had less than 4 years working in the youth sector. Finally, seven months after the analysis, a discussion with a group of 32 duty-bearers took place to verify research findings and recommendations. Divided into 6 groups, participants reviewed the findings and voted on recommendations. We facilitated a discussion to identify areas of agreement and disagreement.

The four dimensions of the RBA serve as a lens through which to examine data collected from the three methods, with dominant themes

from the coding of transcripts guiding the analysis. When indicative, we provide frequencies (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) and in treating the borough or organization as the unit of analysis, we refer simply to duty-bearers. In selected quotations, we indicate whether the study participant comes from either a youth organization or the municipality (considered equivalent to borough).

4. Findings

Below, we examine duty-bearers' perspectives on youth programs as they relate to: (a) universality and equality, (b) participation, (c) collaboration, and (d) accountability. For each, we assess current views on progress and challenges of actualization, and then discuss considerations to further a comprehensive approach to youth programming.

4.1. Universality and equality

4.1.1. Assessing progress

Applying the dimension of universality and equality involves first of all assessing program outreach, as well as identifying reasons why young people may not be accessing the program. Generally, duty-bearers felt the program, with its intentional focus on marginalized youth, reflected universality and equality. They used expressions such as: "It fills in a gap," "[It] reaches a forgotten clientele," and "[It] avoids school drop-out." Youth organizations stated how the funding guidelines encouraged them to target at-risk youth by seeking to offer activities that were accessible and adapted to their local reality. One municipal staff confirmed: "The youth who participate in PIMJ are certainly not those reached by other programs." Another stated, "There are no places that belong to them...except centers like this one."

In discussing the merits of the program, youth organizations identified their role in filling a gap given the general negativity toward youth (as stated by 8 duty-bearers), and the low priority placed on adolescents. An organization staff member explained, "It is an abandoned clientele throughout society.... Young people often experience difficult situations that are dramatic yet there is no service for them." It was felt that changes in family structure meant youth programming played a greater role in young people's lives: "In a society where families break down, where one child has two or three fathers [and] mothers, four or five half-brothers and one quarter-sister...the need is even greater." Another organization explained, "We want it to become spontaneous, for the youth to ask us questions. In families, they are no longer talking about sexuality, and not in schools either, because it takes up too much time, and then the nurses [in clinics] are overwhelmed." Youth programming could support marginalized young people in critical ways "to break the isolation" and facilitate integration: "When they are with us, it leads to a little more social integration...so that when they reach 17 or 18, they are a little better equipped to integrate into Quebec society."

In spite of the merits of the program, duty-bearers identified the difficulty they experienced mobilizing youth, which acted as a barrier to universality and equality. Comments included: "It is really difficult to mobilize youth.... The results are often disappointing." Some organizations said they had to cancel activities because of the lack of participation. There was a general perception that young people lacked interest in participating (a point which we address in Section 4.2.1), and grappled with a range of social issues (as identified by 18 duty-bearers). These included coming from ethnoculturally diverse families in which parents perhaps speak neither English nor French or have social norms that limit participation in activities (i.e., for girls). Racial tensions between groups in the communities also required youth to navigate through realities that could affect participation. An organization staff member explained the problem as being a lack of trust between youth and/or their families toward institutions and services: "Sometimes it is because of language problems or it is cultural because there is no free community service in their country of origin. They do not understand the system here. They are wary."

4.1.2. Furthering universality and equality

To enhance universality and equality, youth organizations identified the need for training to deal with the diversity of social issues (see Table 1). More than half (53%) considered training on working with ethnocultural diversity to be very important, which differs considerably from the 10% of municipal staff who also identified the need for such training. Youth organizations explained: “We are less able to work with clients [who are] more messed up. Sometimes we would need support.” Reaching greater universality and equality requires being tuned into and abreast of community and youth issues. Programming, for instance, should be able to adapt to the shifts in migration patterns in neighborhoods.

Besides training, circulating information locally and regionally was identified by both organizations and municipalities as very important and important respectively (see Table 1) as a tool to help the program achieve equality. For example, data on program participants showed that girls represented less than a third of PIMJ participants consistently for three years (2007–2010). Once this information was shared, duty-bearers reflected on the difficulty reaching out to girls and what needed to change to address this inequality. In the final discussion group, participants agreed on the recommendation to target more girls, an aspect that had been previously neglected. Without the sharing information, the inequality could have gone unnoticed.

Duty-bearers also felt a need to advocate for youth, lamenting the lack of value society places on youth. A municipality staff member stated, “We should give them the place that rightfully belongs to them because adolescents are often caring for adults.” Society’s negativity toward youth translated into low municipal funding: “For a municipality, it is often difficult to invest in youth because they bring graffiti, and then it brings prejudices.” One organization staff member with over 20 years experience expressed disappointment with the disregard for youth: “I find this clientele is often marginalized. They are put aside for X reasons. I think it’s a shame. If only we invested more.” Others explained how youth programming should be viewed as an investment that contributes to society. Our findings are a reminder that duty-bearers in youth programming need to be proactive. While learning to be tuned into and abreast of community and youth issues, they also need to create awareness.

4.2. Participation

4.2.1. Assessing youth participation

Assessing youth participation includes determining ways young people’s views are considered in light of the UN Convention on the

Rights of the Child and current literature in this field, which defines participation as existing along a continuum (Hart, 1997). We found that the most divided perspectives dealt with participation; there is a lack of consensus on the importance or meaning of participation. This was reflected for instance, in the on-line questionnaire, where a majority identified PIMJ participants as mainly recipients (59% very important), with only some seeing them as partners (19% very important) and a very few as initiators (11% very important). Most considered that the program met the needs of youth (87% strongly agree or agree), even though few (19%) participants were initiators. Duty-bearers did not consider participation to affect impact.

Apparent through the interviews and focus groups was the different understandings of what constituted participation. The most mentioned form of participation was consulting with youth about their activities (as stated by 21 duty-bearers). Lower levels of participation such as attending activities were considered by some (13 duty-bearers) to be a good measure of participation. To seek youth input, organizations spoke about carrying out surveys: “We do youth surveys. We ask: What [do] you want to do? OK, we look at what is feasible, what is possible, and they are given the choice.” Having a pre-established range of choices suggests there was little opportunity for meaningful youth influence.

Only a few organizations took steps to involve youth in organizing activities and in decision-making; one of them included “by youth” as part of their operating philosophy. Several organizations voiced an interest in moving towards greater participation: “Now we mostly do activities ‘for’ youth but slowly we are trying to involve young people so that they become more responsible and autonomous.” One critiqued the organization’s current top-down approach as limiting: “[If we had] a citizen approach that is more bottom up, rather than imagining and inferring what the population needs and making them swallow a formula already made, [we could] consult them, [and] validate with them what they would do in response.” Others considered the shift to be unlikely, stating, “The ‘by and with’ as a philosophy is used less and less.”

Obstacles to practicing participation at a higher rung of Hart (1997) were emphasized by some duty-bearers: “We can think the ‘for, by, and with’ – it’s simple, but it is very difficult for an organization.” Several comments suggested that there was concern about the readiness of youth. One said, “We cannot promote participation when young people are not there yet,” suggesting that participation was not seen as a right. Duty-bearers shared their lack of belief in the capacity of youth to follow through: “Often they do not bother. They consider it too big instead of going step-by-step.” One organization spoke about needing to entice participants: “I’ll put it simply: we have to buy youth. Offer them a free BBQ, [and] we will give them goodies.”

Curtailing youth participation were concerns with supervision, identified by more than half (20) of the duty-bearers. Staff members were preoccupied with the amount of guidance, time, and effort required by the program. A youth organization staff member observed: “It is a lot of follow up with them.... If there is a meeting, [they say] maybe I’ll go...maybe not. Sometimes they need someone who [provides] a little more structure to take them by the hand.”

Doubts about youth’s capacity and leadership became apparent in responses to the question of funding youth directly: views were divided. Frequency codes showed that several (12 duty-bearers) were simply unsupportive, with some considering the idea odd and unrealistic. Lacking faith in youth’s capacity, municipal staff voiced skepticism: “They would much rather be partying.... I would not ask young people, [because] they must be heavily supervised so [the program] does not derail.” One elaborated on youth’s lack of capacity to seriously carry through a project: “In any case, it will not be youth under 18. [...] The formation of moral judgment is not before 21 years.... [We need to] give them the centre here, [because] they would much rather be partying.” Another portion of participants (17 duty-bearers) was more open: “The idea is interesting precisely [because it will] enhance youth action,” reflected one municipality. However, even among those who appeared supportive, many qualified their comments by speaking of the

Table 1

Duty-bearers’ views on recommendations as a percentage of study participants.

	Very important	Important	Somewhat	Little	Negligible
<i>Training on the “for, with, and by youth” approach</i>					
Municipalities	19	29	48	0	5
Youth organizations	47	20	20	7	7
<i>Training to work with ethnoculturally diverse communities</i>					
Municipalities	10	33	52	5	0
Youth organizations	53	27	20	0	0
<i>Sharing good practices</i>					
Municipalities	33	57	5	5	0
Youth organizations	31	44	19	6	0
<i>Concerted youth strategy</i>					
Municipalities	40	60	0	0	0
Youth organizations	38	44	19	0	0
<i>Circulating information locally/regionally on youth issues</i>					
Municipalities	29	57	10	5	0
Youth organizations	31	38	31	0	0

need for proper guidance and supervision. “It takes leadership, [and] youth cannot by themselves do things without facilitators, support, and coaching,” claimed an organization.

4.2.2. Promoting youth participation

For participation to become part of practice, youth organizations identified as a priority the need for training on the “for, with and by youth” approach; almost half considered it to be very important (47%). Training would help in realizing the vision that sustained the PIMJ approach that states, “Youth are not just consumers who come to the youth centre to play arcade or ping pong. These are youth that you need to help in becoming aware of their talents, to equip them so they can later organize themselves.” Participation was a means of fulfilling young people’s development. Interestingly, municipal staff members were much less supportive according to the questionnaire, with only 19% seeing it as very important and a majority viewing it as somewhat important. This is an example in which the state actors’ position differs from non-state actors, perhaps because state actors are more removed from youth programming. They may need more convincing on the benefits of youth participation.

The difficulty in embracing participation was again clear in the final discussion, when there was no unanimity on a recommendation to promote participation. A participant expressed his caution openly with others: “It should not be presented as the panacea; there is so much variety compared to other types of clientele.” Perspectives were divided with an equal number of participants agreeing, disagreeing, or with queries. In supporting a broader vision of participation, a need for tools of evaluation that capture measures of participation more broadly than attendance was raised and supported, suggesting once more that duty-bearers feel ill-equipped to promote participation.

4.3. Collaboration

4.3.1. Assessing collaboration

Examining collaboration entailed assessing linkages across sectors. Our study indicated that duty-bearers overall valued the requirement for collaboration among stakeholders in the PIMJ, with over three quarters (32 duty-bearers) identifying its benefits and value. Particularly, interviews and focus groups identified sharing (mentioned by 22 duty-bearers) as a benefit of working within the structure of local consultative committees (i.e., *tables de concertation*). A municipality explained, “A community sits, speaks, meets [and so] it is a place to exchange, to see what works, to share on our ways of working.” Several (7 duty-bearers) identified increased effectiveness of programs as a result. Youth needs would be better met through cooperation, given common objectives and no duplication of services. An organization commented, “The idea is to work together. It is not about who is going to be best when we share a common objective to offer what is best for youth.” Others (12 duty-bearers) believed that local committees had a role in knowing about the programs available in order to connect appropriate resources. One organization commented, “It is absolutely necessary for organizations to work closely together, to know what services are available in the community; it is the only way to create personalized links with social actors, and meaningful collaboration also saves costs.”

The collaboration requirement in PIMJ funding brought together some organizations that would not normally collaborate. A municipal duty-bearer shared, “We have been able to sit down as community organizers from two neighborhoods, with two different cultures, to discuss [the situation], and see what can be done.” Collaboration allowed one to be responsive to local needs, designing programs that reflected localities. Interestingly, consultative committees themselves were perceived as having a small impact on project outcomes (only 8% qualified the role of these committees as very important, while 59% indicated it was more or less important).

Municipalities found their involvement on consultative committees to be mutually beneficial. One municipal staff member described her

presence as appreciated and useful: “Often [we can help] either with space or budgets that come from the side of sport and leisure, so the present symbiosis between the borough and youth organizations is good.” Another municipal staff member explained how they are careful to participate as equals: “I do not give myself a status because I am Mr. Who-works-for-the-City-of-Montreal.”

While seeing the benefits of collaboration, most duty-bearers (35) also identified some challenges arising from tense relationships between the different actors and disagreement on the committee’s role. A youth staff explained, “Some come just to get information not to give.... And there are others who have more of the collective interest in mind, [so] it can create tensions.” Funding shortages or different views on priorities caused competition and conflicts between stakeholders (identified by 16 duty-bearers). A municipal staff member observed that the funding system could make it challenging to collaborate: “When it comes to funding opportunities everyone wants to have a piece of the pie.”

Some felt that involvement of multiple actors could also be an inefficient use of resources. One staff member reflected: “We cannot involve everyone.... In scattering [resources] we end up offering crumbs and scraps for the community to work miracles with.” Another municipal staff commented: “Our project has stalled lots because the dynamics around the table revolved around one issue which the municipality disagreed with.... It has eaten up our energy. ... There was not enough strong leadership.” A few youth organizations questioned the role of committees: “[It’s] a superstructure, a metastructure that is created [and] maybe...it is not necessary. I question all the funds directed to committees and not to organizations or centres directly.” Interestingly, more youth organizations (12) than municipalities (6) commented on the malfunctioning of consultative committees.

4.3.2. Continuing collaborations

Overall, our findings suggest that collaboration is happening and supported in Montreal, perhaps given the long history of local mobilization in Quebec. Of all four dimensions, the need for a concerted youth strategy was most commonly and strongly supported by both municipalities (100% consider it to be very important or important) and organizations (82% consider it to be very important or important) (see Table 1). In the discussion group, there was consensus on the value of maintaining local collaboration as a requirement. The challenges are perhaps best understood as being part of the shift in paradigms, as one municipal staff member articulated: “We remain in the old mentality, working in silos, in competition and we do not share, [and] we do not combine resources.” Emerging from the findings is a sense that combining resources and working together are beneficial but not always easy and involve being open to learning.

4.4. Accountability

4.4.1. Assessing accountability

Accountability involves determining how duty-bearers are meeting their responsibility to provide services, as well as assessing the quality of relationships among duty-bearers. At a basic level, accountability involved reporting on activities and the monies spent. As a normal practice, there was little questioning of this aspect. A deeper assessment required examining the quality of relationships between duty-bearers, which included the City of Montréal, boroughs, and youth organizations. This is part of recognizing Ebrahim’s (2005) point that in the context of social change, the definition of accountability needs to be extended to provide for more horizontal relationships and learning opportunities between funders and non-governmental organizations.

At the borough level, several (mentioned by 9) qualified positively their relationship with organizations. One useful practice was respecting each other’s roles and expertise. A borough staff member commented: “We as the borough, we are here to support organizations, but these are the organizations that work with young people directly. So as the borough, we have our expertise of the milieu, but the organization has

its field of expertise." Interestingly, the role of the borough extended beyond that of a funder. A municipal respondent described its facilitator role: "So for me, my role is to make connections, to seek information, and to make things easier." Questionnaire results reinforced the finding: the borough identified as both an engaged partner and a funder. Other roles which were given less significance but nonetheless mentioned were to provide vision, expertise, and networking. A few organizations expressed criticism when a borough defined for itself a very narrow role. "It is limited to supervise and oversee, but in our borough it is not possible. It is imperative that there be a practical implication because otherwise things cannot be done." The more horizontal relationships between the funders and the organizations are consistent with Ebrahim's (2005) call for a broader perspective on accountability for social change.

At times, boroughs' funding role made it difficult to create genuine relationships: "Are we really able to have the absolute truth on certain portfolios knowing that we are the funder? We are a little trapped." One youth staff member also expressed concern in the lack of professionalism: "I do not trust the boroughs because when they are small, it [cooperation] often depends on who is there.... In a large structure nobody wants to take the blame for making big mistakes." Ensuring cohesive and comprehensive programming across the city was indeed difficult.

4.4.2. Enhancing accountability

We found that moving toward greater consistency would involve increasing the communication and sharing mechanisms beyond borough boundaries, as identified by a majority of duty-bearers (21). A municipality recognized its absence limits effectiveness: "We can often be limited to agreeing on projects and accountability procedures; we do little together to combine needs. We do not see each other often to assess the impact of actions and potentially to rectify our shortcomings." In the questionnaire, the majority indicated this role and the sharing of good practices as either very important or important, although it was less the case for organizations (see Table 1). One municipal staff member explained why he would welcome more sharing: "As a borough, we often feel somewhat isolated. I do not even know what to tell you about PIMJ projects in other boroughs, I just do not know. But I'm curious." Ideas to facilitate sharing information included organizing regular events and forums.

Several called for an increased leadership of the City of Montréal to implement concerted youth programming, extending its role beyond mere funding. We need to "define a youth policy that boroughs are forced to follow to some extent. That is to say, to have a vision of Montréal." A youth organization staff member felt there was a justification in being forceful: "I think some things should be imposed on the boroughs, because I think there are some that would even be willing to prohibit youth." A staff member from a borough suggested: "Instead of just managing programs and asking us for reports and this and that, [they should] leave us in peace and work at a more important level." Youth organizations often felt ignorant of the bigger picture because since decentralization they had had little direct contact with the City of Montréal: "I would say for us, as an organization, sometimes it is difficult to make sense of things. Are the guidelines coming from the city centre, or the borough?"

Capacity-building was one area in which the city's central government could play a role. An organization staff member remarked, "The training of youth workers...should be the same...training program that is recognized by [both] the boroughs and by the city centre." Along with the need for a common vision and leadership, there was a concern about maintaining flexibility to adapt to local contexts. The discussion group also unanimously supported a recommendation for cohesion at a city level. Putting in place mechanisms for sharing was part of ensuring that accountability went beyond a procedural focus to one that could support the type of social change entailed in implementing RBA.

5. Implications

This study posits that the RBA provides for responsive and comprehensive youth programs to effectively meet the increased diversity of problems faced by youth in urban areas (Hansen & Larson, 2007; Hirsch et al., 2011). We found however that implementing an RBA is complex given its multiple dimensions and marked shift from past practices. Although PIMJ funding requirements reflected RBA principles at the outset, implementing each dimension was difficult, and duty-bearers did not necessarily embrace them.

Our study suggests that moving towards an RBA includes creating an enabling environment for duty-bearers, and applying appropriate approaches to assess youth programs. Providing supportive environment state and non-state actors is important as they play different roles in shaping youth programs, and hold complementary views. Youth organizations probably because of their direct work with youth identified greater needs for training; boroughs perhaps given their broader perspective valued more the sharing of information and good practices. These differences illustrate the value of involving both entities to offer comprehensive programs.

Capacity-building to support duty-bearers requires providing for multi-level skills, as well as providing for critical engagement with RBA dimensions. As Ife (2009) points out, actualizing RBA requires dialog and critique among community actors, and Wearing (2011) argues a RBA necessitates extending beyond funding to include training youth workers with multi-level skills that involve coordination, reflexivity, and creating engaging services for young people. For example, the youth participation dimension challenges conventional power relationships and the role of the adult; duty-bearers need support in working through on how to work with youth as partners as well as in using the tools to do so (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2013; Roach, Wureta, & Ross, 2013). Voice is not sufficient for youth participation; an enabling environment is necessary to materialize participation (Lundy, 2007). In providing support, duty-bearers need help to build on existing knowledge of dimensions (Checkoway, 2011; Head, 2011). For instance, Shier (2001) points out that planning for participation involves organizations creating multiple openings: awareness, resources, and building this philosophy into procedures. Ebrahim (2003, 2005) contends that accountability needs to be internally and externally driven for long-lasting social change, and include organizational learning between funders and programs. In moving forward, it will also be essential to consider the perspectives of rights-holders, whose experience is a necessary complement to inform the findings from this study.

Actualizing a holistic approach to capacity-building that involves all duty-bearers calls for the engagement and coordination across the different levels of decision-making. This needs to be worked through in each context. Montréal's decentralization since 2003 has made boroughs and youth organizations wary of over-interference (Jouve, 2006). But as shown in this study, both entities recognize the value of sharing to enhance youth programs; policy-makers' challenge is to develop mechanisms to enhance communication and sharing across the city to meet the best interests of young people rather than being perceived as controlling.

Along with capacity-building, applying an RBA requires assessment of youth programs that focus on progress and generating learnings to inform development. Conventional evaluation methods are inappropriate because there is no predetermined checklist by which success can be measured (Patton, 2011). Rather RBA is best seen as offering a framework and touchstones that can inform duty-bearers of ways of moving forward. With this focus, we learned not only about duty-bearers' views on how the program fared, but considerations for further development. In the future, we will need to consider how this broader view of evaluation complements the increased emphasis on assessing impact and program quality in youth programs from narrow sectoral points of views (Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). The fact is that an RBA considers

that youth programs operate in a context of complexity; along with this comes a messiness that calls for appropriate evaluation methods.

In conclusion, our study shows that funding criteria are insufficient in making a shift to an RBA approach. Moving towards a more comprehensive approach to youth programming involves recognizing the active role of all actors including duty-bearers and rights-holders. It requires multiplying and coordinating opportunities for duty-bearers to learn about, with, and from. RBA offers not a checklist of requirements, but rather a framework to orient duty-bearers in supporting the vision that “a youth is not just a sport activity; he has a family, friends, problems, and activities he wants to do.”

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge funding for the evaluation from the City of Montreal (Direction de diversité sociale). Thank you to Sylvie Lepage for the vision and support. We also are grateful for Junichiro Koji's research support.

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