

GENERATION TRANSFORMATION: EXPLORING YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A PATH TO TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Kylie Pettifer, Dept of Geography
Supervised by Dr. Michele-Lee Moore

ABSTRACT:

Social entrepreneurship (SE) has received increasing attention in academic literature as a potentially transformative business practice, however, the voices and contexts of youth are noticeably absent from these discussions. Yet, with 25% of the world's population between the ages of 10-24, youth are poised to be powerful actors for change (PRB, 2013). In an effort to fill that gap this research asks: **Do youth at UVic involved in social change efforts perceive social entrepreneurship as a viable path to transformation?**

OBJECTIVES:

1. Analyze youth perceptions of "transformation" and how to achieve it
2. Compare and contrast youth perceptions of social entrepreneurship (SE) and its relationship to transformation
3. Identify and describe perceived barriers and opportunities youth have experienced or expect, with regards to their engagement in social entrepreneurship
4. Use the insights generated from the above analyses to develop potential pathways for greater youth involvement in social entrepreneurship as a method to achieve social, ecological and economic transformation

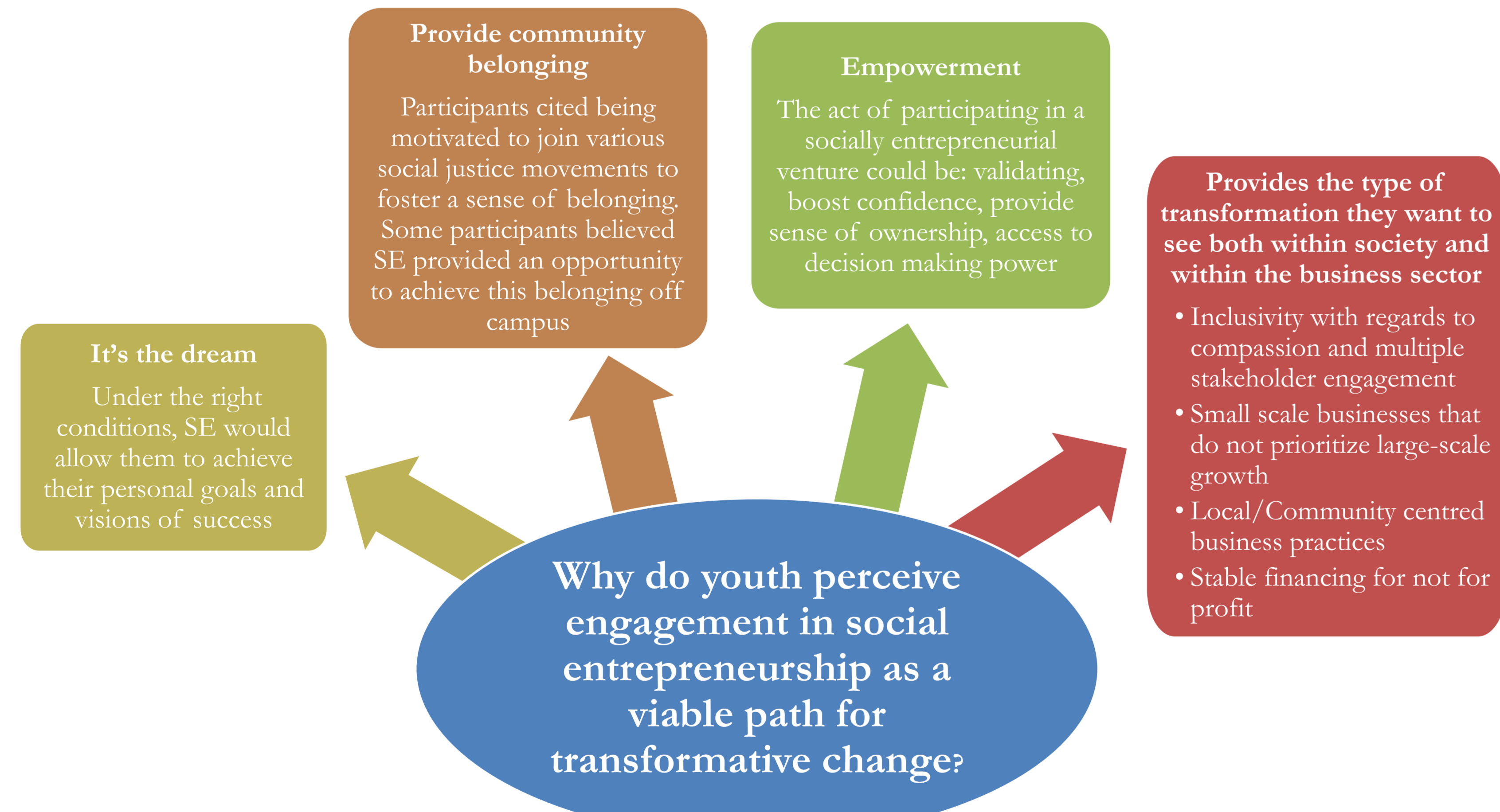


Figure 1: Opportunities SE provides for youth

KEY TERMS:

Transformation is the capacity to create a new system when economic, ecological and/or social conditions make the current system unworkable (Westley et al, 2013; Olsson & Galaz, 2012).

Social Entrepreneurship* is a way to blur the boundaries between public, private and voluntary sectors to create initiatives that use wealth as a means to an end and not as an end in and of itself. In this way, these are ventures that serve a social need, but pay for themselves.

*Note: Since this idea is still new, its definition is still emerging and the term itself is often used interchangeably throughout the literature with terms like social enterprise, community business, social firms, and mission-based venture development (Delgado, 2004). As a result, social entrepreneurship appears to be used as a blanket term that seeks to capture a movement towards the integration of business and social goals.

METHODS:

As the body of existing knowledge in this area is small, this research was conducted using Grounded Theory following Corbin & Strauss (1990), a qualitative research approach in order to support its goal of hypothesis and theory generation. The primary method was in-depth, semi-structured interviews and data analysis was conducted using a three step coding process.

Who are transformation-focused youth?

As the literature has previously demonstrated, the definition of youth is highly context specific. This research uses 18-24 as the age guideline for youth as per the typical age of undergraduate students. Determination of transformation-focus was based on their participation in on-campus departments or student initiatives that have an explicit mandate to create systemic change as demonstrated in their group's governing documents or promotion materials. A final sample size of 8 youth participated in this study.

Why Victoria as a case study?

University campuses have a long history as sites of activism and are often hubs where young people develop and solidify their social consciousness (Broadhurst, 2014). Student life comes with the flexibility to pursue those ideas, thus making campuses ideal sites to find transformation-focused youth. Victoria is one of the most entrepreneurial cities in Canada and the promotion of entrepreneurship/social enterprise is one of the main pillars of its recent Economic Plan (Taskforce, 2015). The site was also ideal due to the researcher's physical proximity to campus and prior knowledge of on-campus activism.

RESULTS

For youth, capitalism and the way we perceive and evaluate peoples' place in the economic system was the most commonly cited area in need of transformation. As a result, a discussion about potential mechanisms for intervening in the system from a bottom up perspective was well received by the participants. Overall, the participants indicated that SE was a path for youth to achieve the types of transformation they want to see and could provide a path to the futures they envisioned for the world and themselves. The perceived opportunities of SE for youth are outlined in Figure 1. However, several obstacles were noted as standing in the way of their ability to engage in SE including standing perceptions of entrepreneurship, societal and personal barriers (Figure 2). The potential avenues to overcome these challenges was largely focused around collaboration, changing narratives about youth and building a more innovative education system (Figure 3).

What is standing in their way?

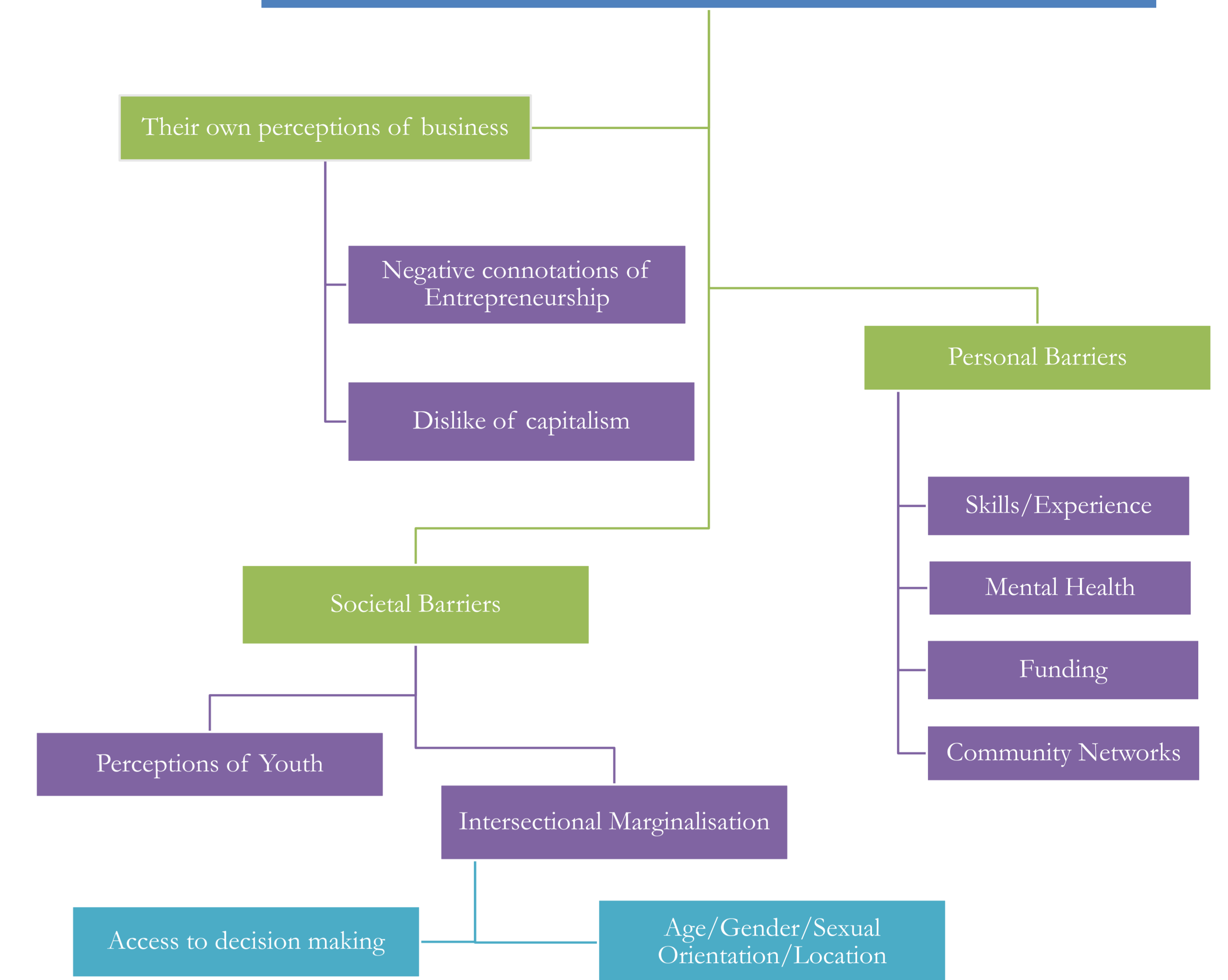


Figure 2: Barriers youth face to engage in SE

What strategies could be implemented to reduce these obstacles?

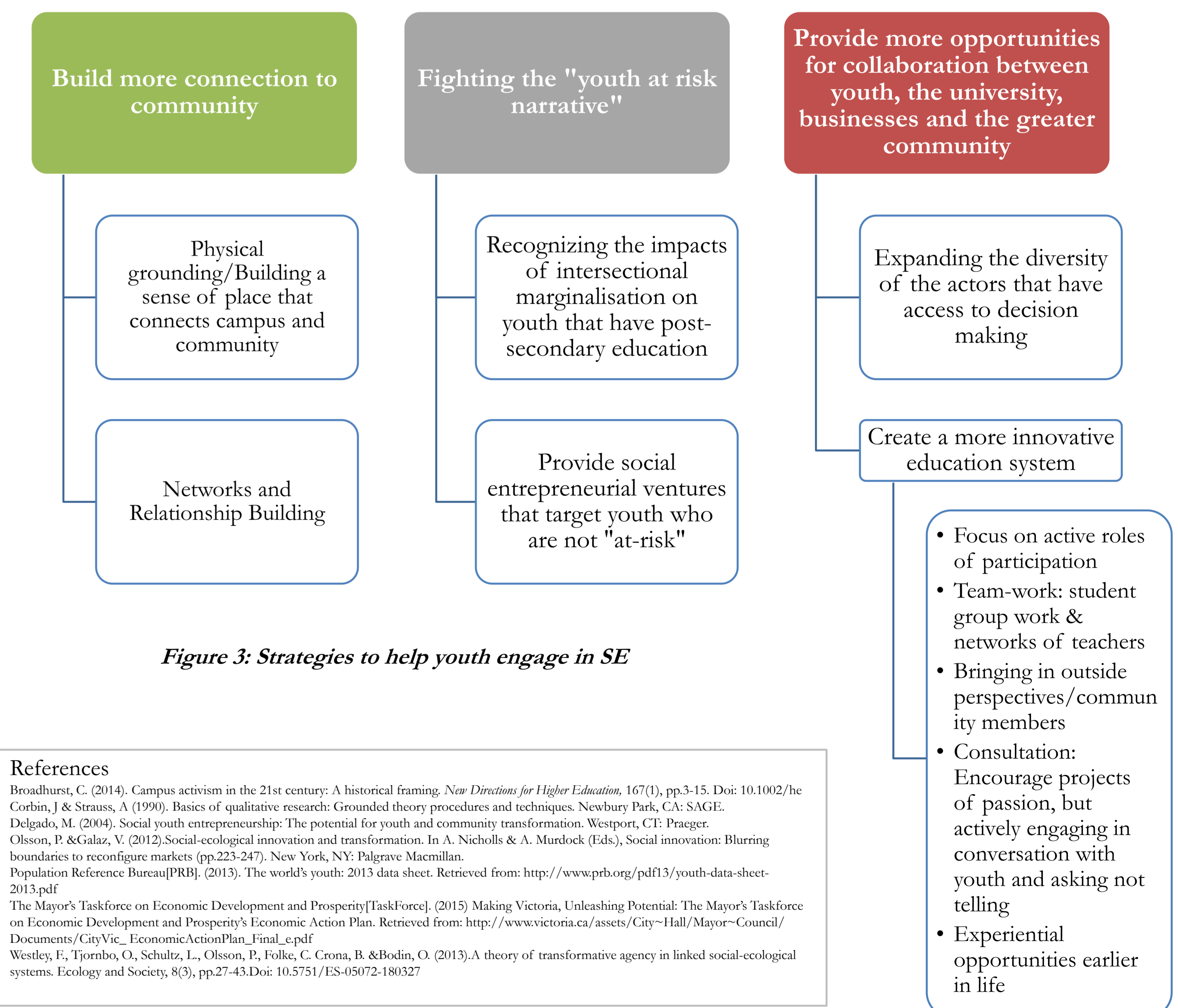


Figure 3: Strategies to help youth engage in SE

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Do transformation-focused youth at the University of Victoria perceive engagement in social entrepreneurship as a viable path for transformative change?