Towards a Healthy Culture of Engagement for Children and Young People: Culminating a Decade of Work by the Carnegie UK Trust

The Challenge
In 2007, the Carnegie Young People Initiative (CYPI) ended a decade of work in the UK dedicated to increasing civic engagement by youth through direct empowerment, grassroots organization-building, and improving the "participation infrastructure" in government. The program, largely inspired by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, was the first of its kind.

Preparing for their final report, the CYPI encountered a major challenge: how to best convey a decade's worth of work with young people, as well as some possible scenarios and recommendations for the future. They decided that a written report was insufficient, because it can "obscure excitement and innovation," and lacked the participatory dimension foundational to the CYPI's mission. Additionally, final reports can be sparsely read, shrinking the circle of participation even further.

Conversely, murals make it easier to communicate with trustees and uninitiates alike, giving the work itself a greater impact, as well as a larger, potential audience. CYPI commissioned MacroVu in collaboration with the International Futures Forum, Inc. to create a mural summarizing the Initiative's work.

The Info-Mural
Robert Horn produced a 3 by 15 foot mural that allowed viewing the different stages in the participatory process developed by the CYPI. Graham Leicester of the IFF acted as project manager, evaluator and liaison on the project. In addition, the mural contained a series of recommendations for increasing youth civic engagement, as well as some possibilities for the future based on the CYPI's work.

The mural is notable for its versatility. Flexible in diverse venues, it is equally useful at meetings, hearings, conferences, and for educational purposes. It allows the viewer to gain a panoramic view at a glance, but also the ability to spend great lengths of time analyzing the complexities within the mural; in other words, it provides the most elusive and sought-after result of a final study: a deep sense of context.

Furthermore, the dominant visual metaphors of the mural provide an unrivaled frame through which to view the Initiative's progress. The CYPI's work, for instance, is represented as a metaphorical journey—with the blind curves, detours, and cul-de-sacs that can accompany any journey—leading to a variety of possible futures that recede out on the horizon.

After the completion of the mural, it was included as an insert in the final written report, serving as both an integral companion to the report, while the mural provides a complete stand-alone account of the CYPI's work.

Interactive Process. The mural-designing process was highly interactive. Members of the Initiative including academics, activists, and youth were able engage the map as a work-in-progress, making their thoughts and recommendations known, and thus expanding the circle of co-authorship to those who knew the material best—the organizers and participants of the program itself. The discussion sessions also helped the project director prioritize and refocus his recommendations for the mural. Here is a photo of the mural after participants added their stickies with suggestions.