

Exploring Youth Participation in Disadvantaged Areas: The Importance of Youth Organizations in The Hague Southwest

Qualitative research into deciding factors of youth participation and how this is affected by engagement in youth organizations

Master's Thesis

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Executive Summary

This paper explored participatory behavior amongst youth in The Hague. Participation is an important concept in contemporary public administration. Studies have shown that involving citizens in policy-making processes has resulted in positive effects on democratic procedures and the credibility of institutions. Nonetheless, participation should not only be viewed as a formal concept. Informal participation is more prevalent, especially in disadvantaged areas. Boundary spanners – particularly youth organizations – play an important role in fostering participation on both sides of the spectrum.

By investigating six factors – socioeconomic status, trust, knowledge, societal roles, social capital, time – through qualitative methods, determinants of participatory behavior were studied among 14 participants between the ages 16-25. A comparison between youth that volunteered at a youth organization and youth that did not, allowed to gain insights in participatory behavior and how this was influenced by the youth organization. While socioeconomic status did not appear to have an influence on the behavior, the findings reveal that the remaining five factors significantly impact youth behavior. Participants with low levels of trust were reluctant to participate, while community identification and genuine interaction contributed to trust building. Through partnering with the municipality and fostering social networks youth organizations increased trust in both neighborhood and government. Knowledge and understanding of participation and its outcomes were critical to encourage engagement, facilitated by information brokering of youth organizations. Thirdly, societal roles – including stereotypes and adultist attitudes – formed a visible hindrance to participation. Inclusive opportunities promoted by the organizations offered a solution to this. Fourthly, social networks and norms were decisive because of information exchange and peer motivation. By offering an engaged social network, youth organizations created favorable social norms and information flows. Finally, time is a crucial element since youth are busy and participation is time-consuming. Priorities are determined selectively, based on a cost-benefit analysis. Youth organizations offer immaterial compensations which make participation beneficial.

The attitude towards participation amongst youth in HSW is diverse. Efforts to broaden participation should address the diverse needs and preferences of youth. Youth organizations in this area impact this by offering a blend of informal and formal participation.

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This thesis has left me with two important takeaways. Firstly, I have gotten to know a lot of people that I would normally not have met, and they have broadened my perspective in many ways. This taught me that there is always a lot to be discovered just through simple conversation. Secondly, the research process showed me that not everything can go as smoothly, and asking for help is sometimes as important as fixing things on your own.

I have encountered difficulties during the past few months, which affected my writing process. It was challenging for me to ask for help or share my situation with others. This caused a vicious circle for the whole process, leading to a great lack of motivation.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
EL	Environmental Law
HSW	The Hague Southwest
SES	Socioeconomic Status
CBS	<i>Centraal bureau voor de statistiek</i> (Dutch statistical center)

Glossary

Term	Definition
Adult	Individuals above the age of 25.
Adultism	Bias of adults against children or youth.
Assigned but informed	Fourth level of Hart's (1992) ladder. Youth understand the project and have clear roles/tasks.
Boundary spanner	Individual or entity that serves as a bridge between two groups.
Information asymmetry	Situation whereby one party possesses more information about a topic.
Information deficit	Lack of understanding about a particular topic.
One-on-one aid	Assistance provided directly from one individual to another.
Participation processes	Process of engaging individuals in decision-making, consisting of several stages.
Social norms	Approval from parents and peers.
Trust	Confidence and reliability in other's (expected) behavior.
Youth	Individuals between the ages of 16 to 25.
Youth Organizations	Organization attracting youth through activities.

1. Introduction

In the Netherlands, and in other countries around the world, there is a trend within public administration moving toward increased citizen inclusion within decision-making. Both national and local governments adopt policies to engage in a collaborative or interactive approach (Ansell & Gash, 2007). High levels of interdependency between different stakeholders in societal questions call for a network approach. The new environmental law EL in the Netherlands is a perfect example of governmental efforts to adopt new approaches in order to address complex issues (*Invoeringswet Omgevingswet (34.986)*, n.d.). The government has decided to create an umbrella act of all environmental laws and regulations (De Graaf et al., 2015). Involving all stakeholders in environmental developments is one of the most important aspects of this new act (*Participatie in de Omgevingswet*, n.d.).

1.1 Formal participation and drawbacks

One of the most important stakeholders within a society are its citizens. Since the new paradigm within public administration calls for interaction and bottom-up decision-making, participation becomes one of the key concepts to be studied. This concept is nothing new, for democracy is established on civic life and the cooperation of people to create and maintain a common society (Crystal & DeBell, 2002). Participation benefits democracy by enhancing citizenship, trust in policies and the sense of community, while reducing conflict and feelings of alienation (De Graaf et al., 2015; Iannello et al., 2019; Kweit & Kweit, 2007). This aspect is noticed and used by governments and policymakers to legitimize and build public support for their decisions (Halvorsen, 2003; Iannello et al. 2019). If the political climate stimulates or even requires participation within decision making processes, this is an opportunity (Van Meerkerk et al., 2017). Aside from legitimization, an important reason for citizen engagement is to gain insights into lived experiences and creating more accurate policies (De Graaf et al., 2015).

However, these goals are not always easy to reach. As the involvement of citizens becomes a priority within new acts such as the EL, the difficulties attached to the reality of participation processes start to surface. First, engaging the public can clash with the traditional bureaucratic structures of government. The traditional authorities perceive participation as chaotic and reason for nuisance which is only effectuated to tick a box (Mohammadi et al., 2017). Secondly, participation processes are time-consuming and require quite a lot of manpower, which makes it

difficult to realize and sustain. Thirdly, the public that participates is often quite homogenous, therefore the representativeness of these participants is questionable (Blijleven & Van Hulst, 2022; Iannello et al., 2019). Thus, in practice there is little evidence that the aimed advantages are acquired on the floor (Iannello et al. 2019). Often, there is a negligence of participation on a community level, while this is the version that is mostly present in disadvantaged neighborhoods and is an important tool to combat the disadvantages in these areas (Williams, 2003). It is precisely these neighborhoods that face most cases of urban regeneration and development. Since simple invitations fail to mobilize these citizens, innovation becomes crucial to initiate some type of participation. Especially youth and minority groups are absent in participation processes (De Graaf et al., 2015).

1.2 Relevance of youth participation

Youth participation is crucial for many reasons. Firstly, civic orientation and involvement sets the stage for civic behavior in the future (Crystal & DeBell, 2002). Given the fact that youth seem to turn away from established political and civil society organizations and volunteerism, early involvement becomes more relevant (Laitinen, 2018; Zeldin et al., 2005). Secondly, youth provide innovative insights often missed by adults, leading (governmental) institutions to evaluate and improve their strategies (Zeldin et al., 2003). Thirdly, from a democratic and pluralistic perspective, representative participation is essential. It must be asked who is not included and whether the small group of participating youth is truly representative of the population (Fusco & Heathfield 2015).

In disadvantaged areas, youth organizations often facilitate the involvement of young people. These places allow youth to get involved in their communities, help their peers, create interpersonal trust, become familiar with institutions, and develop important skills (Campbell & Erbstein, 2012; Crystal & DeBell, 2002). This way, these organizations become perfect boundary spanners between the community of youth and governments.

1.3 Research topic

Having identified two main issues concerning participation processes – absence of youth and negligence of community participation – this paper aims to gaze into youth participation on a

neighborhood level. By doing so, it will attempt to find out how youth participation is or can be influenced.

Youth is defined as a category of people between the ages 18 – 25 (United Nations, 2008). The Hague Southwest (HSW) will serve as the case area for this research. Given that the area is marked as disadvantaged, undergoes numerous regeneration projects, and has high governmental involvement, it becomes a highly relevant location to investigate participation.

The research question formulated to investigate this topic is:

“What is the attitude towards participation amongst youth in The Hague Southwest (HSW) and how do youth organizations in this area impact this?”

The paper will take a critical stance on the traditional notion of participation, which tends to skew towards a formal form. Instead of solely focusing on the formal perspective, this study will try to illustrate the valuable interplay between formal participation and informal – community level – participation. In most cases, this sort of interplay is made possible by boundary spanners.

The attitude towards participation will be examined based on six factors found in literature – SES, trust, knowledge, societal roles, social capital, and trust. Through exploring the differences between a group of youth that participates through voluntary activity in a youth organization and a group that does not engage in such activity – by using qualitative methods – this paper will study in what way youth organizations have an impact on (the interplay of) formal and informal youth participation.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, prior literature is reviewed to provide a better understanding of core concepts and establish a framework for this study. The chapter is structured into three main parts. The first section explains the concept of participation by reviewing literature on formal and informal participation. This results in a critical view that will describe participation used in this paper. Secondly, six factors that influence the participatory behavior of youth are identified and described based on extensive literature research. Finally, the idea of youth organizations and boundary spanners is expanded, looking into the implications thereof.

2.1 Participation

Broadly speaking, any – unpaid – activity to benefit other individuals or groups in the community or society, can be labeled as participation (Williams, 2003). The first widely accepted approach to participation came from Arnstein (1969). She conceptualized a ladder of participation ranging from degrees of nonparticipation to tokenism and ultimately to citizen power. Other studies conceptualize participation as a spectrum or categorize it into different sectors; from community participation to one-on-one aid (Williams, 2003).

2.1.1 Formal Participation

Another way to define participation is through the notions of "formal" and "informal" participation. Formal participation refers to cases whereby citizens interact with public or private authorities and get a say in decision-making that affects them and their environment. Formal participation requires an influence on decision-making, and the degree to which community members can participate depends on the openness of the government (Dekker, 2007).

As participation is often studied through public administration, it is regarded as part of the formal governance process. The governmental body decides the level of citizen involvement in public questions. The International Association of Public Participation (2018) has divided these levels into five categories, resembling the participation ladder of Arnstein (1969). First, the government can choose to inform the citizens so that they can understand the problem or project that is going on and be aware of its outcomes. Secondly, the government can opt to consult citizens for potential feedback and alternatives. Thus, through means such as surveys or focus groups, the government acknowledges that it will listen to public opinion and let them know whether this feedback has also influenced the final decision. Thirdly, citizens can be involved in the process by the government, ensuring constant recognition of public concerns and aspirations. Fourthly, collaboration takes the involvement a step further. Hereby, the citizens are involved in each step, and their advice is incorporated into the decision. Finally, the empowerment of citizens places final decision-making in the hands of the public, as the government rests in a facilitating role (Head, 2010).

Formal participation is met with a lot of criticism as it often overshadows informal participation. Research shows that especially in disadvantaged areas and among youth, informal participation as a means of improving the community is more prevalent (Williams, 2003).

2.1.2 Informal Participation

Informal participation encompasses all activities that do not correspond to formal activities but contribute to the governance of a neighborhood or community. Therefore, informal participation is generally low-scale and takes place almost daily. For example, individual responsible behavior such as keeping an eye out for antisocial behavior in the neighborhood, one-on-one aid, but also commitment to citizen initiatives or organizations that do not partner with authorities (Dekker, 2007; Williams, 2003).

On this note, De Graaf et al. (2015) emphasize that participation is part of living in a social world in which you constantly act within a shared environment such as on the street, in school or in stores. These interactions create lived experience, meaning that people create a sense for themselves of their environment and its conditions. This idea also has a political side. People want to take matters into their own hands and become, so to say, “informal policy makers”, to improve their own environment. This often has not much to do with national politics, rather, it is about concrete projects or initiatives.

2.1.3 Towards a more dynamic framework

The previous parts have laid down two forms of participation. This paper aims to find an interplay between these two versions. Therefore, taking a step back from the hierarchical perspective is crucial. The traditional depiction of participation within a ladder has been criticized for this reason. Some scholars challenge the underlying assumption embedded in the ladder model, whereby the last step of the ladder, namely citizen control, is illustrated as the ultimate goal. They emphasize that striving for the highest levels of participation may not always be feasible or desirable and that mid-levels of involvement are not inherently less valid or authentic. A mid-level status, such as “assigned but informed”, can result in substantial participatory practices (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018). Hence, modeling participation as a spectrum is preferred in the latest works on this subject (Williams, 2003).

A dynamic framework is especially accurate when it comes to youth participation. Just like the ladder of citizen participation by Arnstein (1969), Hart (1992) reformulated a ladder for children's participation with overlapping levels and categories. This ladder and other conceptualizations of hierarchical participation were met with criticism. According to Funk et al. (2012), youth do not statically and linearly climb up the ladder of participation. They fluctuate, going up and down at different paces depending on their circumstances. Therefore, it is important not to try to push them up the ladder, thinking of it as something that goes only one way. It is important to motivate the youth to climb as high as they feel comfortable with. This will also allow to obtain more input from these youth.

In brief, participation has been studied for a long period and the hierarchical approach has become traditional. However, this approach tends to create unrealistic goals and disregard informal participation. Participation is portrayed as something granted by authorities, not considering the willingness of citizens and factors that enhance or hinder participatory behavior. Often, the opposite can also be the case. Numerous citizen initiatives and examples of community participation are demonstrations of this. Consequently, studying the diverse motivators that lead people – specifically youth – to opt for formal and/or informal forms of participation might be the key to find a dynamic framework that includes the interplay between formal and informal participation.

2.2 Factors affecting participatory behavior

Based on previous work, the following part will review the main factors affecting the participatory behavior of youth. By uncovering these factors, better insights can be gained into the attitude of youth towards participation.

2.2.1 Socio-economic status and demographics

Earlier research indicates that low socioeconomic status (SES) is often paired with less developed interpersonal skills and little access to formal institutions that facilitate participatory activities (Dekker, 2007; McFarland & Thomas, 2006). Relating to this, demographics such as ethnic background, age, and gender can also affect participatory behavior. Namely, ethnic minorities and women tend to participate more often, while young people do the contrary (Gittell et al., 2000; Laitinen, 2018). However, this is not always the case. Geographic location can determine the

impact of SES. Dekker's (2007) study which was conducted in the Netherlands for example, did not find a correlation between SES or ethnic background and the level of participation. Also, some studies distinguish between formal and informal participation, stating that people of higher SES are active in formal activities, whereas lower SES are concerned with informal activities (Checkoway, 2011).

2.2.2 Trust

A second fundamental factor relating to participation is trust. According to Kweit & Kweit (2007), the general participation index is related to trust. When citizens do not trust their authorities, or do not trust that their participation is of any relevance, they retreat from it. Conversely, citizens become more compliant when they perceive their government to be trustworthy, which is especially beneficial for formal participation (Antonini et al., 2015). Antonini et al. (2015) found that, even though individuals tend to do a cost-benefit analysis, trust and a high group identification can nullify the high costs associated to participation. Trust enhances the willingness to participate and is in turn also created through productive, long-lasting, and transparent processes (Iannello et al., 2019).

Informal participation is also highly affected by trust. Empirical studies show that trust is linked to increased community service, attending town meetings and volunteering in schools. In the case of informal participation, it is not (only) trust in government authorities that plays a role, but interpersonal trust within communities (Crystal & DeBell, 2002). In fragmented and poor communities, there is a lack of trust, which is a challenge to both informal and formal participation processes (Van Meerkerk et al., 2017).

2.2.3 Knowledge

Several types of knowledge can have an impact on participation. Firstly, knowledge refers to the basic understanding that participation processes exist and knowing the right institutions to consult. Some people might want to participate, but do not know how (Ballard, 2014). Secondly, knowledge in the sense of an awareness of consequences yielded by an issue, can positively influence the willingness to participate (Arkorful et al., 2023). Put more clearly, if citizens become aware of the benefits of prosocial behavior and the consequences of nonparticipation, they will

develop a sense of guilt and thereby stimulate responsible behavior. Lastly, knowledge relates to information deficits or asymmetries, forming one of the important obstacles in the case of participation (Iannello et al., 2019). This is especially true for formal participation processes where information deficit and asymmetries typically go both ways. Officials lack an understanding of citizens' needs or lack practical knowledge, while citizens might not understand the expectations of the process or might be confused about the matter at hand. On this note, if the issue at stake is deemed too complex to grasp, it also becomes a constraint (Arkorful et al., 2023). This relates to the internal ascription of responsibility, which refers to an individual's consideration of their capability of contributing to a resolution (Arkorful et al., 2023; Scott & Serek, 2015). A low internal ascription will also reduce the willingness to participate.

2.2.4 Societal Roles and Attitudes

The attitude of public officials can be decisive for effective citizen participation. Unfortunately, the idea amongst a lot of public servants towards citizen participation is one of "ticking the box" (Iannello et al., 2019). This mindset is often paired with the idea that ordinary citizens lack the knowledge and capacity to meaningfully contribute to decision-making processes. These attitudes create distance between officials and citizens, becoming major barriers for effective formal participation.

Youth face this problem extensively, because of the visible gap between them and adults. This is especially visible in political and organizational forums of community decision-making. The general belief of youth is that they do not attribute values, motivation, or competence to engage in civic society (Zeldin, et al., 2003). Unfortunately, the media can serve to enforce this notion of youth as an irresponsible or even violent group (Checkoway, 2011; Delgado & Staples, 2007). Young people are aware of how they are viewed by adults and their ascribed social roles (Zeldin et al., 2003). This affects their willingness to engage. One of the young participants in Ballard's (2014) research for example, responded that he thinks there is not much a minor can do (about participation).

A report commissioned by the Dutch government researching youth engagement, shows that of more than 3000 participants in decision-making roles, only 20% talk with youth between the ages of 21-25 about their work monthly. This number decreases to 12% when the age group is 18-20

(Number 5 Foundation, 2021). This is a clear example of *adultism*, whereby adults (unconsciously) discriminate against youth, due to a lack of trust (in their capabilities) (Delgado & Staples, 2007).

Young people approached for participation processes are typically over- or under-achievers. The over-achievers are the people that do have capability and can be seen as resources in the eyes of adults. Underachievers, on the other hand, are the ones that need help to fix their deficits. Meanwhile, the majority which forms the middle group remains unapproached and uninterested (Augsberger et al., 2018; Checkoway, 2011).

2.2.5 Social capital

The willingness to participate in governance relies substantially on social capital, which consists of social networks, social norms, and social trust. Scott & Serek (2015) discovered for example, that favorable social norms have a positive influence on the willingness to take part in civic activity. This is also concluded by the study of Pancer et al. (2007), which investigated the community and political involvement in adolescence. From a cost-benefit perspective, high social capital will reduce the costs of participation and information exchange and heighten the probability of collective action and change. It is often through social networks that people can be reached, and information exchange can happen. Not only do abundant social networks allow people to be more receptive, but the frequency of the exchange also allows for consistency which is key for participation processes (Nan & Ouyang, 2020).

Social networks are acquired through interactions of individuals with other members of society. The networks can be informal, such as the interactions with friends and family, or formal, like the interactions one has with organizations and institutional structures. Both formal and informal networks directly affect the behavior of individuals and groups (Nan & Ouyang, 2020). Consequently, studies demonstrate that social networks and social capital have significant influence on participation in governance. An invitation or call for help by a friend appears to be a source of motivation to participate to some youth (Ballard, 2014). The study conducted by Arkorful et al. (2023) also emphasized the relevance of friends, opinions leaders and other relevant influencers in the process of acquiring prosocial behavior.

2.2.6 Time

This factor is quite straightforward. Participation can be time-consuming, depending on the length of the process. Although one-time meetings are also a type of participation, long-lasting processes result in more valuable outcomes (Iannello et al., 2019). Especially if one of the goals is to engage and educate youth. However, several studies show that youth are quite busy. Apart from school, they engage in a lot of leisure and extracurricular activities, which simply leaves them with little time to engage in participation within their communities and societies (Ballard, 2014; Delgado & Staples, 2007). Due to this, committing to longstanding participation processes is not feasible for a significant part of youth.

To conclude, all these factors are highly interconnected. However, it remains important to understand their differences and grasp how they affect each other in the process. Of course, these factors do not cover all influences on participatory behavior amongst youth. Still, they provide us with sufficient insights to get a better understanding of it.

2.3 Youth participation and boundary spanning

This part will first delve further into the specifics of youth participation. Thereafter, the influence of boundary spanners on this process will be discussed.

2.3.1 Development and benefits of youth participation

Previous work identifies several benefits of youth participation (Laitinen, 2018). The first one launches youth participation as a learning opportunity for youth, emphasizing the process rather than the outcome. Another approach underlines the importance of youth participation as a creator of a sense of belonging, especially among youth at risk of exclusion. Lastly, youth participation as a form of social justice serves to empower and make marginalized youth aware of their situations and support them to strive for justice (Laitinen, 2018).

It is critical to understand the importance of youth participation as a means of social learning, as it is the second predictor of (political) participation in adulthood, aside from class reproduction (McFarland & Thomas, 2006). Youth participation as social learning involves participation in voluntary organizations which allows the development of skills and networks to become politically engaged in a later stage of life (McFarland & Thomas, 2006). While youth that come from

politically engaged families will activate their resources when participating, youth that do not have these resources will be able to acquire them through participation.

2.3.2 Boundary spanners

To engage youth effectively, different strategies have been experimented with throughout decades. Top-down practices have shown drawbacks, while genuine interaction is promoted (Iannello et al., 2019). Campbell and Erbsstein (2012) suggest structures involving boundary-spanning community members, to facilitate collaboration between adults and youth in decision-making processes. Notably, NGOs serve as crucial boundary spanners, particularly in communities where trust in formal institutions is low (Van Meerkerk et al. 2017). These organizations play multiple roles to activate, mobilize and empower citizens, so that they become enabled to plan and participate in improvement and local action plans.

Youth organizations represent spaces that promote active participation without a direct formal or political affiliation (Laitinen, 2018). Unlike informal gatherings, these organizations operate with structure, goals and partnerships with schools and local authorities. They provide a sense of belonging and responsibility, making them ideal for nurturing participatory behavior among youth, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Ballard, 2014; McLaughlin, 2000; Zeldin et al., 2003). Given that youth develop their civic identities based on their everyday experiences, and that interactions with public institutions are often negative (Ballard, 2014), the role of youth organizations becomes increasingly valuable. Through volunteerism and participation in social services, the civic identities of adolescents are developed (Metz et al., 2003).

As boundary spanners are often conceptualized as individuals, it is relevant to investigate their characteristics. Boundary spanners bridge different groups or stakeholders through information processing, stakeholder engagement, negotiation and trust-building (Sandmann et al., 2014). Characteristics such as being trusted, having a wide array of contacts, having interpersonal skills, and finding common causes as well as advocating for the disadvantaged are crucial for boundary spanning in disadvantaged areas (Miller, 2008).

In community organizations, boundary spanners facilitate connections between formal and informal sectors, translating citizens' ideas into actionable projects for local officials. Their

innovative approaches help reach vulnerable groups efficiently while linking them with relevant authorities to drive progress (De Graaf et al., 2015).

To understand the impact of boundary spanners and youth organizations, their influence on some factors must be considered. Starting with trust, boundary spanners have unique ability to build trust by addressing unspoken concerns among organizations with diverse interests (Miller, 2009). The presence of boundary spanners within governance networks has a strong link with trust thanks to the facilitation of interaction and understanding (Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014). Youth workers build trust with adolescents through emotional connectivity and acquaintance, establish trust with adolescents, even through “meaningless” small talk (Van der Veken et al., 2022).

Additionally, boundary spanners are known to be information brokers, adept at translating jargon and bridging knowledge gaps across community and administrative boundaries (Miller, 2009; Van Meerkerk et al., 2017). Young people find it particularly difficult to relate to top-down governmental approaches, so speaking their way is essential for effective engagement (Hylton et al., 2018).

Furthermore, youth feeling alienated by the *adultist* attitudes of society, can find refuge in youth organizations as observed by Nolas (2014) in her study on youth clubs. She found that youth at risk of substance abuse attended the clubs in order to avoid the social divisions they face in daily life.

Lastly, social capital can be cultivated through boundary spanning and in youth organizations, as members develop social networks, interpersonal skills and social trust by identifying themselves with their communities (Campbell & Erbstein, 2012; McFarland et al., 2006).

Overall, youth organizations and boundary spanners play pivotal roles in nurturing participatory behavior among youth, stimulating interpersonal skills, fostering trust, knowledge exchange and social capital.

3. Research Design and Methods

This chapter is dedicated to the explanation and justification of the research design and methods. In the following parts, the research question and sub-questions are stated. Afterwards, the

operationalization of the research variables is displayed in a table. The research design and data collection methods are described.

3.1 Research question and sub-questions

As mentioned in the introduction, the main research question of this study, is as follows:

“What is the attitude towards participation amongst youth in The Hague Southwest (HSW) and how do youth organizations in this area impact this?”

To find an answer to the central question, the following sub questions were used:

- “How do the factors – trust, social capital, knowledge, societal roles, time – affect the participational attitude of youth in The Hague Southwest (HSW)?”
- “How does the attitude of youth that participate in youth organizations differ from youth that do not participate in youth organizations?”

3.2 Operationalization

Factor	Dimensions	Indicators	Method
Socioeconomic status and Demographics		Level of income	Interview / focus group
		Level of education	
		Place of residence	
		Age	
		Ethnic background	
		Gender	
Trust	Trusting the (local) government (Antonini et al., 2015; Kweit & Kweit, 2007)	Expressions about past projects of the local government	Interview / focus group
		Expectations of the (local) government (concerning participation)	
		Experiences with different governmental institutions	
	Trusting the community/neighbors (Crystal & DeBell, 2002)	Views about the neighborhood	
		Expressions about neighbors and others in the neighborhood	
Knowledge		Understanding of the concept of participation	

	<p>Awareness of consequences of (non)participation (Arkorful et al., 2023)</p> <p>Awareness of the opportunities to participate (Ballard, 2014)</p> <p>Lack of information or expertise (Iannello et al., 2019)</p>	<p>Understanding of the outcome of participation</p> <p>Awareness of activities and/or participation processes organized by (formal) organizations)</p> <p>Knowledge about matters discussed in participation processes</p>	Interview / focus group
Societal roles	<p>Perception of societal roles (Zeldin et al., 2003)</p> <p>Interaction with adults (Delgado & Staples, 2007)</p>	<p>Stereotypes attached to youth</p> <p>Perceived gap between youth and adults</p> <p>Own perception of the role of youth in society</p> <p>Frequency of interaction with adults about engagement or decision-making</p> <p>Experiences from interactions with adults</p>	Interview / focus group
Social capital	<p>Presence of social networks (Nan & Ouyang, 2020)</p> <p>Social norms within social networks (Scott & Serek, 2015)</p>	<p>Size of social network</p> <p>Frequency of interaction and information exchange with network</p> <p>Activities approved by peers and parents</p> <p>Participation levels of social network</p>	Interview / focus group
Time	<p>Free time (Ballard, 2014)</p> <p>Prioritizing pursuits (Ballard, 2014)</p>	<p>Availability of time for extracurricular activities</p> <p>Time management</p>	Interview / focus group

3.3 Research design

3.3.1 Qualitative study

A qualitative approach is beneficial when the goal of the research is to explore the contexts of a complex topic and gain an in-depth understanding of underlying motivations (Bryman, 2012). Social phenomena can be better understood in relation to two or more contrasting cases studied with similar methods (Bryman, 2012). In view of this, this study has taken on a comparative design. The two groups that were compared are:

1. Youth that do participate in a youth organization in their neighborhood.
2. Youth that do not participate in either youth organizations or other forms of collective formal or informal participation in their neighborhood.

3.3.2 Case selection

The scale for this research has been on the neighborhood level, because it is an important arena for social and political involvement. It is the place where citizens experience their cities, shape their collective identities and form a judgment of other citizens, their governments and other institutions. It is also the place where "real" action takes place in order to improve conditions (Sorensen & Sagaris, 2010).

HSW served as the case area. A note to be made is that HSW consists of several neighborhoods: Moerwijk, Bouwlust, Vredelust and Morgenstond. This research has not distinguished the different neighborhoods, as this did not significantly influence the case. Also, some participants resided in one neighborhood, while participating in another. To avoid complexifying the case, it was opted to take entire HSW, and formulate the interview questions in accordance with the neighborhood scale.

HSW was selected based on a few factors. First, as part of "The Hague Southwest Thesis Project", the region of focus had been predetermined. HSW is a disadvantaged area of The Hague given factors such as the low SES level, high criminality rates, low employment rate and high fear of crime (Artz & Daggenvoorde, 2021). Due to the numerous social and complex questions, this area is fruitful for (academic) research. Although participation is increasingly promoted on a national scale, areas like HSW are especially targeted for this. There are two known reasons for this. Firstly,

disadvantaged and developing areas often face many changes such as urban generation to improve the physical situation. These interventions call for participation. Secondly, the government aims to emancipate these residents to create a better community and social environment. The national program “*De Regio Deal*” therefore finances a lot of citizens initiatives and organizations (Artz & Daggenvoorde, 2021; De Gemeente Den Haag, 2023).

All these initiatives both affect the residents and require their involvement. The most important actors of these projects have been the community organizations and their employees or volunteers, who served as boundary spanners between the residents and the (local) government. With the arrival of EL, this requirement strengthens and specifies that the group of participants are representative of the present stakeholders. One of the groups that are often underrepresented is youth. Statistics of HSW display that around 12 percent of the population are youth between 15 to 24 years, which is a significant part (Den Haag in Cijfers, n.d.).

3.3.3 Sample selection

The research participants were selected and recruited through purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Babbie, 2016). The target group were youth between the ages of 16-25. This age group was based on several considerations. Firstly, the United Nations defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 to 24 (United Nations, 2008). Other than this, the Dutch statistical center (CBS) uses the term "young" until the age of 25 (CBS, 2022; CBS, n.d.). When referring to the percentage of youth partaking in social participation, the Dutch Youth Institute, defines youth as people between the ages of 15 to 25 (Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, n.d.). Secondly, the age group was selected for practical reasons. During initial explorations and efforts to recruit participants, this age group was the most prevalent. The broad age gap offered flexibility and the possibility to include more participants. Lastly, this age group was chosen, because previous research has demonstrated difficulties with finding examples of youth participation among minors, as adult mentoring and influence is more present (Botchwey et al., 2019).

The first group of participants were youth that attended and even volunteered in youth organizations. Initially, the aim was to find participants from diverse youth organizations. Through the thesis hub and thorough web research, several youth organizations in HSW had been discovered. However, due to difficulties in communication and feasibility considerations, only one

organization, WijkZ, has helped to recruit youth. WijkZ is a professionalized organization, providing services not only for youth but also supporting elderly, helping residents with personal concerns and problems, working to get neighborhoods safer and more social (Wijkz, n.d.-a). The organization is present in all districts of The Hague with their own employees, experts and a large base of volunteers. Each district has several locations spread through the neighborhoods, and each location has its own youth worker(s) that know the area and work in a tailormade fashion (Wijkz, n.d.-b). Considering the scope of Wijkz and how much they are integrated in HSW, this organization was deemed the most appropriate and convenient option compared to the other organizations that were encountered before. Youth workers of Wijkz helped to recruit eight participants from different neighborhoods that were either active members, volunteers or interns at their organization.

The second group of participants were the people that did not engage with community and/or youth organizations. This is not to say these participants did not display participatory behavior. Individual participation cannot be excluded in any case. Therefore, the research question only distinguishes between youth that participate in collective forms of participation and youth that do not do this regularly. The subjects of the second group (non-participants) were identified by an initial exchange, in which they were asked whether they are members or volunteers of an organization or collective initiative (in their neighborhood). First, three participants were included through mutual contacts. Afterwards, three other participants were invited to an interview via snowball sampling.

In total, fourteen young people participated in this research. Six of whom were not participating in youth organizations, while the other eight were participating in the youth branch of Wijkz.

3.4 Data collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviewing and a focus group. Semi-structured interviews were opted for, so that similar questions could be asked to the different groups of people. This was also a beneficial method to sufficiently investigate the research topics while still having room for in-depth conversations (Bryman, 2012). The interview guide contains questions attached to each concept in the operationalization table to provide structure to the interviews (see appendix II for English or appendix III for Dutch).

The focus group was only conducted with participants from the first group, namely the ones that participate in a youth organization. This was due to practical reasons. Despite efforts, it was not possible to arrange a focus group with the second group. The aim of the focus group was to create more interaction and understanding of the views of the participants also based on their discussions and reactions to each other during the conversation. The same interview guide used for the semi-structured interviews was adopted, but it was not followed as strictly due to the nature of focus groups.

3.5 Analysis

A deductive approach was followed for the analysis, taking the previous theoretical framework as a starting point. The interview and focus group transcripts were analyzed through a priori codes based on the operationalization tables as well as open coding when deemed necessary (Gibbs & Taylor, 2005). After this, the codes were categorized according to the dimensions of the concepts stated in the operationalization tables.

Considering that this research aims to explore the interplay between formal and informal participation, the attitude towards participation was analyzed without a sharp distinction between the two forms. The analysis aimed to uncover how the six factors affected participation in both forms. The interviews allowed the researcher to understand how the two forms connected and influenced each other.

3.6 Reliability and validity

Qualitative studies come with some concerns regarding validity and reliability (Bryman, 2012). Just like other qualitative studies, this study is case and context specific, thus external validity and thereby transferability is not strong in this respect. Also, the sample is selected through nonprobable sampling, which is a risk for external validity.

Internal validity – referring to the match between concepts and observations – is ensured by basing the concepts of measurement on a wide array of previous academic research and by matching these with concrete indicators used during the data collection (Bryman, 2012).

Moving on to external reliability, the exact replication of this study is impossible as the same setting cannot be found, and the circumstances constantly change when it comes to social

phenomena. However, it might be possible to reach comparable results if a similar study would take place if a researcher adopted the same role and methods as the current one (Bryman, 2012). The internal reliability, which questions biases and subjectivity related to research, is difficult to determine. Through transparency, clear guidelines and reflexivity (Bryman, 2012), the researcher has tried to avoid any occurrences harming internal reliability.

3.7 Ethics and Privacy

In line with the privacy and confidentiality regulations, the names of the participants have been anonymized in transcripts and analysis. Only relevant information, such as age, has been revealed. However, this information does not expose the individual. Consent forms, informing participants about the purpose of the study and the data collection, have been distributed and signed before the conduction of interviews and focus group (see appendix I).

4. Findings and Analysis

In this chapter, the results of the interviews and focus group are presented. The analysis has been organized around the different factors operationalized in the methods part. For each factor, the findings are explained and compared between the two groups. From now on, for the sake of conciseness, the group comprised by youth that are participating in a youth organization will be named ‘first group’, while the group of youth that does not engage in (collective) participation will be called the ‘second group’.

4.1 SES

Although it was not possible to factually know the SES of the participants, questions were asked to estimate this measure. The participants in both groups were aged between 17 and 22 years old. The ethnic backgrounds differed between Moroccans, Turks, Egyptians and Surinamese. Participants from the first group were almost equally divided between males and females, whereas the second group was only comprised with females. Although it was not possible to have exact insights into the levels of income of the participants, the estimate of the first group – mostly residing with their parents – came from low to middle income households. On the other hand, the estimation for the second group was slightly higher, namely that they resided in middle to high

income households. The education levels were also significantly different. Whereas the first group's participants were studying at MBO (secondary vocational school), the second group consisted of university or HBO (university of applied sciences) students.

4.2 Trust

4.2.1 Government and municipality

During the focus group, the first group was asked to rate their trust in the municipality, this resulted in an average of 6 out of 10. The municipality as a financer was the greatest source of trust. Aside from individual subsidies or student loans, the group acknowledged that the municipality financed “this place”, their youth organization. Notable was the fact that different institutions – be it governmental or private – were confused to be (part of) the municipality. Loans and subsidies provided by the national government were attributed to the municipality, even after clarification. Issues faced with the housing association were also attributed to the municipality. Often, daily confrontations with topics concerning the municipality were sources of distrust. These are problems such as (paid) parking, housing, bureaucratic procedures, lack of cleanliness, or (lack of) police presence.

Most of the participants in the first group stated a general distrust regarding municipal development projects. A few explanations were given for this by the participants. Firstly, the municipality was not physically present in their environment, they did not *know* the municipality. One participant explained what determined her trust: “I trust what is going on *here* [emphasis] in our community center, because I am here a lot, I *know* [emphasis] what is going on.”

Secondly, housing developments and the housing crisis harmed the level of trust. Almost all of the participants expressed their discontent on this matter: “Construction is just screwed”. Lastly, previous experiences with municipal projects had led to distrust. The participants declared that the municipality cannot be trusted with these matters. One participant gave an example to illustrate this:

Jan Luykenlaan here in Moerwijk has been a drama for years. There have been discussions with residents for years about renovating the avenue, and they were asked for advice.

Finally, when it came down to it, they suddenly said 'yes, it is not going to happen, we do not have the money for it'. Leaving all those residents angry.

Thus, a lack of trust was clearly notable when it came to including citizens' opinions in decision-making.

Among the second group, the answers were rather divided. While part of the interviewees thought that The Hague is one of the better cities and municipalities to live in, the other part expressed distrust. Trust was associated with appointments at the municipality, waste management, public transport and financing of projects. For example, one of the interviewees stated that her trust had increased upon hearing that the municipality finances and facilitates extracurricular activities for children and youth. Conversely, answers conveying distrust had a lot to do with perceived absence of the municipality.

“I never really feel that they [the municipality] are present. (. . .) When we asked for presence of local police officers [“wijkagent”], when it was still a bit chaotic around here, they never came actually. (. . .) I would say that my trust is quite low.”

Trust was also related to expectations that participants had of the municipality. The interviewees that expected the municipality to take an active role and interact with residents and youth and understand their needs and interests, expressed overall lower rates of trust. Additionally, distrust was fueled with the idea that: “They will maybe ask for our opinions more often, but probably still get things done their own way. So, your opinion is not very important actually.”

4.2.2 Neighbors and Neighborhood

In both groups, trust levels were low when it came to neighbors. An important reason for this appeared to be the high turnover of residents in the neighborhood. Several participants from both groups pointed out that they did not know their neighbors. However, this was not the case for everyone. A smaller yet significant part of the first group affirmed their trust in their neighbors, for example: “If anyone loses anything in the apartment, another neighbor will leave a message. That is always nice.”

Curiously, participants from the first group that expressed distrust and dislike towards their neighbors, were quite positive when it came to the neighborhood itself. They stated that they felt safe and taken as a whole, the neighborhood represented a small community to them. One of the participants made a telling remark to which other participants agreed: “It really changes per street; I live on a shopping street which is more problematic than where I used to live which was a small and calm street where everyone knew each other.”

This notion also recurred in the second group. While the respondents that did not trust their neighbors, explained that there is instability; a school nearby or that there are loiterers in the area; the respondents that did feel safe, lived either in newly built homes or mentioned that “there are no loiterers and people know each other”.

Unlike the first group, the second group, regardless of whether they trusted their direct neighbors, did not trust the neighborhood overall. Some expressed that only their own street was “okay” or “nice”, but that the neighborhood and people overall were not so friendly, and they did not feel a connection to them or their neighborhood.

One of these interviewees recurrently answered that she would not be interested in participating because it did not directly affect her. Hereby, she expressed that she was not familiar with her neighborhood and had a rather negative view of her neighbors. Therefore, she made her choices based on a cost-benefits analysis:

I would honestly not go there... it might sound a little egocentric, but it does not directly affect me, construction projects. (. . .) If it were a topic that directly affected me, for example, something about the school of my little sister, especially something that could affect her education negatively. I would go and speak up. But otherwise, I think others that know the neighborhood better, can participate. I would rather spend my time on other things.

4.3 Knowledge

Interestingly, almost all interviewees had accurate answers when asked to define participation: “Doing something for society, something like that”. However, a significant number from the first group did not realize that by volunteering in an organization or helping others, they were *participating*. Both groups associated participation with formal participation, e.g. attending formal meetings or voting. During the interviews, some respondents from the second group realized that they were in fact engaging in informal one-to-one forms of participation on nearly a daily basis, through contacts with neighbors and helping each other when needed.

The groups seemed to have difficulty understanding the outcomes of formal participation. Therefore, they attached more value to informal participation. Respondents from both groups stated they were open to helping people, for example elderly, or keeping their streets clean. These acts were more useful in their eyes. When asked about the outcomes of formal participation, this was not met with similar enthusiasm. Even in a hypothetical situation whereby the outcome would be guaranteed, the participants of the first group expressed that they did not believe any real outcome would be possible. One of the volunteers, who had a supervising role, stated: “Here you can immediately see the result. For example, how your work impacts the children. With other things, projects such as sustainability, for example. You do not see immediate results there, and for many it feels like a burden.”

Moving on to lack of information or expertise, there was not much concern about this. Since the topics discussed were mostly regarding the neighborhood, respondents were not taken aback by their lack of expertise. Notably, some hesitation was present in the second group more so than in the first group. “I do not think I have enough knowledge to form a useful and informed opinion.”, was the response of one of the interviewees when asked if she would participate in a meeting about his neighborhood.

Lastly, there seemed to be a lack of awareness of opportunities in both groups. Although the first group was engaging in the activities of their own organization, they were not aware of other opportunities outside: “We are always aware of what is organized here at Wijkz, but we know nothing about other stuff done (organized) by the municipality.” Still, this group did indicate that they were asked to participate by the municipality or other institutions, again through the youth worker at Wijkz. Therefore, they had a head start that allowed them to be aware of opportunities.

On the contrary, the second group – except for two participants – was totally unaware of any opportunities. Not only formal forms of participation were unknown, also neighborhood initiatives, voluntary organizations or community centers were off radar. This had several reasons. Firstly, due to a lack of interest the participants simply never looked for any opportunities or these opportunities did not cross their path. Secondly, insufficient publicity and reach might have caused a problem, as one of the interviewees said: “I am quite active on social media, but I have never seen anything about neighborhood meetings or activities. Also never received any flyers at home.” Another respondent replied that she did not think she was sufficiently informed about what was going on in the neighborhood, and that she would like to attend a meeting if she ever received an invitation.

The two participants that were aware of a few opportunities revealed that these were activities either for kids and youth under the age of 18 or for the elderly and mothers. They heard about these opportunities through family members and colleagues. One of them explained that he knew about these activities through word-to-mouth advertisement: “If I did not work at Albert Heijn and was just a resident, I do not think I would be aware of this type of activity. There are plenty of people who do not work there but who do live in the neighborhood.”

4.4 Societal roles

The results show that societal roles play a visible role in the imaging of youth of formal institutions and adults that represent these institutions. When asked about stereotypes about them – youth – the respondents of the first group were prepared to name an entire list: “student that never goes to school”; “street rat, only loiters, criminal behavior (. . .)”; “junkie, crook, thief”; “adults have the impression that youth want to go their own way.” Most of these stereotypes have negative connotations. The majority of the participants firmly denied that they resembled these stereotypes: “(. . .) I am just a nice guy who pays his taxes.”

Most of the volunteers at the youth organization stated that adults would not believe or would be surprised that they were volunteers. “When they see us, they look at us like they think we do not go to school and only hang around doing criminal stuff and scamming people.”, declared one of the participants in the focus group while the other participants nodded in agreement. When asked if such a stereotype affects their behavior – their motivation to volunteer or participate – most of

the participants answered that they did not care what others think and that they would even prove them wrong. During this conversation, however, an interesting remark showed that these stereotypes actually did impact their behavior. One of the participants reminded his peer that he did not like to attend somewhat formal meetings: “There have been certain projects that I do not want to participate in because certain people look at me strangely, things like that. But usually, if I feel good about it, I just participate.”

In the second group, there was a different idea of stereotypes. Most of the respondents answered in the same manner, stating that the new generation is more flexible and individualistic to the point that this can become rather egocentric. However, the respondents did not necessarily identify with these definitions themselves. A stereotype would affect this group positively, making them work harder to reach their goals or prove others wrong. Several respondents stated that people around them were highly educated despite "low expectations". Although this positive impact might be true to some when it comes to education, this was not always the case. Especially when it came to responsibilities in daily life at home or in the community, a negative connotation could lead to responses such as: “You guys do not trust me anyway.”

Explicit examples of the perceived youth-adult gap were the resident meetings organized by the housing corporations to gather opinions. As the youth worker explained, these meetings were only meant for main residents of residences, so the other residents – often including youth – were not invited. Upon hearing this, the youth around the table expressed disappointment. One of them said “They could just walk in here [community center] and say, ‘hey we have a neighborhood meeting’. If we go there [to a meeting], there is not even anyone from the neighborhood. Only people from the municipality, as if they do not want us there. And that makes us feel bad.”

Another important component of societal roles is the frequency and substance of interaction with adults about decision-making or participation. As they were part of a youth organization, the first group discussed topics about participation and decision-making, not only with the youth workers, but also with adults from partnering organizations, such as the municipality or other NGO’s, researchers or politicians. Nevertheless, these interactions did not always leave a positive impression. As mentioned above, one of the participants disclosed that he did not feel comfortable during certain meetings. Moreover, the youth worker explained that these arrangements were often not planned and had a tick-the-box feeling to them. Despite several negative experiences, key

figures and community managers were familiar to these youth, leaving a positive impression overall.

The second group did not have the same opportunity to interact with adults on matters such as decision-making. Their answers made it clear that they have no recollection of such interactions. While part of the respondents would prefer more initiatives from decision makers or key figures to connect with them, another part was reluctant: “If anyone seriously desires to participate, they should be the ones to take the initiative and search for opportunities. I am simply not interested, so it is normal that I have not been contacted.”

4.5 Social Capital

Both groups had considerable and diverse social networks, and, in both groups, family formed the base to the social network. For the first group, their peers in the youth organization comprised a significant part of their social network. The second group had a more diverse social network, often from school and studies or jobs. In most cases, this network was not (only) concentrated in The Hague.

The frequency of interaction within social networks was high in both groups. Almost all respondents stated that they spoke with their friends daily, online or in real life. The important difference between the groups was the type of information exchange. The first group was in constant contact with each other and the youth workers. This allowed them to be up to date about the latest news in the neighborhood or about any project. Additionally, these participants shared this information in their social network outside of the youth organization. By sharing information and talking about their experiences at the youth organization, the interviewees explained that they – often unintendedly – attracted their social network to join (activities of) the organization. Some recalled that they got in touch with the youth organization through their friends: “I had a friend who used to come here and volunteer, she would invite me to join her. Now she is not here anymore and I still am.” The youth worker also confirmed that most of the volunteers had joined the organization via contacts, either via friends or school or just walking in to see what is happening and making friends afterwards.

Within the second group, information exchange about participation or the neighborhood was rare. While some explained that their friends were not from (this part of) The Hague, others simply preferred to talk about other topics such as personal development and hobbies. In this case, the little information about “neighborhood stuff” was often through daily interactions with neighbors or colleagues. One participant stated that her neighbor was always active and informed the rest: “(. . .) he takes initiative when anything goes wrong and asks us to sign a petition, for example. It is nice to have someone like that.”

Aside from the scope of the social network, social norms within these networks are key. Since their friends were from the organization, the first group naturally got the approval of their peers to be volunteers or to engage in social activities within this organisation. On top of this, their families also supported this pursuit. In most cases, the families were familiar with the organization and participated or helped with activities in this organization or elsewhere. Contrarily, the work of the municipality for example, was not always approved. Negative experiences shared by parents or others within the network affected the social norm: “Those parents and families share their experiences. These kids pick up on that.” This remark of the youth worker was affirmed by a volunteer: “If I receive a letter at home and I open it... that thing will go straight into the trash can. Straight.”

The participants also stated that they were not prepared to spend time or effort on “random projects” other than their work at the youth organization. The reason for this was that they had a fixed group at the youth organization, thus, a social network. If it were a different place, if they had to move, they would not be willing to put the same effort into a new organization.

Social norms were diverse among the second group. Although the participants declared that their peers and families would approve of forms of collective engagement, it was not in an encouraging way. More value was attached to one-on-one aid. Families were illustrated as people that would help neighbors if there was any problem. Most participants stated that they: “were raised to help others and think about others.” One of the participants added that she had learned the importance of caring for her neighbor from her religion, while the other explained that feeling responsible towards others was: “part of the collectivist culture”. Other than this, the participation levels within the social networks were low and constrained to one-on-one aid: “If any of my friends was engaged in participation processes or if my social network in general would attach more value to

participation than I would at least be more aware and probably more willing to engage.” One of the respondent’s mothers engaged actively in her neighborhood and in citizen initiatives for which she would cook or help with Dutch classes. This respondent explained that she was always encouraged to be busy and do something useful. Although her family would encourage her, the approval of her peers was not present:

“My friends are not interested in these types of activities (. . .) I think mostly because I have no one to join me if I were to participate and I do not want to do it on my own. If I had friends that did participate and would ask me if I want to join, I would really like to.”

4.6 Time

Lastly, time was analyzed by the availability of time – aside from obligatory occupations such as work and school – and how the available time was prioritized. The first group consisted of students, some of whom had a side job. On paper, they did not have much time available as full-time students, some in combination with almost full-time jobs. Activities or meetings were often scheduled together with these volunteers, as their availability was of importance. Therefore, the youth worker complained that other organizations, like the municipality, would try to arrange last minute meetings: “Youth are busy. It is often too late to find them last minute.” Despite this the youth worker also declared that: “A few days ago I asked one of the volunteers if he was available for supervision during an activity and he answered yes. Afterwards I learned that he was actually supposed to be at school.” This example illustrates how many of the respondents prioritized their tasks at the youth organization, sometimes at the cost of other responsibilities. When asked why they would spend their (free) time at the organization instead of taking part in other activities, the general answer was the same: “We just like it here, our group is great.” One of the respondents said she had moved recently but came to this youth center. Although the first group demonstrated a high level of prioritization when it came to spending time at the organization, this could not be concluded for other participatory activities. Even a survey from the municipality or any other organization would take too much time in the eyes of the interviewees. Committing to participation processes was a “no-go” as well: “A few meetings? *Wajow*, of course not. Who is going to spend that much time on that. Maybe if they provide a nice compensation.”

In the second group, the same occupations were present. Aside from school and/or a job, the participants noted that they did not have a lot of time left. The time that was left, was often spent with family or friends. The notion of being busy was quite present in this group. Therefore, time was seen as something highly valuable that they would want to spend cautiously. “If I had more time, I still would not use that for participation or anything. I would rather use it on self-development instead of other people or some project that is going on.” Almost all respondents from this group stated that they would have made time if they were interested in participation. In short, this group prioritized other activities.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The findings provide key insights into the behavior of youth and what drives this behavior based on the studied factors. The aim of this study has been to provide an answer to the research question through two subquestions. The following discussion will answer these questions based on the findings and literature while also considering this study's limitations. Finally, the answer to the research question will form a conclusion with suggestions and recommendations for policy and future studies.

5.1 Discussion

Firstly, drawing a concrete line between SES and participatory behavior is difficult by using qualitative methods only. However, several points can be drawn from the findings. Firstly, corresponding with Dekker (2017), this study did not find a relationship between ethnic background and participation levels as both groups consisted of ethnic minorities. Secondly, even though the first group had lower income and education levels, their participation levels were higher, this can be explained by the fact that they partake in informal participation, which is more prevalent amongst low SES (Checkoway, 2011). However, the second group did not participate in formal participation despite high SES, in contrast to previous studies. A final contestation with the literature is that the first group did have access to formal institutions that facilitate participatory activities (McFarland & Thomas, 2006). Here, the youth organization and the youth workers as boundary spanners played an important role as connectors between officials and youth (De Graaf

et al., 2015). Thus, this study did not find a strong influence of SES on the participatory behavior of youth in HSW while the youth organization facilitated participation regardless of SES (Ballard, 2014).

Furthermore, in line with literature, findings reveal that trust has a significant influence on the behavior of youth whereby youth that participate have higher expectations of the municipality. Answers from both sides make clear that acquiring a level of trust that will lead to participation requires more than just providing basic provisions such as financial support, police presence and waste management. Distrust is generated by perceived absence and ingenuine interactions - like the case of Jan Luykenlaan. Transparency and meaningful interactions are key in meeting expectations and creating positive experiences that will lead to trust and active involvement (Iannello et al., 2019). Trust on the neighborhood level is also decisive when it comes to participation and was influenced by the rate of resident turnover, street characteristics and identification with the community (Crystall & DeBell, 2002). The participants with low levels of trust and negative views of their neighborhood were reluctant to participate, basing their choice on a cost-benefit analysis instead (Antonini et al., 2015). Neighborhood trust is positively influenced by the youth organization through social networks and community identification (Scott & Serek, 2015). Aside from this, the youth organization fosters government trust because they partner with the municipality and by forming a platform on which youth can meaningfully interact with public servants (Augsberger et al., 2018).

Thirdly, While the findings reveal that the knowledge and understanding of participation is limited to formal processes, informal participation appears to be preferred because of understandable and short-term outcomes. This highlights that knowledge and awareness are crucial components to initiate meaningful participation, as information deficits can be discouraging (Arkorful et al., 2023; Ballard, 2014). Especially youth face difficulties in understanding long-term and top-down governmental approaches (Hylton et al., 2018).

Limited exposure to available initiatives, coupled with insufficient publicity and outreach efforts, hinders individuals' ability to access and participate in activities (Iannello et al., 2019). This issue is partly solved by boundary spanning activities of the youth organization but holds true for youth that do not participate. Other than this, findings reveal that concerns of internal ascription were discouraging youth of the second group from participating.

Hence, knowledge also proves to have a significant impact on participatory behavior. While understanding the concept of participation can lower the threshold to engage in civic behavior, understanding the outcomes of formal and informal participation can further encourage individuals. This understanding can be created by the information brokering of the youth organization (Miller, 2009). Lastly, outreach and exposure are crucial to provide access to participation.

Additionally, Societal roles play a significant role in the participatory behavior of youth. Due to ingenuine interactions and adultist attitudes, youth feel alienated and their willingness to participate in formal occasions is hindered (Zeldin et al., 2003). The distrust that is implied by adults – e.g. not believing that youth are volunteers – contributes to distrust and creates a gap between the two parties (Delgado & Staples, 2007). The findings reveal that negative experiences lead to heightened awareness of these roles and stereotypes among high participation youth whereas a low level of participation leads to indifference. Though in a number of cases stereotypes can motivate youth to work harder, feelings of marginalization might also lead to avoidance as revealed in this study. The substance and frequency of interactions between youth and adults about topics concerning participation is also an important element of dealing with societal roles. Hereby the youth organization provides a trusted platform through which youth can comfortably participate (Laitinen, 2018). However, based on SES, the findings affirm that often “under-achievers” are approached, while the middle group is forgotten (Checkoway, 2011). Addressing adultist and “tick-the-box” attitudes and promoting inclusive opportunities for sincere conversations are essential to cultivate an environment where all members feel empowered to contribute to community participation.

Fifthly, drawing from the literature, it is evident that favorable social norms, and extensive social networks significantly influence individuals’ willingness to participate (Nan & Ouyang, 2020). An extensive social network on its own is not sufficient, however, factors such as location and interest of a network are found to be decisive. Neighbors are important nodes of a social network when it comes to information exchange about the community, leading to increased knowledge and engagement. Social capital also entails social trust, the findings affirm this by revealing a connection between trust and social networks (Scott & Serek, 2015). Namely, neighborhood trust fosters social networks in the neighborhood while social networks can lead to increased trust.

The findings also underline the impact of social norms on participatory behavior (Pancer et al., 2007). Approval and support of peers and family can become decisive about an individual's priorities, whether this will be active participation or one-on-one aid. These priorities are further affected by the level of peer involvement in participation. The results demonstrate how an engaged social network can be a motivator whereas little interest towards participation can lead to reluctance (Arkorful et al., 2023). The role of the youth organization is the creation of social networks that mutually encourage each other to participate (Campbell & Erbstein, 2012).

Lastly, time is a factor that also plays a decisive role in participatory behavior. Participation is time-consuming, and processes that are long-term are often more effective (Iannello et al., 2019). However, as depicted by previous studies the findings confirm that youth are busy (Ballard, 2014). Therefore, time is an important measure within a cost-benefit analysis. Participation is deemed costly when there is no visible (immaterial) compensation to it. The youth organization offers benefits through cultivating social networks and a sense of belonging which are often hard to generate in other (formal) contexts. Thus, flexible and time-efficient engagement processes and meaningful incentives can influence participatory behavior and reduce the perceived cost of participation processes.

5.2 Limitations

This research delved into six factors influencing participatory behavior amongst youth. However, there are many more sides to the question. For example, Ballard (2014) identified that part of the youth is motivated by a specific cause – e.g. climate change, social justice – rather than the act of participation. Several interviewees revealed that they might be interested in participating if it was about a specific topic they were interested in.

Additionally, one-on-one aid is a form of participation that is often disregarded while it is the most common version of (informal) participation. This form of participation has also been disregarded in this research, while some of the 'non-participating' interviewees mentioned that they did engage in small acts of one-on-one aid.

For the sake of feasibility and structure, this research has opted to divide youth into two groups and compare their responses. Yet, this can lead to an oversimplistic result. In the end, there are

clear differences in the level of participation within these groups of people as well, which is also visible in the findings. On top of this, the participants were recruited through snowball sampling and through a single organisation, which might have led to low external validity.

Also, in a vibrant area like HSW, the research results demonstrated that every street has a different story and is a completely different environment. Therefore, to understand differences and underlying factors more thoroughly, a closeup of streets or at least micro-neighborhoods can be valuable. Taking the district as a whole might have caused the results to become ignorant of this fact.

5.3 Conclusion and recommendations

This research has attempted to shed light on the attitude of youth towards participation and how this is impacted by youth organizations. As discussed above, the participatory behavior of youth is quite diverse and ranges from one-to-one aid to formal participation. One of the most important takeaways of this study is the need to recognize all different forms of participation. Still, discovering how behavior is shaped and finding ways to promote and cultivate citizen engagement is beneficial for a civic society. This study found that different factors play a role in determining participatory behavior. It is also crucial to understand that these factors are influenced by one another, creating a complex dynamic. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for designing inclusive and effective strategies to enhance youth participation in governance and community initiatives.

Furthermore, a second dynamic is present between informal and formal participation. The findings have revealed how engagement in informal participation facilitates the step towards formal participation.

In short, the attitude towards participation amongst youth in HSW is diverse. Efforts to broaden participation should address the diverse needs and preferences of youth. Youth organizations in this area impact this by offering a blend of informal and formal participation. The youth joining these organizations are empowered by the opportunities and social networks that are present.

In appendix IV, a policy recommendation is included that displays a model demonstrating the different factors, how they can be positively influenced and how youth organizations are connected to this. By recognizing and addressing these complexities, stakeholders can develop inclusive and effective strategies to harness youth potential and facilitate meaningful contributions.

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Appendix I – Consent Form

Informatie- en toestemmingsformulier

Informatieformulier

Introductie

Beste Deelnemer,

Ik ben Elif Oztoprak, master student van de opleiding Urban Governance, aan de Erasmus Universiteit te Rotterdam. Als onderdeel van mijn scriptieonderzoek, voer ik interviews uit. Ik richt mij hierbij voornamelijk op jongeren tussen de leeftijden 16 en 25, woonachtig in Den Haag Zuidwest. Uiteindelijk hoop ik door middel van het onderzoek inzichten te krijgen het participatiegedrag van jongeren en hoe dit bevorderd kan worden.

Voor meer informatie over het onderzoek, kan je mij een mail sturen naar dit adres: elifelber@hotmail.com.

Dataverzameling

Ik verricht mijn onderzoek aan de hand van interviews en focusgroepen. Hierbij stel ik vragen gerelateerd aan participatie. De interviews en focusgroepen worden opgenomen door middel van een voice-recorder app, zonder beeld. De geluidsopnames gebruik ik om terug te luisteren en te transcriberen, zodat ik een preciezere analyse kan uitvoeren.

De opnames worden niet gedeeld met een derde partij. De namen van de deelnemers en van derden die worden genoemd, zullen niet worden genoemd of worden onherkenbaar gemaakt door middel van acroniemen.

Potentiële ongemakken en risico's

Er zijn geen fysieke, rechtelijke of economische risico's verbonden aan uw deelname in dit onderzoek. U bent niet verplicht om alle vragen te beantwoorden.

Vertrouwelijkheid en databescherming

De verzamelde data zal worden gebruikt voor een geaggregeerde data-analyse en vertrouwelijke informatie of persoonlijke gegevens zullen niet worden gebruikt in de uitkomsten van het onderzoek. De data zal worden opgeslagen op een beveiligde locatie voor 7 jaar.

Het delen van data

Ik deel de data met mijn scriptiebegeleiders van de Erasmus Universiteit, mijn begeleiders van de gemeente Den Haag, en mijn begeleider van de scriptiewerkplaats Den Haag Zuidwest. Dit ben ik verplicht te doen als onderdeel van de beoordeling van mijn scriptie.

Vrijwillige deelname en individuele rechten

Uw deelname is vrijwillig en het is mogelijk om op ieder moment te stoppen. Tijdens uw deelname aan het onderzoek heeft u het recht om meer informatie over de dataverzameling en analyse te vragen. Daarnaast heeft u het recht om uw toestemming in te trekken en te vragen naar verwijdering van uw data voordat de dataset is geanonimiseerd of het manuscript is ingeleverd om gepubliceerd te worden. U kunt dit bewerkstelligen door contact op te nemen met mij (Elif Oztoprak).

Mocht u klachten hebben aangaande het verwerken van persoonlijke gegevens in dit onderzoek, neem dan gerust contact op via de mail.

Toestemmingsformulier *Jongeren en Participatie*

Door het tekenen van dit toestemmingsformulier bevestig ik dat:

- Ik geïnformeerd ben over het doel van het onderzoek, de dataverzameling en het opslaan van data zoals beschreven in het informatieformulier;
- Ik het informatieformulier heb gelezen, of dat het aan me is voorgelezen;
- Ik mogelijkheden heb gehad om vragen te stellen over het onderzoek; de vragen zijn voldoende beantwoord;
- Ik vrijwillig toestemming geef tot deelname aan dit onderzoek;
- Ik begrijp dat er vertrouwelijk wordt omgegaan met de informatie;
- Ik begrijp dat ik de deelname op ieder moment kan beëindigen of het beantwoorden van vragen kan weigeren zonder enige consequenties;
- Ik begrijp dat ik mijn toestemming kan intrekken voor de dataset is ingeleverd voor goedkeuring.

	Ja	Nee
Ik geef toestemming om audio van het interview op te nemen		
Ik geef toestemming om video van het interview op te nemen		
Ik geef toestemming om citaten van mijn interview te gebruiken		
Ik geef toestemming om mijn naam te gebruiken bij de citaten		

Naam van de deelnemer aan het onderzoek: -- _____

Datum: - _____

Handtekening: - _____

Appendix II – Interview Guide

Introduction

- Welcome and thank the participant for taking part in the interview.
- Explain the purpose of the study: to understand the attitudes of youth in HSW towards participation and the factors that influence this.
- Mention the approximate duration of the interview.
- Assure confidentiality and explain informed consent.

Section 1: Socioeconomic status and demographics

- What level would you say the income of your household is? low/average/high
- What are you studying/have you studied?
- Where do you live?
- What is your age?
- What is your ethnic background?
- What is your gender?

Section 2: Trust

- How would you describe your level of trust in (projects of) the government? Can you explain?
- How do you feel about past projects of the government?
- Do you think the participation processes have an impact on decisions?
- What is your experience with local authorities?
- What do you think of your neighborhood?
- How would you describe your level of trust in the residents of your neighborhood?

Section 3: Knowledge

- Can you explain participation in your own sense?
- What are your expectations from participation? What do you think it is used for or can lead to?
- Are you aware of the opportunities to participate in processes that might impact governmental decisions or that can positively impact your neighborhood?
- How familiar are you with the ongoing projects in your neighborhood? Do you know about new urban developments for example?

Section 4: Societal Role of Youth

- In your opinion, what is the societal role of young people in your community or municipality?
- How do you think that your age group is viewed by adults?
- Are there any stereotypes or biases about young people that impact you or others?
- How often do you interact with adults concerning serious topics?
- What is your experience from these interactions? Do you think you are being taken seriously?

Section 5: Social Capital

- How would you describe your social network? Small/average/big?
- Who do you consider your social network?
- How often do you interact with your environment?
- What do your social networks keep themselves busy with aside from work/school?
- Would you say that your social network engages in participation in some way? How often?
- How often do you talk about topics concerning participation with your social network? What are their views?
- Would you say that your social network influences your activities and views?

Section 6: Time

- Time is often a precious resource for young people. How do you manage your time between various commitments?
- Do you have any time left for social activities besides your school, work, and family?
- Have you ever felt that time constraints affected your willingness or ability to participate in community activities or organizations?
- What are your priorities when it comes to time management?

Closing

- Is there anything you would like to add to our previous conversation?
- Do you have any final thoughts you would like to share aside from the topics we have just discussed?

Thank you for your time!

Appendix III – Interview Guide in Dutch

Introductie

- Verwelkom en bedank de deelnemer voor zijn deelname aan het interview.
- Leg het doel van het onderzoek uit: inzicht krijgen in de houding van jongeren in HSW ten aanzien van participatie en de factoren die hierop van invloed zijn.
- Vermeld de geschatte duur van het interview.
- Zorg voor vertrouwelijkheid en licht het toestemmingsformulier toe.

Onderdeel 1: SES

- Op welk niveau zou u het inkomen van uw huishouden plaatsen? laag/gemiddeld/hog
- Wat studeert u/heeft u gestudeerd?
- Waar woont u?
- Wat is uw leeftijd?
- Wat is uw etnische achtergrond?
- Wat is uw geslacht?

Onderdeel 2: Vertrouwen

- Hoe zou u uw vertrouwensniveau in (projecten van) de overheid beschrijven? Kunt u dit toelichten?
- Hoe staat u tegenover eerdere projecten van de overheid?
- Denkt u dat participatieprocessen invloed hebben op beslissingen?
- Wat is uw ervaring met lokale autoriteiten?
- Wat vindt u van uw buurt?
- Hoe zou u uw vertrouwensniveau in de bewoners van uw buurt beschrijven?

Onderdeel 3: Kennis

- Kunt u participatie uitleggen zoals u het begrijpt?
- Wat zijn uw verwachtingen van participatie? Waarvoor denkt u dat het wordt gebruikt of toe kan leiden?
- Bent u op de hoogte van de mogelijkheden om deel te nemen aan processen die invloed kunnen hebben op overheidsbeslissingen of die uw buurt positief kunnen beïnvloeden?
- Hoe bekend bent u met lopende projecten in uw buurt? Weet u bijvoorbeeld iets over nieuwe stedelijke ontwikkelingen?

Onderdeel 4: Maatschappelijke rol

- Naar uw mening, wat is de maatschappelijke rol van jongeren in uw gemeenschap of gemeente?
- Hoe denkt u dat uw leeftijdsgroep wordt bekeken door volwassenen?
- Zijn er stereotypen of vooroordelen over jongeren die invloed hebben op u of anderen?
- Hoe vaak hebt u interactie met volwassenen over serieuze onderwerpen?
- Wat is uw ervaring met deze interacties? Denkt u dat er serieus naar u wordt geluisterd?

Onderdeel 5: Sociaal kapitaal

- Hoe zou u uw sociale netwerk omschrijven? Klein/gemiddeld/groot?
- Wie beschouwt u als uw sociale netwerk?
- Hoe vaak heeft u interactie met uw omgeving?
- Waarmee houdt uw sociale netwerk zich bezig naast werk/school?
- Zou u zeggen dat uw sociale netwerk op de een of andere manier deelneemt aan participatie? Hoe vaak?
- Hoe vaak bespreekt u onderwerpen met betrekking tot participatie met uw sociale netwerk? Wat zijn hun opvattingen?
- Zou u zeggen dat uw sociale netwerk invloed heeft op uw activiteiten en opvattingen?

Onderdeel 6: Tijd

- Tijd is vaak een kostbare bron voor jongeren. Hoe beheert u uw tijd tussen verschillende verplichtingen?
- Heeft u nog tijd over voor sociale activiteiten naast uw school, werk en familie?
- Heeft u ooit het gevoel gehad dat tijdsbeperkingen van invloed waren op uw bereidheid of vermogen om deel te nemen aan gemeenschapsactiviteiten of organisaties?
- Wat zijn uw prioriteiten als het gaat om tijdbeheer?

Slotvragen

- Is er iets wat u zou willen toevoegen aan ons vorige gesprek?
- Heeft u nog laatste gedachten die u wilt delen naast de onderwerpen die we zojuist hebben besproken?

Bedankt voor uw tijd!

JONGERENPARTICIPATIE

Waarom participatie?

Participatie is een groot onderdeel van het omgevingsbeleid. Er wordt steeds meer belang gehecht aan de meningen en ideeën van stakeholders.

De gedachtegang is dat de democratie wordt door burgers meer en vaker te betrekken bij besluitvorming. Zo ook met de omgevingswet die voorziet dat bij elk onderdeel een participatietraject wordt ondergaan vanaf de beginfasen.

Wat is er met jongeren?

Jongeren zijn vaak minder aanwezig bij formele participatiegelegenheden. Dit terwijl zij net zoveel te maken kunnen hebben met gevolgen van bijvoorbeeld gebiedsontwikkeling. Er zijn verschillende verklaringen voor de afwezigheid van jongeren. Als de grootste erfgenamen van de toekomst, is het cruciaal om ze steeds meer te betrekken.

Effectief betrekken

Participatietrajecten moeten er niet zijn om een vakje aan te vinken. Het is van belang om waardevolle betrekking te creëren, en tegelijk te accepteren dat het een vrijwillige keuze is om te participeren.

De participatieladder wordt vaak bekritiseerd om het feit dat het niet gaat om een lineair concept. Streven naar de hoogste trede, is daarom niet altijd effectief. Vooral met jongeren is het belangrijk om op maat aan de slag te gaan.

Huidig beleid

Er staat veel op de agenda voor Den Haag Zuidwest. Veel van deze doelen zijn ook behaald, met alle mooie projecten die het website van de regiodeal versieren. Er ligt een nadruk op samen doen en het stimuleren van burgerinitiatieven en maatschappelijke organisaties middels subsidies en samenwerkingen.

Jongerenorganisaties en boundary spanning

Onderzoek toont aan dat jongerenorganisaties vaak een veilige haven zijn voor jongeren. Door deze organisaties te stimuleren, bereikt de gemeente een hele boel. Jongeren zijn meer betrokken bij hun buurt en voelen meer verbinding vergeleken met anderen. Door 'boundary spanning' worden de meeste eisen van jongerenparticipatie aangetikt. Toch is niet alles op deze manier opgelost. Ondanks deelname is de verbondenheid met de lokale overheid en diens instituten niet zo hoog.



JONGEREN- PARTICIPATIE

Direct beïnvloedbare factoren

Vertrouwen Kennis Maatschappelijke rol Sociaal Kapitaal



- responsiviteit
- aanwezigheid
- persoonlijke ervaringen



- Bereikbare berichtgeving
- behapbare info



- Dialoog
- Verbreken van stereotypen



- Sociale netwerken
- Sociale normen

Indirect beïnvloedbare factoren

Interesse

Tijd

Invloedsfeer

Organisaties en
Boundary Spanners

Invloedsfeer