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The Last Generation to End Climate Change: Youth's Experienced Responsibility for Saving the World

Master's thesis in Globalisation and Sustainable Development

Supervisor: Hilde Refstie

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore how young active global citizens understand their own role in achieving a sustainable future. Young people's strong attitudes towards sustainability has been noted in the research for quite some time. However, this has until recently not been coupled with the idea of young people as critical agents of change. Limited research has addressed how the sustainable development challenges affect young people's sense of themselves and their future, and until very recently, they had little voice in discussions of the problems.

Using a qualitative approach, the aim was to bring forth the young people's own thoughts, experiences and perceptions. Nine semi-structured interviews was conducted to gain insight into the complexity of the young people's reflections, with participants from six different countries. Furthermore, a focus group was set up to discuss the initial results from the individual interviews. This provided an opportunity for five of the youth to contribute both to the data production and the analysis.

The youth showed a deep understanding of the complexity of sustainable development, and had daunting views on the future if nothing happens soon. They all expressed a strong sense of responsibility, mainly due to the fact that they are aware of the injustices happening around the world. However, the individual experience of this responsibility differed. In broad terms, the youth describe their role as a small one, with little power and influence compared to other actors, such as government, companies and adults. However, this do not discourage the youth in believing that change is possible. They all share a strong sense of a generational bond, tying them together, supporting each other in the quest for a more sustainable future, a future where we survive, thrive even.

Keywords: youth, responsibility, sustainability, influence, SDGs.

Preface

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the wonderful, talented, caring, and passionate youth willing to take their time to join this project. You continue to inspire and motivating me, not only towards a brighter future, but to take action today.

I would also like to thank my supervisor Hilde Refstie for her support, advise and quick replies.

Thanks to all my friends in CISV for helping me to get in touch with the youth, and for volunteering their time to promote the views and concerns of young people in the world today.

At last, I would like to acknowledge the support provided by my loved ones during these months of writing. Thank you for the hammock lunch breaks, the motivating ice creams and the 30 seconds dance parties.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since our leaders are behaving like children,
we will have to take the responsibility they should have taken long ago.

Greta Thunberg
04.12.18, COP24

1.1. Context

1.1.1. Sustainable Development Goals

In September 2015, the United Nations (UN) adopted the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the year 2030, setting an ambition for a safe and sustainable future for everyone with the promise to leave no one behind (UN, 2015). In its probably most noteworthy formulation, Agenda 2030 describes the enormous tasks ahead by saying: "We can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty; just as we may be the last to have a chance of saving the planet" (UN, 2015, p. 12). In order to reach the SDGs there needs to be mountainous political will and ambition by all stakeholders to ensure the necessary change in financial, economic and political systems that are currently in place in today's world (UN, 2020).

However, during the SDG Summit 2019, Member States recognised that the efforts so far are insufficient to achieve the global goals. Thus, year 2020 marked the start of the Decade of Action with a promise to accelerate the transition towards a sustainable future (UN, 2020), with the climate crisis being recognized as the most urgent area for action (UN, 2019; UNDP, 2020). Year 2020 also brought with it a global pandemic, which turned a public health emergency into one of the worst international crises of our lifetimes (UN, 2020). While the novel coronavirus might have had a positive impact on CO_2 emissions due to travel restrictions, it also caused the first increase in global poverty in decades (UN, 2020). It is still uncertain how the political climate for climate change measures will be in the aftermaths of the pandemic.

1.1.2. Role of Youth

Today's schoolchildren represent the largest group of protesters for climate action in history. Prior to the UN Climate Summit in September 2019 the Guardian reported that roughly 6 million people participated in the 2500 events that took place in 163 countries on all seven continents (Taylor, 2019). The school strike for climate (also known as Fridays for Future, Youth for Climate…) is a global movement inspired by the actions of Swedish Greta Thunberg. This mobilisation is not a singular incident, but rather a culmination of the engagement on sustainability children and youth share. Together with other youth activist such as Leah Namugerwa from Uganda, Brianna Fruean from Samoa and Kehkashan Basu from the United Arab Emirates and many more, young people around the globe is making contributions towards children's rights, climate justice, gender equality, peacebuilding and many more aspects of sustainable development.

There is an emerging awareness of the potential of youth and their active contributions in the solutions of sustainable development challenges, especially within grey-literature (e.g. UN agencies and other organisations that promote children and youth). Piselli, Loni, Colyard, and Nordquist (2019) outlines three of the main narratives revolving around youth participation in sustainable development: 1) the striking similarity of the concerns shared by different youth communities across countries and regions; 2) the notion that governments, especially in western democracies, tend to favour older age groups in developing policy; and 3) the fact that the so-called millennial and generation Z is usually better educated than the generation of their parents. There is no doubt they have something to say. Based on the growing number of grey literature and youth initiatives for sustainable development, the question now is not how or if youth can contribute, because clearly they can, but how they understand their own role and their own experience in this.

1.2. Problem Statement

The aim of this study is to explore how young active global citizens understand their own role in achieving a sustainable future. The research will take into account different aspects of participation, influence and a sense of responsibility, and give the youth an opportunity to reflect on this together with a group of peers. Their opinions vary and it's not the idea to get them to share a unified view of the youth role, but to explore and expand on the youth point of view.

There is still limited knowledge on how young people engage with these issues. This despite the knowledge of how climate crisis will significantly affect the lives of children and youth, both with regards to the extreme weather that will continue throughout the 21st century, but also the implications of the large societal transformations due to action to mitigate climate change. Little research has addressed how this affect young people's sense of themselves and their future, and until very recently, they had little voice in discussions of the problem (Sanson, Van Hoorn, & Burke, 2019). This indicates a need to understand the various perceptions the impact of sustainability that exist among young people today. Finally, the possibility of applying experiences from past projects with youth can be shared with them and empower, give them a sense of agency.

1.3. Research Questions

How do young active global citizens understand their own role in achieving a sustainable future?

- What are the main challenges in the world today, according to them?
- Do they feel a need to "save the world?"
- If so, how do they experience and act on this perceived responsibility?
- Do they feel supported or hindered in this? In what way?
- How do they view their role vis-à-vis other actors such as adults, politicians, fellow youth and others in achieving a sustainable future?

1.4. Disposition

This thesis has been divided into seven chapters. The first chapter gave an introductory account of the topic at hand, including the problem statement and research questions. Chapter 2 will review the existing literature on the topic, and provide a theoretical framework. This includes theories regarding child perspectives, participation and agency. Chapter 3 goes into detail on the methodology for this research project. Here, the considerations regarding the chosen research design and ethics will be discussed, as well as it describes the research methods used for data collection and analysis. In chapter 5, the results of the analysis will be presented. In chapter 6 the finding will be discussed against the literature on the topic through the lens of participation, influence and agency. Lastly, in chapter 7, a conclusion will be provided, as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature and Theoretical Framework

This chapter will provide an overview of the empirical studies on youth involvement in sustainable development. This includes the role of children and how they are included in the academic research on sustainable development, in addition to research discussing the challenges of including children and youth, and why it is important to do so. Further, the theoretical framework of participation for the analysis will be addressed. First, the chapter will start by clarifying the key concepts.

2.1. Clarification of Concepts

2.1.1. *Children, Youth and Young People*

Children will here be defined as all persons under the age of 18, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). This is a widely accepted definition within the literature and legislation around the world, and allows for protection for all the children in the world. Furthermore, this also implies an extremely diverse group of people in terms of age, development, ethnicity, and culture, as well as social and economic circumstances. Youth and young people are overlapping terms. Youth is defined by UN as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, whereas young people are those between the ages of 10 and 24 years old (UN, n.d.). However, youth can also be understood as the transition period between childhood and adulthood, rather than a fixed age group. The participants in this study are between the ages of 16 and 23 years old.

2.1.2. *Active Global Citizenship*

The definitions of global citizenship are varied and contested. Due to the complexity and dynamic nature of this concept, it is not likely that a unified definition will be possible (Leduc, 2013). Generally speaking, citizenship is often defined as rights and responsibilities between individuals and a governing state. Citizenship can also be said to include civic skills, such as the ability to gather political information, critical thinking and engage in passionate yet informed conversation about political issues (Brunell, 2013). With the global aspect, there is no such government, and is more widely understood as people's perception of belonging to, and engaging with, an emerging global community (Lough & McBride, 2014). This can also include participating in the political life at the global level (e.g. inter-governmental organisation, international NGOs, and international citizen initiatives). This paper will focus on active global citizenship as broadly defined as one's moral responsibility to meet the needs

and welfare of others in one's global community (Lough & McBride, 2014). In addition to knowledge and skills, global citizenship also includes attitudes for becoming agents of change, locally and globally. This also includes the concept of scale, and the connectedness of global and local issues, such as climate change, international migration and economic interdependence (Brunell, 2013).

2.2. The Role of Children and Youth in Sustainable Development

Young people's strong attitudes towards sustainability has been noted in the research for quite some time (Piselli et al., 2019). However, this has until recently not been coupled with the idea of youth as critical agents of change. The debate was mainly concerned with the actions and partnership of governments, and later more inclusive of other stakeholders at different levels, such as civil society organisations, transnational companies and industry. Children and youth have often been viewed as the recipient, as they are the ones most harshly affected by the challenges the SDGs are addressing, the most researched being climate change (Piselli et al., 2019; Treichel, 2020).

2.2.1. Impacts of Climate Change on Children and Youth

In their article, Sanson et al. (2019) summarises the impacts of the climate crisis on children and youth. Here, it is stated that children and youth are disproportionality affected by the impacts of climate change, estimated to suffer more than 80% of the illnesses, injuries and deaths attributed to climate change. The main body of literature regarding this topic focuses on the threats of climate change on children and youth's physical health, while communication and research on the psychological and mental health impacts of climate events have been secondary. Even less so is the focus on psychological effects of climate change unrelated to specific climate events (Sanson et al., 2019; Wu, Snell, & Samji, 2020).

Sanson et al. (2019) points out that both the sudden climate change events (e.g. extreme weather) and the long-term changes (e.g. drought, rising sea levels, global warming) can have immediate and lifelong impacts, and is regarded as the biggest global health threat in the world today. Even though climate change is mostly caused by the "developed world", it will disproportionality affect those with the least resources and deepen the existing inequalities in our global society. The far-reaching effects of climate change poses a risk to achieving all the other SDGs, and children and future generations will suffer its worst consequences.

Sanson et al. (2019) found that threats to children's physical health include, but is not limited to, heat-related illnesses, exposure to environmental toxins, infectious, gastrointestinal, and parasitic diseases, as well as malnutrition. They argues that even though there has been a considerable less focus on mental health impacts, the evidence from climate related disasters shows that it can be equally devastating as physical health impacts. In those cases, there has been a significant increase in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety, sleep problems, cognitive deficits, and learning problems. Further reactions also include distress, grief, and anger, loss of identity, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, higher rates of suicide, and increased aggression and violence. Recent attention has been turned towards the evidence that many children feel powerless and hopeless about the prevention of climate change (Sanson et al., 2019). This has given rise to the term climate anxiety (also referred to as eco-anxiety and climate distress) (Clayton, 2020). However, there is little data available and thus difficult to determine the prevalence of climate anxiety, but there are indications that young people are adversely affected (Wu et al., 2020). With regards to the indirect effects of climate change, children are also more susceptible (Sanson et al., 2019). Examples of this includes economic dislocation and family functioning, school attendance and access to education, as well as food shortages, intergroup conflict, and forced migration. There is a vast amount of evidence showing that climate change poses an urgent threat to future generations, and is already raising serious concerns about children's well-being today.

2.2.2. *Disempowerment and Marginalisation*

As illustrated above, children are often presented as vulnerable and in need of support in climate change debates. Treichel (2020) argues that this furthers the idea of children as passive victims, as this type of academic literature seldom recognise young people's potential contributions to action or how this type of action could benefit both the children themselves and their communities. Indeed, her recent literature review of child-centred climate change adaptation approaches shows that the focus on young people's active role is limited compared to other aspects of climate adaptation research (Treichel, 2020). However, there has been some increased recognition of the roles of children and young people in climate advocacy in recent years (Treichel, 2020).

This is in line with the view of childhood in research generally. The most widespread being the view of children as unfinish products that inspires interest, not for what they are now, but

for the adults they will become (White, 2002). This is a so-called "becoming" view of childhood, rather than "being". In this approach, adults hold considerable power and view children as pre-social savages in need of discipline, innocent in need of protected or developing in need of adult training (White, 2002). A "being" approach would be to view childhood as a sub-culture, with its own distinctive logic and meanings, and needs to be understood in children's own terms.

Another concern is young people's access to democracy. In his paper on youth quotas, Wallimann-Helmer (2015) state that especially developed countries tend to favour the interests of older age groups and have a tendency for unsustainable policy decisions. He further argues that young people's discourses tend to be marginalised due to the demographic development. In addition to the incentive structure of democracies favouring short term-policies, having increased the majority of the old with regards to voting power and better representation in the political bodies can lead to an overfocus on present needs that in turn neglects to ensure similar benefits for the future (Wallimann-Helmer, 2015). This also holds true for young people's access to markets, credits, land and skills (Piselli et al., 2019). There is a series of obstacles for young people when trying to implement and scale up initiatives, including access to the marked, ownership rights, financial and contractual barriers and so on (Piselli et al., 2019).

2.2.3. *Youth Participation in Sustainable Development*
There is an increased recognition of the benefits surrounding young people's participation in sustainable development. Involvement of young people can improve life quality on an individual level, by enhancing self-esteem, contribute to personal development and gaining knowledge and practical skills (Sinclair & Franklin, 2000). In addition, involving young people in processes of change can lead to more effective and relevant decisions more likely to be implemented. They have distinctive knowledge and experiences, and are capable of identifying and implementing viable, locally appropriate adaptation responses (Treichel, 2020). Services can be improved when children are given a level of influence that enables them to communicate their wants and needs (Sinclair & Franklin, 2000). Treichel (2020) found that children can be effective communicators of climate risks and information, including information that leads to behaviour change.

Piselli et al. (2019, p. 230) even argues that the interests, concerns and solutions of young people should have as much of a consideration in the SDGs compared to other actors, if not more. They highlight the potential benefits of including young people as active agents given the fact that the youth generation is generally speaking better educated than older generations and they have sense of community and shared concerns across the globe (Piselli et al., 2019). As mentioned in the introduction, comprehensive reports show that countries and regions are struggling to meet the targets, and the world is not on track for achieving Agenda 2030 unless efforts are significantly increased. This was also before the novel coronavirus brought with it many considerable challenges, deepening the issues at hand. Piselli et al. (2019) suggest that by harnessing youth-led solutions and skills, young people themselves can be part of the solution. Thus, bringing to light the significantly untapped potential for every region, discipline, and industry in youth-led solutions for sustainable development.

With a new narrative emerging, there has been a growing body of literature addressing young people's contributions towards a specific Sustainable Development Goal or Target, the most frequent being climate action. In wake of the urgent threats climate change poses to future generations, there has been a growing number of studies stressing the importance of adult and professionals responding to these manifolded impacts on children and youth (Piselli et al., 2019; Sanson et al., 2019; Treichel, 2020). One important factor is giving children and youth agency in managing these challenges (Piselli et al., 2019; Sanson et al., 2019; Treichel, 2020).

However, barriers remain that can prevent their inclusion and full participation in resilience-building programming. Thus hindering the democratic process, and can contribute to excluding young people as active members of local communities and society at large (Sinclair & Franklin, 2000). There are on-going debates on how much children and young people should be included, and how much responsibility they should have (either based on the assumption that they need protection, or that they are not yet capable of providing useful contributions). With the increased recognition of the role of young people's participation in sustainable development, there is a need to consider both how to more effectively include children and youth, as well as evaluating the consequences of these strategies, for them and their communities. In a recent literary review on child-centred climate change adaptation approaches, Treichel (2020) discovered when children are included in the research of community adaptation activities, it is often with the notion that they can contribute through their enthusiasm and energy. This approach can be viewed as somewhat patronising, also

lacking substantive examples and explanations. Nevertheless, some of the most effective and prevalent examples include: 1) climate change education (and education more broadly); 2) child-centred climate vulnerability and capacity assessments; 3) and advocacy by children at local, national and international levels (Treichel, 2020). Furthermore, participation and taking action provides confidence and self-assurance with in and of itself can contribute to resilience-building. It should also be noted that children should not be left with the responsibility for solving the climate crisis, but rather contribute in a meaningful way (Treichel, 2020).

2.3. Levels of Participation

Children's right to participation is protected by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). This includes the right to express opinions in matters that affect them and should be considered in decision-making processes. It does, however, not clarify that children should have the power to actually make the decision. This power still lies with the adults. In addition, when young people do participate, the common critic from adults is often paradoxical. If they act too much as a children, the grown-ups might accuse them of not being serious enough. Conversely, if they act according to adult rules, they can be accused of acting "adult-like" and thus not being a good representative for young people.

The role of adults is very important, and can (intentionally and unintentionally) facilitate or hinder young people's participation. Ranging from negative impact to positive impact on participation, Reddy and Ratna (2002) outlined 13 roles adults can take in young people's involvement: 1) active resistance; 2) hindrance; 3) manipulation; 4) decoration; 5) tokenism; 6) tolerance; 7) indulgence; 8) children assigned but informed; 9) children consulted and informed; 10) adult initiated, shared decisions with children; 11) children initiated, shared decisions with adults; 12) children initiated and directed; and 13) jointly initiated and directed by children and adults. While the benefits of participation are many, Adu-Gyamfi (2013) argues that when adults are in control of the decision-making, it does not lead to the empowerment of young people, as they cannot yield any power over the adults.

Thus, additional steps is needed in order to ensure empowerment. Empowerment here is viewed as "a social, cultural, psychological or political process through which individuals and social groups are able to express their needs, present their concerns, devise strategies for involvement in decision-making, and achieve political, social and cultural action to meet

those needs" (WHO, 1998, p. 6). A classic theory here, is Arnstein´s Ladder of Citizen Participation. This model has eight levels for public participation corresponding to the extent of citizen power. The lower levels, such as manipulation and therapy, represent powerlessness. The middle levels, consultation and placation, represent a symbolic or limited influence, whereas the higher levels, such as partnership, delegated power and citizen control, represent a real participation with different degrees of citizen power (Arnstein, 1969). This model also alludes to the power structure in a society "since those who have the power normally want to hang on to it, historically it has to be wrestled by the powerless rather than proffered by the powerful" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216)

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter will focus on the choice of research methodology and the research process. First, the rationale behind an exploratory qualitative approach will be explained. Second, the approach to the literature search will be outlined. Third, the selection of participants will be addressed. Fourth, the interview process will be presented, including preparations such as the interview guides and the researchers own preconceptions. Fifth, the data gathering and analysis process will be presented, including transcription and coding process. Last, an assessment of the quality of the research and ethical considerations will be addressed.

5.1. Choice of Research Methods and Design

The use of qualitative methods is a well-established approach in social sciences exploring social phenomenon. Qualitative research emphasizes multiple meaning and interpretations rather than to find one interpretation that can be seen as a general rule (Winchester & Rofe, 2016). People experience and understand the same situations differently. By exploring these viewpoints, it creates space to potentially silenced or excluded knowledge to surface. Accordingly, the research question needs to be broad enough to include both individual and structural explanations. In addition, it needs to be open enough to find alternative interpretations (Winchester & Rofe, 2016). This is done here by focusing on an overarching research question on how the youth understand their own role in sustainable development, supplemented by a subset of open-ended questions relating to scale and participation.

Winchester and Rofe (2016) state that qualitative research questions are concerned with social structures on one side and individual experiences on the other. Qualitative methods offer an

effective way to both bring forth the youths own thoughts, experiences and perceptions, and to examine the structures and processes to understand how social, cultural, economic, political and environmental factors shape the youths lives with regards to their role in sustainable development. Winchester and Rofe (2016) point out that it's important for the researcher to find a balance of these two perspectives, as they might be difficult to disentangle in practice. An overemphasis on structure and process may be viewed as dehumanizing, so it's imperative with the co-construction of knowledge, that the voices of the youth are included both with regards to the data they are providing, as well as their input for the analysis. With rich data collection, it is possible to gain a broader understanding of the complexity, detail and context of our dynamic social world. The qualitative interview is suitable for this endeavour.

The goal of this research project is not to get answers for a proposed problem (how do we solve the issue of climate change) but rather to explore how young people understand their own role in context of a sustainable future. A semi-structured interview format was chosen in order to narrow the scope to understand the sense of responsibility, but left open in order to bring in the youth's own priorities that came up in the conversations. Individual interviews and focus groups are both beneficial to explore and navigate this broad topic with the youth, and gain insight to complex behaviour and motivation, a big strength of the qualitative interview (Dunn, 2016). These methods provide a platform where the young people can reflect upon and give in-depth answers, thereby allowing both researcher and participants to explore the nuances of social and spatial interactions, events, and processes (Dunn, 2016). These methods are flexible enough for alternative perspectives to emerge, as well as they can be shaped so that the focus remains relatively close to the topic of youths role in sustainable development. It can be fruitful to conduct individual interviews with the participants. When giving undivided attention to one person, it can also be helpful in building the relationship between the researcher and the participant. After an initial analysis of the individual interviews, the participants will be asked to be included in the analysis. A focus group will be set up to discuss the initial results from the individual interviews. This will provide an opportunity to reflect on the findings together with the participants, challenge some of the thoughts and check for the researchers own assumptions. In addition, the focus group can have a synergistic effect (Cameron, 2016), making the youth discuss amongst themselves, opening up for a deeper understanding of the complexity of the issues. It also contributed to the diversity of meaning, opinion and experiences, and can make differences in opinions more visible, but also reveal consensus on some issues (Dunn, 2016) In order to include the voices

of the youth in the text of the project, the video/audio recordings from the interviews will make it possible to include quotes more accurately to further highlight the youth perspectives. It is important to mention that listening to the perspectives of youth can be goal in and of itself. By investigating and creating a platform for their voices to be heard, they can be empowered to take part in discussions and decision-making processes that involve them and their lives.

5.2. Literature Search

Data collection was mainly based on searching, selecting, analysing and interpreting excising research and literature on the topic and surrounding areas. The databases Google Scholar and Scopus was used in order to gain an overview from several disciplines, and a regular Google search was used to access news articles and relevant grey literature. In addition I got support from my supervisor who suggested other relevant articles and journals, mostly related to research methodology and ethical considerations regarding research with children and youth.

Most of the relevant articles was from the field of geography, childhood studies, political science, international relations, public health, and multidisciplinary literature. With regards to the grey literature, a variety of UN institutions, such as UNICEF, UNDP, etc. As well as Plan International, Save the Children and other interest groups for children and sustainable development. Search words included: youth, children, young people, future, sustainable development, SDGs, sustainability, united nations, climate change, participation, agency, empowerment, impact, responsibility and different combinations of these. Furthermore, the reference list of relevant articles was used to expand the search, as well as newer articles citing the original article.

In this process source criticism was a central part of the inclusion selection. The requirements consisted of peer review articles and impact factor/citations. Overview articles and literary reviews were prioritized, as well as well-established/classic articles. News articles and social media provided useful insight in the field, and was used mainly to develop the research questions and interview guides due to the lack of relevant academic literature on the topic of youth responsibility.

5.3. Sampling and Participants

This study will focus on the experience of globally engaged youth, or youth that falls into the category of active global citizens. Youth is defined by UN as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years (UN, n.d.). Due to limitations by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) that requires more extensive consent forms for persons under the age of 16, participants between the ages of 16 and 24 years was recruited.

The participants were contacted through the researchers own network within organisations that promote active global citizenships, such as CISV, AFS and UWC. The researcher, having volunteered for CISV actively, focused on selecting people that she did not know personally, but through posts in social media and networks of acquaintances. The snowball method was also used by asking already interviewed participants if they know someone they could recommend to partake in the study from other regions. By selecting participants that already engage in the discussion on sustainability, it was possible to access richer data. In addition, the participants are familiar with an international, cross-cultural context and have extensive practise in expressing themselves in English as a second language.

For the individual interviews, a total of 9 participants was interviewed from age 16 to 23, around half of them being under the age of 18. There was also an even gender distribution. The aims was to try and get representation from both the global north and global south, and strive to cover the continents. Due to the short time to recruit and last minute drop outs, the nationalities included Norway (2), Sweden (2), Germany (2), Peru (1), Indonesia (1) and Thailand (2). For the group interview, five of the youth were present, from Germany (2), Peru (1), Sweden (1) and Thailand (1), from the ages of 16 to 19 years old.

5.4. The Interview Process

The qualitative interview is characterized by a co-construction of data between the participant and researchers intersubjective understandings. It is important to show respect for and empower the people who provide the data. These stories can also be used to counter the claims of those who presume to have discovered the public opinion (Dunn, 2016). Going forward, the researcher will strive to build upon the empowerment approach, with an attitude of learning from the youth and their experience, which they are the experts on, provide support and encouragement making participation in this project meaningful for them beyond just providing their thoughts.

5.4.1. Critical Reflexivity

The first preparations I did, was reflect upon my own experiences and assumptions. Using the method of critical reflexivity, I could to a larger extent attempt to identify and resolve ethical dilemmas when they arose through processes of self-critical reflections on the social nature of research (Dowling, 2016). This included among other things, the uneven power structure between me and the participants based on age, authority and level of education. Due to my involvement in the peace organisation CISV where most of the participants have been active, they likely to view me through the lens of "leader" and "staff" roles. This entails a certain level of authority, but at the same time this role opens up for a lot of trust (also due to the fact that these roles are often viewed as "adults but not parents" in a way that we are educators, but younger, so it's possible to discuss more topics than a teenager typically would with their parents or teachers).

In addition, the organisations in which the participants are active (CISV, AFS, UWC) have a clear mission to educate active global citizens. This can influence the participants to answer in a way they think the researcher wants to hear, following the lines of what's been though. At the same time, the tools they have learned include contributing to safe learning environments and the importance of voicing one's opinions. While some of the youth participated in these organisations because their parents chose it for them when they were younger, some of them also picked these organisations based on their own interests and ideals. As a researcher, I need to find a way to tell their own story, without me affecting it too much. And I need to explore what my assumptions are about this group of youth. I also need to consider; who am I representing now? Am I really portraying this the way my participants would agree with? One way to check this, was with the group interview where the participants had an opportunity to correct, elaborate, and further reflect on the initials findings of the analysis.

5.4.2. Preparing for the Interviews

When preparing for the interviews, it was important to give the youth enough information for them to give a truly informed consent, while at the same time not influencing the direction of their answers (e.g. if they feel a responsibility or not). When the participants had expressed interested in partaking in this project, we agreed on a time for the interview that based suited the youth and their life. I was flexible with the time zones, and willingly stayed up late, so it

wouldn't be too much of an inconvenience for them. Before the interview, I collected the consent form, and sent a reminder with the link to the meeting.

The interview guide was based on the research questions, the initial literature search, but also on information I got from what I saw youth posted on their social media accounts. At this stage in the research, a sustainable future is broadly defined to include all areas of the SDGs. This is to allow the youth to focus on the issues most important to them, without narrowing the scope beforehand. It was important to find overarching topics, that the youth themselves could specific what meant to them. Also, not to give directions in the questions, but leave them open-ended and prepare for both outcomes (if yes, how would you describe it; if no, why not?). Before the first round of interviews, I also did a pilot interview in order to check the flow of the interview guide, in addition to familiarize myself with the recording tool. I also got to practice the different ways to ask questions to ensure a rich and free answer (in my profession as a social worker, I also use this techniques a lot).

5.4.3. Conducting the Interviews

The interviews were conducted online using Microsoft Teams allowing for video and audio. The two main reasons for using a digital platform was firstly that the participants are located all around the world, and secondly, due to covid-19 restrictions. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to 1 hour, while the focus group lasted for 1 hour and 30 minutes. The internet connection was stable most of the time, with no major disruptions.

When meeting with the youth online, I devoted some time to getting comfortable, sharing a bit about myself, allowing them to get to know me. I repeated the information about the project and their participation. I explained how the interview would be, that there was no right or wrong answers, that some of the questions would be quite broad, and that they should feel free to focus on what comes to mind, and what is important to them. I prepared them that I might ask some follow up questions, but would not participate the way I would in a normal conversation, as I was interested to hear their thought and experiences, and did not wish to influence their answers too much.

In the focus group, I also added that I hoped they could have a conversation with each other, and try not to address me too much (a concept they are familiar with from debriefing groups in CISV). In the discussions, I also provided alternative viewpoints express by some of the

other youth not attending, in order to further enrich the feedback, in a way that strived to advocated for that persons views (for example by reading a quote from the individual interview). While the participants talked, I was attentive of my body language. I consciously used listening cues and gave positive feedback on their answers, as well as trying to summaries what they said to see if I had understood it correctly.

Many of the participants provided unprompted feedback, either at the end of the interview or in an email after, saying they really enjoyed talking about the topic, how they looked forward to discussing with the others, and how much they felt they had learned from exploring their own and others reflections on this. They expressed a hope that what we discussed could be used for something, for example an activity or a local project, and that I could share the results with them, which I said I would do.

5.5. Analysis

These are some common factors in analysing data. It is difficult to say what will emerge from the youth, but it is important to note that when handling the data, the researcher should, as with in the interview it self, be in a process of "constant self-conscious scrutiny of the self as researcher and of the research process" (Dowling, 2016, p. 34).

The video/audio recording was enabled in Microsoft Teams and then stored on the secure server. Following the process of qualitive interviewing by Dunn (2016), I transcribed the interviews shortly after, to make sure I still had it fresh in my memory. Through the process of transcribing I got to familiarise myself with the data material, taking initial notes and anonymized the participants using their nationality and age, as agreed in the consent form. Then I worked towards reduce the amount of data and organising the material.

The qualitative content analysis provided a flexible framework for data exploration, analysis and theory building. It works well with a rich data set from interviews and focus groups and helps to understand "why" questions to brings out key points, opinions and experiences. It was easier to have an overview since I had sorted the interview guide by three main themes. These followed into the analysis, and provided a good structure where they youth filled in their priorities. This way, it became apparent what categories that could provide a good basis to understand the youth experienced responsibility and their views on the role of youth in sustainable development.

5.6. Ethical considerations

The main ethical considerations in this research is that the participants are children and youth. As a vulnerable group, they still represent important voices that should be included in research. However, precautions must be taken so that participating in this project will not harm them in any way.

As active global citizens, these youth might experience psychological stress when discussing the topics of this research. As addressed in the introduction, children and youth are more prone to experience anxiety due to the issue of climate change than older people. It will be important to put in place the necessary support, for example by telling them at the beginning that they can take breaks or terminate the interview, empower them and give them a sense of agency, and end the interview on a positive note.

Before conducting this research, the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) was notified and approved the research project and how the data was to be stored. The interviews was conducted online using Microsoft Teams with audio and camera, and stored in secure NTNU servers following NSD guidelines for data management which ensures privacy and confidentiality. The data was handled in such a way that the participants was anonymised in the data material.

Before starting the interviews, the researcher made sure that the participants have understood the meaning of the research, and that is was completely voluntary to contribute (Dowling, 2016). The participants got information that they can withdraw from the project at any time, and did not have to answer, if they did not want to. They also got the information that they could withdraw from the project after the interview, and all data will be deleted. All of this without any negative consequences for the participant. In addition, the participants were asked to not disclose any political affiliations under advise from NSD, rather say "my party" or "in youth politics".

5.7. Assessing the Research

A central part of doing good research is being able to discuss the reliability and validity of the study. Crang and Cook (2007) argue that subjectivity becomes more of a resource for deeper

understanding when researchers comes to term with our partiality rather than aspiring to an impossible objectivity. With a thorough representation of the research process, I have tried to draw attention to my own understanding of the literature and framework used, in addition the choice of methods and my role in the relationship with the youth.

It is important to represent what actually took place (Crang & Cook, 2007). It is possible to establishing the trustworthiness through the hermeneutic circle: starting from an interpretive community (e.g. the subjective process of the literature search and choice of theoretical framework) and involving our research participants' community and ourselves (the individual interviews), before returning to our interpretive community for assessment (initial analysis and focus group)(Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016). By adding a focus group to check the findings and further reflect on the analysis, the youth had an important part as co-constructors, both in terms of data production and in the analysis. This was important also in terms of empowering the youth and to further their voice. In addition, as much as the youth's actual words were included in the results, and a clear difference between their voice and my interpretations.

Generalization in qualitative research often refers to how the results are validated in terms of how they theoretically and empirically relates to other studies. This can also be approached through participants checking as mentioned above (Crang & Cook, 2007). The transfer of knowledge is the main goal here, and it is not an attempt to speak on behalf of all youth. The group of youth selected for this study was carefully chosen because of their passion and engagement with these issues in order to gain access to rich data. However, that is can be possible to draw upon insight to youths own understanding of their role and responsibility in order to provide a stronger basis for future research looking into this, in addition to providing a platform for this group of youth to speak their truth.

Chapter 5: Results

This chapter will provide the key findings surrounding the youths understanding of their own role in achieving a sustainable future. This includes: 1) a short introduction to the youth's understanding of sustainable development as a concept; 2) their view on the future, and the challenges the world is facing today; 3) an in-dept exploration of their sense of responsibility towards "saving the world"; 4) a presentation on what ways they act on this responsibility and ways they experience agency or lack thereof; 5) their understanding of their own role

compared to that of other actors, such as adults, government, businesses and fellow youth; 8) and lastly the chapter will address the overarching research question on how young active global citizens understand their own role in achieving a sustainable future.

5.1. What Does Sustainable Development Mean to the Youth?

The youth showed a deep understanding of the topic sustainable development. When explaining what sustainable development meant to them, the youth focused on how we move forward, how to make the world a better place for the people in it and the future generations. They said it encompasses many things, not just climate change, like ensuring that people have equal opportunities, and about our actions as a global community.

> *We have a lot of issues in the world and it's important that we solve them, and I think sustainable development incorporates all of this (Norway, 17).*

They talked about the complexity of the environmental, economic and social aspects of sustainable development, and how these sometimes contradict one another. This is a problem, because it will not work if not all the aspects are realised. One youth said it was a smart way of development, thinking further ahead than just two steps at the time. Another explained how it helps people in the long run, that it's something that can be built on top of one another, making it more efficient and this requires less maintenance. Another put it like this:

> *Sustainable development starts with being aware of the consequences, and the rest is just to take action (Sweden, 16).*

5.1.1. What are the main challenges in the world today?

When asked to reflect on what they would constitute as the biggest problems in the world today, climate change was mentioned one way or another by all participants. What is interesting, is that only with the exception of a couple, it was not picked as a topic of personal interest. Climate change, environmental challenges and pollution were more presented as a given, especially due to the fact that is it interlinked with all the other issues, it affects everyone, the whole planet, and it is really hard to reverse.

The youth gave a lot of detailed examples of conflicts, issues and demonstrations currently happening around the globe and in their local communities. This includes among others: the LGBTQI+ demonstrations in Poland, the Black Lives Matters movement in the US, the genocide of Muslim People in China, the famine in Yemen, the war in Syria and the refugee crisis, the loss of greenery in the Philippines, the rise of right-wing extremism in the west, the political uprising and police violence in Colombia, the attempted coup in Peru, the deforestation in the Amazon, abortion right demonstration and femicide debate in Argentina, the list goes on. While the youth clearly paid a lot of attention to these issues, their main concern where not the issues in and of themself, sort to speak. It was more the structural aspects that allows for these challenges to surface, in addition to the obstacles that hinders solutions for these issues. One overarching theme here, was the broad topic of inequality:

> *There are more and more people on the planet, and more people want a higher living standard and a higher quality of life, and our world just can't provide that (Germany/Sweden, 18).*

> *The inequality of the world is a really the biggest issue for me. I think everyone deserves a fulfilling life. Everyone deserves to have a good livelihood. We see that in the world today, the majority of people actually don't. With hunger and lack of clean water and easily preventable diseases, these are easy issues to solve if we just put in the work and the financial needs to do this (Norway, 17).*

> *I think lack of equal opportunities can encompass many different things. Because it can include access to healthcare, access to education, and then, with education, you have the information for many other human rights (Peru, 16).*

A common view amongst the youth was that the increasing polarisation in the world today contributed in a negative way towards sustainable development, making it more difficult to have discussions about world issues and to take action:

> *Polarization. The fact that people disagree, and that there is a lot of conflict, it leave room for a lot of bureaucracy instead of action (Norway, 19).*

> *It's cool that we are living in such an individual democracy and that everyone has the right to say what everyone wants, but at the same time, it is getting more dangerous each year, so we have to see how we can get all together in one boat and fight against - not against each other - but against another common enemy. It is a hard challenge to balance these different values (Germany, 17).*

Education, or lack thereof, was also mentioned as a key factor in the large inequalities in the world today, and thus, an important part of the solution. This suggest that the youth has a meta perspective when it comes to the main challenges, reflecting on the reasons why sustainable development is stagnating as a whole.

> *Education is at the base of many other aspects of sustainable development. I think it will let us advance and have new ideas on how to manage these issues. For example with discrimination, if you are educated, you know when you or someone is being discriminated against, and you better know how you can take action with those things (Peru, 16).*

However, more education and information is not necessarily the solution. One youth pointed out that even with information, some people still don't care. They speculated if this could be because the problem was too far away or not a part of people's reality. That it is easy to think that it is someone else's problem. There is also the aspect of too much information. One youth said it like this:

> *We are flooded with information. It's hard to know what you should care about. Because I want to help, of course I want to help, all the world hunger and everything, you know, but I can't, and that makes people feel kind of helpless and I think that's the main problem, that it's so much, so people do nothing instead (Germany/Sweden 18).*

5.1.2. *How do they see the future?*

A variety of perspectives were expressed on the future. Some felt scared and pessimistic, while others found hope in the younger generation and new technology. The majority commented that the future is very uncertain, and action is definitely needed. The sense of emergency was present among all the youth, and in response to the question of what is at stake, the answers were quiet dauting:

Everything. Yes. The world, our future, our children's future, the economy, our lives, our health (Norway, 19).

I mean everything is at stake. Our mere existence. And what is even worse is we are already dying. We are in the middle of the destruction, it's just a question of time. The second we will actually get to see it with our own eyes, then we will realize "oh we are doomed" but I mean, we've been doomed a long time ago when it comes to climate change (Sweden, 16).

Some of the youth focused on more concrete examples, like how climate change contribute to problems becoming more frequent, such as more climate related disasters, bigger refugee crisis's, and more violence and war due to lack of resources. Most of the youth expressed that this is the beginning of the extinction. However, the youth's dystopian viewpoint do not seem to discourage them in any way. On the contrary, one youth described it like this:

When I think in a more pessimistic way, I am more likely to act.
It actually gives me a good feeling to be active (Germany, 17).

The solution oriented mindset of the youth is notable, and play a part in their shared view of achieving a sustainable future. They are hopeful, but with some reservations:

I feel sustainable economies is achievable. However, with issues such as climate change, I don't think it's reversible. So it's really important that we pay attention here. I think when technology and renewable energy and so one comes into play, hopefully the future will be sustainable (Thailand, 18).

I think there are many directions we can go. I hope we're headed towards sustainability, that our children and the next generations will have a better life than we have now. But I'm scared that the opposite is what's happening (Norway, 19).

I think that science will always keep on advancing. The science that is developed is afterwards applied to our local communities. So I think that many of the things that are being investigated right now will be put into implementation (Peru, 16).

I like to be optimistic when I see the generation we have now. I think we are showing some kind of engagement to at least to try and better the world. [...] I look bright on the future with the information age, technology and all the information spreading, but I also see there is a big gap of knowledge (Norway, 17).

5.2. Do they feel a need to "save the world"?

A strong sense of responsibility was expressed by all the youth, and in different aspects of sustainable development. When asked directly if they felt a responsibility for saving the world, they all agreed strongly, answering yes, definitely, of course, and we all do.

5.2.1. Everyone has a responsibility

This normative view on responsibility is present in a lot of the reflections the youth have on why it is so important to act and why people should care about making our future more sustainable. The analysis revealed that the youth viewed awareness/education, age/growth and privilege/opportunity as important underlying aspects for this sense of responsibility:

> *With education comes responsibility. Once you're aware, you have to do something, you can't just sit there and say "somebody else can do it for me". I think the older I get, the more responsible I will be for sustainable development and making sure that everything is okay, or is going to be okay, to the best of my ability (Sweden, 16).*

> *You can't just get information about a starving child and say "not my responsibility". You can't just ignore what's happening and say "oh it doesn't have anything do to with me". So when you get to know about it, you feel it's your fault - well, not your fault - but your fault that you're not doing anything about it (Germany/Sweden, 18).*

> *As we get older we think we have more responsibility, because since we're kids, we're still growing up and we're still learning. But we can still take actions, and we can still be informed. And maybe at some point we do some things that aren't necessarily positive. We make mistakes and learn from them, but we do still have a responsibility. I think it just grows more as we grow up (Peru, 16).*

Especially coming from a very fortunate background, or like coming from Norway, coming from all these opportunities, I think we all have a responsibility to make a difference and to try to give other people the same opportunities that we've had (Norway, 17).

I also got to know the responsibility I have in my privileged position. To know that I'm well educated and with this education came the responsibility and the knowledge of responsibility that I have to use my privilege for good (Germany, 17).

5.2.2. How do the youth experience this perceived responsibility?

There is a wide spectre in how the youth experience this responsibility. For example, one youth said it didn't feel like an obligation, more like a desire to make the world a better place. This wish to contribute and notion of "I want to do this" was expressed by all the youth:

Wow. Why I want to do it? Probably to save the world *chuckles* (Germany, 17).

Maybe it's a bit egocentric, but I want to do something good, to make myself feel good. I want to do something good because I want to feel like I'm actually making a change. And I think a lot of people that help are doing it to get a better conscience, and to feel like they are not destroying the world. I think, there is probably no one that can say they are doing anything totally selfless (Germany/Sweden, 18).

I mean, my motivation is because I want people to have a better life, I want people to have the same opportunities that I've had. Or at least have some opportunities. That's really why I do it (Norway, 17).

There was also some important differences in the underlying emotions contributing to this motivation. Some explained it through passion and care, while others mentioned anger, frustration and guilt. For some, these emotions fuelled a motivation and will to act, while others felt overwhelmed by them:

I think we all should feel a responsibility. Even a bit guilty. And even though guilt is not really positive, I think it's something that drives everybody to do good. I think we all should feel guilty about what is happening (Sweden, 16).

When I recognise there's a problem, I want to be able to do something. Maybe that's part of the responsibility. But I don't feel obligated to do it. I want to do it (Thailand, 18).

There are so many problems and you just feel helpless and give up. I want to help, but it's just so much, so I decide to do nothing at all, because I can't choose. And that's really bad because then nothing gets done (Germany/Sweden, 18).

I think it's mostly anger. Whenever I'm reminded of what's happening, I get so mad. That anger, I try to turn it into something positive instead. Not hate, I'm not necessary fuelled by hate, I don't think it's healthy for anyone to be fuelled by hate, but it's mostly anger, I would say. Because you get constant reminders of what's happening (Sweden, 16).

One possible explanation for this difference can be seen in the youth's belief in their own ability to actually make a change or not:

I feel a bit helpless. Helpless and hopeless. Because you want to make a change and you want to do as much as you can, but then I guess I've come to the point where I don't want to do the things that I know won't make a change (Norway, 19).

I see myself that I need to contribute somehow to the world, no matter how small it can be. I can share it with my friends and family, and hopefully they will do the same. If one person can do it, everyone else can do it (Philippines, 23).

When I started recognizing that I really can do a change. Not only with being present, but also with being active. I recognise that when I discussed, I really liked being the position to be the more "moral" person who can say and know that you did something good. I think that is a big motivation (Germany, 17).

There was also an important difference in if this sense of responsibility came from within or was put upon them. The results indicate a high level of internalised responsibility in all the

participants. However, some of the youth expressed an externalised pressure for this responsibility as well:

> *I sometimes feel like I feel too much responsibility, even for my age. I mean, I'm in the first year of high school, I shouldn't have to, I have so much school work, I shouldn't have to feel so much at once. But I don't really have a choice (Sweden, 16).*

> *It feels like we got all the issues on our shoulders, and we got the responsibility for everything. We are the last generation that can solve the climate crisis, we are the generation that has to stop this huge consumption culture, we are the generation that has to join in all the revolutions around the world, because there are so many conflicts going on and we get to know them all because of social media (Germany/Sweden, 18).*

> *As a young person it's a little bit frustrating, when it's an adult problem. Well, obviously it's not just an adult problem, it affects us, and will affect me when I become an adult, it will affect my children, it's a long term thing. By disregarding young people and say things like "oh you're kids, it doesn't matter, just solve this later on", it doesn't make sense to disregard people just based on how old they are. So this responsibility for me, is frustrating sometimes to be honest. I might not have the skill set yet, but I want to do it. And I know I could at least contribute as minor as it may be, I could still give a little bit here and there (Thailand, 17).*

5.2.3. Changing views as they grow older

It is interesting to note that several of the youth mentions a change in view as they have grown older. Some of the youth has already started to experience that they become less idealistic as they grow older, and finds it sad but true. Some of the youth reflected on their pervious naivety and idealism, at the same time they also acknowledge how they now have more knowledge on the issues and make different priorities:

> *When I was about 15, I was really enthusiastic and started youth initiatives where I lived, had all these meetings, joined three political parties, and I wanted to do everything. When I saw a plastic bag like taken by the wind, I would literarily jump into the ocean to go get it, because I was like no plastic in the ocean! (Norway, 19).*

I can see a change from when I was younger, definitely. Cause as you grow, and you learn more about a lot of things from a lot of aspects, you recognise that there're issues that should be resolved, like you are able to make a change. But at the same time, while you acknowledge the opportunity, you also acknowledge some limitations, that you alone will not be able to do it. But then you also try to implement whatever you can to do it. It has changed, like you gain more knowledge but at the same time you recognise the limitations of it (Thailand, 18).

Growing up, I always had like a passion for these topics. But when I first became a part of the youth party, my relation to the topic kind of changed with me actually being more hands on and thinking more about the solutions and gaining knowledge, more than just talking about a cause. I would say that was a big, positive, change (Norway, 17).

Another youth also expressed this feeling of gaining more agency and influence, and was hopeful that this would continue to rise into adulthood:

Yeah, it has definitely changed. Since now I can decide more for myself. The people who are decision makers right now, and who can really really change something, the older you get, I think the more they listen to you. So, with my privileged I got responsibility, but also with growing older I get responsibility. I see it for example in school, when I went to a teacher and said something, and I was 10 years old, it would not have this influence than it would have now. And if I was a parent for example to a teacher it would have more a higher influence on them. On this influential scale it will always rise. Maybe somewhere fall again, I don't know (Germany, 17).

5.3. How do they act on this responsibility?

As seen above, the youth have a strong wish to contribute to making the world a better place. They are aware, they care, and they feel they have a responsibility. During the conversations, the youth reflected a lot on the question how - how do we save the world? What needs to be done? What can I do? In addition, they had a lot of conceptions about the obstacles in place, hindering the progress they mean should be happening faster. Turning now to the ways in which the youth expressed their own participation and contributions. A recurrent theme in the

interviews was a sense amongst the youth that they are not doing enough, or a feeling that they should be doing more:

> *In my day to day life, I'm not really doing that much to be honest. I'm not going to events or anything. But I think it's the small things I do, a little habit that I do every day, it might not have a huge effect, but I believe it from day after day it adds up (Thailand, 17).*

> *I don't do so much. I feel like you're supposed to be part of an organisation or help people in Yemen, all that kind of stuff. I feel like you're supposed to do so much more than I'm doing, but I try to do as much as I can on a small, day to day basis. But I feel like I'm not doing enough, the small actions don't feel enough anymore (Germany/Sweden, 18)*

> *Right now I feel like I'm not as active. Not because I'm not active, it's just that I'm not doing as much as I used to. I'm doing anything directly. I think I've come to terms with that the most impactful thing you can do is educate yourself. And actually be able to make a difference. I mean, yes, picking up plastics from the street is very important, it's good that someone does that, but that's not going to solve anything really. It's a lot of hours for very little outcome. So I think that's why I decided to start university and that's my motivation, that I can work with things that will actually implement change in the future (Norway, 19).*

Interestingly, when it comes to the question of where they participate and how they feel they can contribute, the youth share an individualistic perspective, saying "I'm only one of seven billion people", "I'm just a consumer, just a citizen". The idea of being just an individual seems to contribute to a sense of disempowerment among the youth. Several of them expressed that it was easier to do the little things when they didn't have the knowledge of how insignificant their actions were in the big picture. Still, now that they know about what is need to make a large enough impact, they express a frustration of lacking the power to influence the people and institutions that can make a big change, nor access to the arenas where the decisions are being made. Especially with large corporations, several of the youth mentioned that's where they feel no or least influence to make a change, and they don't know what to do:

Like who am I to the big corporations? The corporations for sure affect so much on the air, and land and oceans. Who am I to tell the big corporations that you should be doing this and that? I am just someone small. Yes they see, they're all aware of what is happening to the world, but what else can they do? What will make them actually change? That's my big question (Philippines, 23).

It is very hard to get the companies to act. You can as a consumer have some kind of influence with choosing who you buy from, but in the large picture, you need to - and a lot of people need to - stop buying from a brand that is very bad, to be able to make a difference. You can't just go to a CEO of a company and lobby for them to stop emitting CO2, cause they will mostly think about the money and the returns and the shareholders (Norway, 17).

This also applies to situations happening geographically far away from them. They express deep concerns, at the same time, they experience it is outside of their control. Here are some examples:

I feel I have no influence on the stuff that is happening far away, things I see on social media, for example the genocide of Muslim people in China. As a German, we promised never to let anything like that happen again, but now it is, even worse still. It's just so out of my control and I can't influence anyone to make a difference, and that is so hard on me. That I can't change anything. Like, I can't, my friends can't. Who can? I just haven't found the answer to who can make a change. Of course the communist party can make a change, but they won't. But then who has the power to actually make a change? And you just feel powerless (Germany/Sweden, 18)

I get very empathetic when I see what is happening with poverty, famine and war, for example in Syria. But I can't actually do anything to change that. I can try to understand, sign petitions, but then like, after that, what do I do? It's hard to find charity foundation in a warzone, it's a lot harder to donate to UNICEF and WHO, and find channels that will actually reach the ones in need (Thailand, 18).

When it came down to the question of what they actually do, what choices they make, and where they do feel they can contribute, four areas of participation emerged: 1) lifestyle

choices; 2) personal relationships; 3) democracy and organisational life; and 4) business and entrepreneurship.

5.3.1. Lifestyle Choices

All the youth gave examples of «small things» they do in their everyday life, such as minimize the use of plastic, bring a tote bag to the store, wear reusable masks, use menstrual cups, eat no or less meat, recycle, use a bike, public transportation or carpool, buying local food, or growing their own.

They express a very conscientious view of what they purchase and consume. They tell how they do research on brands in terms of packaging, environmental impact and social corporate responsibility, and even promote boycotting the one's they view as "the worst" (e.g. Nestlé, HM, Zara). Their style and trends are heavily influenced by sustainable development, such as buying second hand, redesigning, and mending damaged items.

At the same time, the youth also find it mentally exhausting to be constantly vigilant about these issues, and reflect upon all the things they should be doing better. It's easier to just go with the flow, and it takes a lot of energy to break out of the social norms and actually change:

> *I think energy is the biggest factor to why we're not making a big change. Because I think the power lays in the people - if we want to change, we can change. But it's hard, when you have a family, and work, and everything else too, and not enough time and energy (Germany/Sweden, 18).*

5.3.2. Personal Relationships

While the youth reflected on the limited impact of everyday habits, they also focused on the importance of not doing them in silence. The youth said they used these "small actions" as a way to inspire others and attempt to change the attitudes of other people around them, in the same ways they also had been changed by someone else. They tell how they use everyday situations as opportunities to make other people aware of the consequences of their actions and habits. They expressed that by taking these important conversations with people, you get to see the change and how it ripples. Many of the youth said that it was in fact in discussion and within personal relationships they felt they had the biggest influence:

I really like discussing issues within school, with my classmates, with my parents. I feel like in those discussions is where I feel like I can make the most impact (Peru, 16).

I want to make more people be aware of these things and get more people passionate. I think we all have the potential to have a big influence, if you just take these conversations with your friends, with other people, or go on stands or debates or get into an organisation, it all has a big influence (Norway, 17).

I think personal relations are the biggest influence for everyone. I think that's how you make the biggest change, even if it's just small stuff. For me it's the method I've found I can do, without feeling overpowered (Germany/Sweden, 18).

When I go out with my friends I tell them "do you want a straw?" and I mention you can save the turtles if you don't use straw. I think that sometimes can influence someone, although it might not create such a massive movement, it's more like gradual changes (Thailand, 18)

For these conversations to have meaningful exchanges of ideas, the youth highlights the importance of a safe sharing space and respect for different viewpoints. In addition, almost all of them expressed how much they love discussing topics like this, and how they really feel they have something to contribute. This is both in terms of knowledge on the different topics, as well as how to be a good listener and to have an open mind when presented with new perspectives:

What's the point debating if everyone thinks the same way? There is no need to share ideas, there is no need to clash if everyone thinks the same way. I think it's best for everyone to be in an environment where it's comfortable and possible for people to express their opinions as controversial as they may be (Thailand, 17).

With discussions I think you can get more ideas about what you can do, and things you're not doing as you think you should. So, there is everyday situations where you can see things you can do on your own, or with other people and maybe educating them also, or as a community, helping with different things together (Peru, 16).

I discuss a lot. I think that is one of the biggest things I do. I really like to get into political discussions, with friends, or with relative, or anyone. So I think that is a big thing (Germany, 17).

To a large degree, many of the youth experience these safe sharing spaces in school and organised leisure activities (e.g. debate club, summer camps, youth organisations). Here, many of the youth join and initiate activities for peers to contribute to sustainability, for example through protests or cleaning up beaches. They say they find a lot of support and a sense of community this way, even with people with different viewpoints from themselves:

As youth, it's very good to have this sense of community that we all share a wish for change. It's definitely a lot easier and more inspiring when you have other people who supports you. Even if they have different views, they still want to create change. It's very important to have those people who makes you more open (Peru, 16).

I feel I have most influence in the classroom, when I learn. I love my class, and I know everyone listens to everyone. I love being in school for that reason. I feel I can have a lot of impact. Everyone is paying attention. Online too. If I share a post, I get comments back, thank you for sharing. And in CISV as well (Sweden, 16).

When it came to their home and family life, differing experiences emerged among the youth group. Many felt a lot of support from their siblings. Some of the youth explained how sustainable development was a topic around the dinner table, and a passion they shared together as a family, and how they got interested in these topics from a young age. Others felt that they have "inherited" viewpoints, but now feel they can be more independent in their opinions. Additionally, a few said they felt little support from their parents, and little influence on the decisions being made:

I definitely do feel I have support. My family, my friends, my teachers, which are the people I encounter most day to day, they're very great and supporting (Peru, 16).

Since I live with my family it's a bit hard. At home, my parents are in charge. If they have decided on something, then I have to go with the flow. I don't really have any

power at home, because my parents obviously decide what we do. It's not that they don't listen to me, it's just that they're in charge, so I tag along (Sweden, 16).

I talk a lot to my sister and brother, they understand it. But when I talk to my parents, they really don't understand it. They don't understand the kind of overflow of information we get and that's something that bothers me. My mom is kind of like "oh that has nothing to do with you, so you can't make an influence, so just let it go". But I can't, because I will always get reminded that it's happening (Germany/Sweden, 18).

With my family for example, my mom and dad didn't really care about climate change, and also I didn't really care about climate change. After I entered the school I am in, it made me so aware. When I'm aware, my actions change. And my parents notice this and now they also don't use straws for example. I'm not sure if this is true in your country, but in most Southeast Asian countries there is a clear hierarchy with the elders and the young people. I've experience that a lot on a day to day basis, especially with parents and my uncles. Because people from different generations think differently. Often, young people are not comfortable disagreeing. It kind of feels like you are rebelling sometimes. There are many causes where you don't agree with something they said, and then you are accused of being disrespectful or disobedient, bad values, you know. I feel like, having a clear hierarchy - like my opinion matter more than yours because I am older than you, doesn't really make sense, but it's also important to hear from the other generations as well (Thailand, 17).

Another way the youth say they reach people, is through social media. This includes conversations with friends, information gathering and information sharing through posts and stories. By sharing on social media they help spread information, and get more aware themselves. They get live updates from around the world on what is happening on the ground and feel they can contribute to champaign causes they support:

The effect of social media is also motivating me. Seeing transparency reports, for example this is how much greenery is left, this is how much food waste is being thrown away, this is happening to the world, I have to do something. I think it's also sharing, sharing what I see about the world. For example if I see a post about how much waste

is in the ocean, this is how much plastic is being used, even if I contribute to the
problem, I still want to share it (Philippines, 23).

However, they also see their own limitations here. Several of the youth has mentioned that they are not influencers, and thus has a limited reach on social media compared to other actors:

Of course I can share a post on Instagram, of course I can spread awareness of that,
but people will either play passive if they are not interested, or if they are interested,
they are already interested, so I don't have to change their opinion for the better you
know. So I think the most impact every person has, in like my position, not like an
influencer or that kind of stuff, has the most opportunity to make a difference in their
personal life, to correct people when they say something that is not okay, to educate
other people and spread information (Germany/Sweden, 18).

5.3.3. Democracy and Organisations

Almost all of the youth mentioned they are active in youth organisations that has a sustainable development focus (e.g. Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, youth political parties, CISV, TEDx) . The degree to how much they participate and attend varies amongst the youth. Some are active in several organisations, while others choose to focus on only one. Some of the youth describes that during the pandemic, both their attendance and number of activities planned by the organisations has declined. One youth says they find this sad, because it motivates them to be part of a community and with an organisation, there is power in people, and easier to be heard:

It's obvious that me as an individual, without any group or organisation, it's not
possible to change the world a lot. I think in some level of influence, it has to be
organised. So there will always be an organisation to join, if one wants to influence
the world. I think the higher it gets, the more important it's to join other people, to
network, to be a bigger group to influence the world (Germany, 17).

A lot of teenagers these days is recognising these issues, some have also formed their
own kind of organisation and I feel like also a lot of people are like me, they want to
make a change, and they're finding some kind of channels for them to make that

change. Sometimes organisations that can reach out and motivate them to keep doing whatever they want to do to make the world more sustainable (Thailand, 18).

The notion of participating in civil society and in democracy is a key value for all the youth participating in this project. However, there is a noticeable difference in the individual experience of the youth how much influence they perceive to have on the political stage. The youth that are or have been involved in youth politics express feeling like they can really make a difference this way. The youth that does not partake in youth politics express that they experience having little or no influence in politics what so ever, especially those under the voting age. Another interesting aspect here is also the difference between the youth from "the global north" and "the global south". The youth from countries like Norway, Sweden and Germany all had great confidence in the democratic process, and saw this as a legit platform where everyone can influence and state their opinions. Meanwhile, the youth from Peru, Thailand and the Philippines expressed that their politicians don't really care about sustainable development, and shared a sense of not being able to change that. Some of the youth mentioned people organising to protest and try and make a change, which is positive, but it will still take a lot to change the system and politicians:

> *So the Philippine government is really bad. But then the government is someone everyone looks up to. I see not a lot of people can pick up at the government, but what they can do is get attention. So I see a lot of communities, organisation trying to partner up with each other to help. It's a separate thing. One is government and the other is organisations trying to help what the government is not trying to focus on. That is one good thing I see now. There are so many organisations partnering up, really trying to make a change of what they see (Philippines, 23).*

> *Like, right now here we are going to have elections soon. Here politics has always been about choosing the, it's a common phrase here, that you have to vote for the less worst. What can we do? These are the politicians we have… Since we are young, we can't vote. But it's still very important for us to be informed and to talk with others because even though we cannot personally give our vote, we can discuss with other people and we can be better informed when it is our time to vote and we can also give people better ideas or enrich their own opinions when they do vote. This goes not only for elections, but also for everything else (Peru, 16).*

The problem, in my country, with young people and politics, is that it's so disconnected. But it actually is connected. Because the decisions made would affect people on a day to day basis. I think this needs to be addressed, because once there is disconnect between the people and the law, is can contribute to a lot more problems (Thailand, 17).

I really like to do this kind of political work because I feel you can really make a difference, especially in a country like Norway. There is a lot you can do if you just focus on going through the political system we have now. And generally just, the best thing you can do for sustainable development is to vote for the political parties that actually promote this (Norway, 17)

So, in the party I am in. If they were in the position to rule Germany, not just in the opposition, I think there would be a better world. But why are they still in the opposition? Because there are still many people that want another thing for the world. So one can't say politicians do a bad thing, because they listen to the folks, they listen to the citizens (Germany, 17).

5.3.4. Business and Entrepreneurship

Many of the youth have already started own companies. Some are small youth businesses where they receive support from for example their school or university, others do humanitarian projects and fundraising initiatives, and some family businesses. What all of them have in common, is a strong sustainability profile. Among the participants, one youth is making candy from ecological honey to raise awareness of the importance of bees in our ecosystems, two others started a fundraising campaign when the pandemic hit, in order to send medical kits to rural hospitals. Another is part of an investor group where they prioritise and support sustainable investments. Also, one of youth is part of the family business, and is working towards making a sustainable mark on their operations. These youth express that they feel a bigger impact doing these thing on a larger business scale, rather than just as an individual. One of the youths explained it like this:

I really felt like we made a big impact during that time. It was really a crisis, and us lending our small helping hands. Although I still feel like it's quite small, I am really

proud of the impact we've made at a time like this. If I have the chance, I would like to do something even bigger. I feel like it's really important that you understand, like, we focus on like sustainable development, one issue, the sustainability revolving around that issue and kind of like understand the system that goes with it, like, after you understand that, then you can make some actions and plans on it (Thailand, 18).

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the youth feel they have little influence over action of big corporations. What is interesting is that the youth draws upon their own experience running a business or initiatives to further reflect and understand why the corporations act in the way that they do. This is in terms of understanding the difficulty of prioritising the economic, environmental and social sustainability, but also why money is so important, and why it is so difficult to say it shouldn't be. It is also about understanding the systems in place, in order to find better solutions for the future:

From my own experience, you have to sometimes prioritize. You can't do everything at the same time. Like now we have to use palm oil in the gluten free alternative, and we didn't want to use that. But by including a gluten free option we can expand more. Then we also spread the word of the bee and their importance more. A company just has power as long as they have money. As long as they have influence. And if they're not just focused on their money, and they say "ok that's not that important we try to make the world a better place", they will lose their power to make the world a better place. That's a problem. Because if you lose stockholders, you lose investments, then you don't have the same power anymore. You have to find a balance between keeping your influence, keeping your money, keeping your stockholders happy, but also trying to make the world a better place (Germany/Sweden, 18).

The one's I think perhaps has the largest impact or potential is the small businesses. They can still adapt to how the world is now, they have so much room for adjustments, they have room for mistakes, they can do so much to actually make a change or change something globally. For a big company it's harder to adjust to the world at the present, because they are so systematic and so routine. They have been getting things from the same supplier, or they've been so used to how the big company has been working. But the small businesses, they have so much voice now, and everyone is supporting small businesses. So they have so much influence on other people also,

because they can adjust on how their packaging is, who their supplier is, emission. I think a big influence is the small businesses trying to improve the world, presently and for the future (Philippines, 23).

5.4.How do they view their role vis-à-vis other actors?

This section will address how the youth view the dynamics of different actors on the sustainable development stage. The youth reflected on why change is happening so slowly when the emergency is so high. Furthermore, they asked themselves the question of who should be doing what exactly? In addition to the roles of adults, governments, corporations and other citizens, the youth attempted to critically look at their own role in this, and tried to come to terms with what they expected from themselves, what others expect of them and what should be the role of youth:

I would say that as a young person, I can't do everything alone. I think the most inspiring thing is seeing a bunch of people from different backgrounds and different beliefs coming together for a common cause, and that cause might be, feeding the poor, charity, cleaning up the beach, whatever. But as a young individual, it's not a one man thing, it shouldn't be. Even as an adult, but I think it's much more so as a teenager. I believe that during our teenage years is the time we get to experiment a lot in terms of what we try, jobs and activities in general. Being a part of a group is very important (Thailand, 17).

I think as youth, you don't feel as if you are so involved in those things. You don't feel like things you can do can have that much of an impact, and so many actions that you think you should be taking in your community, and think "oh the politicians should do that, the government should do that". But it's very important to think about what you can do in whatever role you have (Peru, 16).

A lot of people are trying to do small businesses, and more partnerships. So I think my role, and the role of younger people is really finding organisations with likeminded goals and ambitions that they see for the future. That's a good thing about the youth, that they have knowledge of sustainability and how they can start something and make it grow eventually (Philippines, 23).

I think the difference is that the politicians already have that responsibility. If you're a politician or a change maker, you are supposed to be calculating what is efficient, what is not, and then like, how we can save the world, so I think that you're not following up on your responsibility if you're not doing that. I think a lot of politicians are to blame for that. And corporations and companies, I think they have a huge responsibility that they don't take. And youth as a group and a generation they don't have that responsibility at all. For youth it's more like you can set demands, you can voice your opinion, and educate each other, but you don't have the actual responsibility right now. But they do have a responsibility to educate themselves and to ask for change and to be motivated so that when our generation is the politicians, and when we go in to office and when we are head of big corporations, then we have this in mind. So we have a responsibility cause we have the ability to change the memo and how it is. We can change the system (Norway, 19).

At the same time, they are aware that not everyone of their friends and peers are as passioned about sustainability as they are. They express a worry that it's just a trend the youth follow now, and that it might die down in a few years, and people just care about it on a superficial level. Another youth commented on this saying that there need to be a trend for a start, and then we can build from there, but without a trend, there is no hope. The group expressed a wish to know more about "normal" youth, someone who hasn't been "thought all this since they were ten years old" to seek to understand if they are "as invested in this as we are".

5.4.1. The Youth-Adult Disconnect

At the same time, they felt both that they got the responsibility for saving the world, and that they are not taken seriously by adults, politicians, parents. The youth-adult disconnect, as one of the youth called it, was a recurrent theme in the interviews:

I think they do have some more responsibility than us as youth. But it's still, while thinking that, you can't start thinking "oh since we're young it's in the hands of others", that's something dangerous to start thinking. I do think they have some more responsibility, but that doesn't take away from our responsibility (Peru, 16).

I think that's really the biggest problem when it comes to taking climate change seriously, because the older, the people in power, are also from a whole other

generation, currently. I think it would be a whole different thing if we had realized this maybe fifty years ago and, let's say our generation was their generation instead, things would be very very different, and we would be in power, and we would have the awareness. They don't have the same awareness that is ingrained in us, and I think that's really showing now. And I think it's a huge problem (Sweden, 16).

The older generation were born into, especially the people who are 40, 50, now, they were born into the best years ever of the human race and they really have a responsibility to now see the climate crisis, to make a difference and to understand that we can't live as we've always have, or we can, but we have to make big changes now, and they have been a very fortunate generation that got all the perks of having widely available fossil fuels, these kinds of thing without having really big consequences for it. But now we have to suffer for it. I think it is important that the older generation takes a stand and tries to really make a difference, because we're their children, we're the people who will have the earth after them and so I think they have a responsibility. But now the indications show that older people don't really do a big difference, and don't really try to do a big difference and so, it's up to our generation to do a big difference now. I think also these ideas that they always had through their lives gets more and more integrated the older you get, so it harder to change their minds, the older they get (Norway, 17).

I know a lot of parents think, just because we are so young, our opinions are…not invalid, but like "you don't know that much, like you are overreacting, it's not that bad" you know. Just because we're young, our opinion and our actions are not really being taken seriously and played down. Like Greta Thunberg talked about that, with the politicians, that she feels like she's talking and screaming, and we are all screaming "Please do something!" but the parents are just like "oh nervous children and overacting and like not that bad, and they are just children". I think a lot of grownups don't understand how educated a lot of us actually are, and how active we actually are. We don't really have the same power as adults, because we don't get taken that seriously (Germany/Sweden, 18).

I don't feel alone. I do feel alone when it comes to my generation vs the older generations. But I don't feel alone, which is nice. I mean, when every single leader

was talking about goals set for 2030, 2040, 2050, no one was talking about taking direct action, like "we can postpone it, we can take it later" It's not fine! They are basically putting the job on our generation, and at the same time they are wondering "your generation, why are you all going to therapy? Why is mental illness so normal? Why are you whining all the time? why are you on your phones?" No shit we are on our phones, when you are putting all this pressure on us! (Sweden, 16).

However, this youth-adult disconnected did not necessary apply to teacher and educators, and they youth perhaps have different expectations from them then other adults in their lives:

I think it's really important to have educators more involved and raising awareness about why it's important to create a sustainable environment and society (Thailand, 18).

When we want to have discussions, teachers are always super open to having them. But that hasn't been that way always. For example last year, there was a political crisis, so there was a lot of political action, especially with youth, and there was huge protests and everything. And whenever I would talk with my friends and classmates, we would always talk about that, because it was something that was really big. But with our teachers, we didn't talk about it at any point. And I did feel it was strange for we that we didn't talk about it (Peru, 16).

Some of the youth also tries to understand why adults act the way that the do. A lot was contributed to the difficulty adults have of learning new things, and how they got so little information about world issues and sustainable development growing up compared to the younger generations. Several youth also adds that it's important to respect our elders and we should try and strive for a mutual understanding:

Imagine learning a language at the age of fifty. I mean that's really hard. I feel it's the same with being aware of sustainable development and global warming. My generation is growing up with this. I've known and read about it in my schoolbooks, I've been engrained with it, not specifically from birth, but maybe form 9, 10 years old. I'm constantly surrounded by it with the news, and social media, reminding me about this and this is happening, be aware, be aware, be aware, but if you are a

politician, or if you are from my parents' generation basically, you only just learned about this at the same time I learned about it. It's so much harder for their generation to truly understand, when they are learning it on their own, while we are engrained. For us it's our mother tongue, for them it's just a language on the side. That also makes it more difficult for them to take action. I mean, they can, but they don't have the assets we do. We are a lot more passionate about it (Sweden, 16).

It's a bit hard to justify it to them, because it's an issue that has just become apparent during our era. I think there is a point where you get saturated, and new information don't just sink in anymore. I like some people that has already reached that point, you can't just blame them for not understanding, but like at the same time it would be hard to change their behaviour (Thailand, 18).

The youth went on to reflect on how this would apply to them when they became adults, and if they would be different. Some said they didn't know if their generation would do something much better, but with the climate crisis getting nearer, that perhaps the will of people would be greater, and thus easier to make a change. Some of the youth had noticed changes in their parents from what they heard about them as teenagers, that they have gotten more conservative and less idealistic, and perhaps a bit hypocritical. Still, a lot of them believe they will contribute to a change in society in such a way that they don't have to go in the same time and energy traps as their parents. Several of the youth also mentions how they will continue to educate themselves and find a job that contributes to a more sustainable world. One youth also mentioned that with this education, sometimes you get less idealistic when you understand the complexity of the biggest issues in the world today.

5.4.2. *Money and Power*

From the conversations, there was a divide among the youth about whether the politicians and government or the corporations and money had the biggest influence, however both where seen as important actors. The youth reflected a lot on the complexity of democracy. The answers varied, and the biggest disagreement was on how much we could expect from the government and politicians in a democracy. One side argued that the state was the strongest actor, others argued that the politicians where to easily influenced by other actors (e.g. majority of people, corporations and money).

The key player I would say is the government. Because the government lays the whole foundation, gives legislations for how the companies will behave and what happens. Everything that happens is regulated or can be regulated by the government. I think the government is the main player. For me, my relation to this, is that I try to promote the party I am in. I want to show that this is the party that promotes sustainable development and that it will do the most. I think it is important to get the right, like the most important thing to reach this goal is to get the right politicians in the government. And then there will be big differences (Norway, 17).

The government is someone everyone looks up to, so when they give the rules and strict regulations on how to sustain the whole country, consistent rules, everyone should follow, it can start from there. So having the same consistency rule or regulation or law to follow would really benefit the whole country (Philippines, 23).

Of course politicians, But I think politicians can't do that much. Politicians are just marionette dolls to society and will do what society wants. Of course there is a smaller group fighting for climate action and human rights, but there is not enough people to actually impact the political scene. So I don't think we can blame it all on the politicians, we have to kind of blame it more on the society, and the people that choose the politicians. Of course it's different in different countries, but in democratic countries. But then of course big corporations, because they have such a big power over politicians, in Sweden and other lobbyist countries (Germany/Sweden, 18).

There is also the politicians that have a big influence. I think there are many politicians who wants to do a good job. And who also can't do a good job because society is against them. Because there are still many people want another thing for the world. So yeah, one can't say they do a bad thing, because they listen to the citizens. But I think there's also this big thing of money, which has the most influence I think. So if you take all the politicians of the world together and get all these influences together, I still think money has a bigger influence (Germany, 17).

Also here, the youth reflect upon the reasons behind why politicians aren't making sustainable development more of a political priority:

Since there are a lot of issues globally and locally, it's hard for youth and for politicians to find a balance of what actions to take. If you just focus on just one issue, you are kind of going to be neglecting the other ones. For example in Latin America right now, there is a lot of political unrest, so that's what's at the top of the agenda for politicians. And then comes climate action. It very hard for them to find that balance and be able to take action in everything, because there is only so much we can do we limited time and people and resources to work on these issues (Peru, 16).

Another youth commented on this saying that in Sweden, they don't have these kind of political problems, however the politicians still always find other problems to focus on instead of the "real" problems. Conversely, one youth spoke up against the critique politicians are getting, especially from young climate activists:

I can't really understand this hate against politicians in a democracy, like in Fridays for Future for example. Because we are the people in charge. In some countries where you don't have a democracy, obviously the people in charge are the problem. I think it's a very complex system, and if you are a politician, you have so many things to worry about, and there is this thing to get re-elected, of course. But in the end we have to keep in mind that the folks have the power (Germany, 17).

In summary, the youth view the government as an important tool for implementing change. This can be done in both democratic and undemocratic ways, even corrupt way. Some of the youth express a top-down understanding, if government wills it, enterprises and people will have to follow. The others view it as a bottom-up process, that people (in democratic countries) will vote in the politicians that can create the society they want. The question is then, why aren't the majority of people more concerned with sustainability?

One important actor that benefits from the current power structure, is the big companies, several of the youth mentioned. Here there is also a divide amongst the youth is it is the power of the consumers (as mentioned in the section of lifestyle choices) or the power of legislation that can hold business accountable for exploiting people and natural resources, and leaving huge carbon footprints in their path:

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When it comes to corporations, I feel like it's very dark and monetizing. I feel like I have no power or influence, whatever you do. If they change themselves, if feel like it's not because they want to be more green, and for the world, it's because they want people to like them. It's a marketing strategy, Because they could choose to be like "no we don't want to sell coffee that's not fair trade because that's against human rights". But they don't do that (Norway, 19).

I think pollution is one of the biggest problems we have right now. The thing with pollution, it's something that, once it's out, it's out, right. We need to solve it at the core, people polluting, factories dumping waste in the oceans. For example fast fashion, HM, Zara, those brands that produces clothes primarily following trends, and they make clothes quick, and cheap, affordable. But environmental sustainability and any kind of responsibility actually just goes out the window. The thing is to make it cheap, they use really low standards in production. As a result they are dumping a lot of waste in the local waters, and there are cases where children who relies on the water, have deformities when they are born, liver and kidney diseases. Pollution as a whole is something that should be addressed quick and we should be solving it by now (Thailand, 17).

I think there are a lot of nuances to it. I think it's very important that everyone does what they can do, but I also think it's important not to blame consumers. Because really it's the institutions and the organisations and the politicians and the government that can actually make change. Like it's important that consumers or individuals are prepared to follow when stuff is implemented for example, but what's really going to make a difference is rules and amendments (Norway, 19).

But also the companies influence us again, making us believe "oh we need this and we need this". For me it all comes back to society. I think we're all able to think by ourselves. And we need to educate ourselves, and that's not just school, we have to make our own research. I think that society is the biggest, main, actor. Like the actions of normal folks (Germany/Sweden, 18).

5.4.3. The Challenges of Democracy

The youth reflected a lot on the diversity of people and opinions in the world. In the group discussion, they shared a common value that in order for the future to be sustainable, everyone should be entitled to their opinion. Just because they think this is the right way, it might not be if it excludes others. However, they still tried to understand why people didn't share their perspectives. Is it because people just don't care? Are they not aware of what is happening? Do they disagree, on what basis?

If I see people who are against my values, I think it's important to recognise that they also have a reason for it. So, they just don't decide to be against me or against the values I represent. So they also have a reason for it, whether it's less education or whether it is how they grew up or something. I think there's a responsibility to figure that out, and to work it out together with people. And to also get into their perspective, and not just go like this through the world and be like these are the right values that I represent and they are always right, but also get into the perspective of other people (Germany, 17).

It's about how you look at things, for example on the very right of the politics, it's often very individualistic or very like libertarian, so you just want the economy to grow, or you want the best for yourself and your family, the least taxes and this. While other parties might prioritise welfare for everyone, and I think it's a lot about where you are in life. If you are very rich, you will probably want to vote for someone who will lower the taxes. Or if your family rely on the local coalmine, you probably won't vote for the green party, so there is a lot with your situation, your family, the people you have around you. I am pretty sure most people would want the best thing for everyone, but people are disagreeing on how to do this and some people think more about themselves because they can't really feel empathy for people on the other side of the earth or something, I don't know. It's a complicated issue (Norway, 17)

People will not give up the freedom they already have. They aren't going to be fine with that. They'll say "I will not give up all my freedom because someone higher up thinks that's the right choice for me" And sometimes it is definitely the right choice, but then, people have different opinions (Germany/Sweden, 18).

Also, with the increasing polarisation, the youth reflected upon the balance of freedom of speech, hate speech, censorship and "cancel culture". How we often surround ourselves with people who share the same values as us, and how social media algorithms only show us what we already believe and more and more extreme content. This further contributes to a society where people grow further and further apart, instead of unifying us. While it was clear that discrimination it's a serious issue, several of the youth also expressed a concern that "cancel culture" might make the problem worse:

> *I really agree with what's being said, that cancel culture contributes to polarisation. I think it's not just that it makes people from different viewpoints go further apart, it's also that these encounters from different groups, they are more violent. Like for example with Colombia, the protests, there has been a lot of deaths. The way people are saying to solve this is go look at their constitution and make some amends to it. There is no way the people who are involved in the protest would sit down to discuss with the government, when there has already been so much violence from the government towards them. And so, to be able to have better discussions and come to better agreement, this cancel culture and this polarisation, the way that we answer to each other, we are not as open to discussing with other people. It's more, they are the other group and we are more quick to judge them and to set them aside. And that is part of why this discussion needs to take place (Peru, 16).*

> *Cancel culture is dangerous. Humans are pack animals, we need a group. Cancel culture excludes a person from the pack. And being excluded for a human is one of the worse things that could happen, and you can go to really dark places. I mean, human should be allowed to make mistakes, that's how we grow. I think we need to switch the mentality, that when humans are 18 or when they are adults, they aren't ever allowed to make mistakes anymore. We are constantly growing and learning new things. I've learned so much from this conversation for example (Sweden, 16).*

> *I think the biggest problem we have in terms of sharing ideas, is that sometimes ideas can be a little bit offensive or too far right, too far left, and it kind of discourages people from saying what they believe in. Of course, on very touchy topics such as*

racism or abortion, the gender pay gap, like all these topics needs to be addressed, but some people are afraid of being considered offensive, so they don't really say what they need to say. I think the problem that comes with not being able to share different ideas from different viewpoints is a society that flatlines. We stagnate and don't really change. I would say that despite being controversial, radical ideas need to be shared. You can't just listen to one end of the spectrum, you need to listen from both to be able to find the best opinion, like of course it's up to the person to weigh the pros and the cons themselves, but you have to provide those options first. Being able to share ideas without judgement is a very powerful thing for a group of people to have. We are much more able to learn from new, different ideas and more able to see different perspectives. It's very powerful, not just for a generation of kids, but people as a whole really. We shouldn't be arguing with each other, we shouldn't blame each other for the problem, it's us vs the problem, not us vs us. Less judgement and more talking (Thailand, 17).

They shared a common value that everyone should be included, and if we could get together as a whole and discuss, it would be easier to find a solution that benefits society more than just majority rules. However, one youth expressed a worry concerning the democratic process, and how much time and resources is needed to ensure that everyone's interests are being taking into account.

The question is can we afford compromised in climate change for example? Can we afford to discuss many years about climate change or is it too late by then? (Germany, 17).

5.5. How do the youth their role in achieving a sustainable future?

To summarise, the youth all feel a strong sense of responsibility, mainly due to the fact that they are aware of the injustices happening around the world. In broad terms, the youth describe their role as a small one, with little power and influence compared to other actors, such as government, companies and adults. However, this does not discourage the youth in believing that change is possible. They all share a strong sense of a generational bond, tying them together, supporting each other in the quest for a more sustainable future, a future where we survive, thrive even:

We are the people that have the power to change that. We are the next generation. We are the next generation of work force, the next generation of politicians, we are the next generation that kind of votes. I think we have the power to actually make a change. We just have to take that power, of course it's hard, but we have to do this, because if we don't, no one else will (Germany/Sweden, 18).

Since I have this pessimistic view, I think our generation is going to be one of the generations who will have to face very harsh problems, very though problems, that we really have to work to get all this shit in the right direction. I think it's going to be hard, I mean there was always hard times with wars and something, and people who were in the position of decision makers had to face, but I think now there comes hard times again and maybe the most important time. I think our role is going to be very very important, and is already important to make a good path to then make good decisions. So I think we are now in the responsibility to make it easier for us to change the world in a good way for when we are in a position to change it. So we have to change the world now in a way to then change it very good (Germany, 17).

It's very important that we do make our voices heard. And since we are youth's we have different views than adults would have, because of the way we've grown up is different and our experience is different, so it's always good to have different points of view and people from different backgrounds, that can only do good, because afterwards you'll have more diverse opinions and have better ideas (Peru, 16).

Believe in our potential. Believe in us, believe the world will not explode and there won't be wars. Keep trying our best, keeping finding opportunities to make changes (Thailand, 18).

The more you are bombarded with this information, the better, for me, that's how I changed. So keep educating, and people will start taking action. I am also really hopeful for our generation, even though it will be a bit too late when we are in power, I think with the knowledge we have I think we will really be able to make a systemic change in how we see the world and how we. I might be pessimistic, but I am a bit hopeful on that part as well (Sweden, 16).

I have hope for our generation. We have so much information readily available, we can learn about whatever we want, we can find information about anything online and so we get more connected and we can get more connected to people who are also in countries that are suffering or are developing into so that they have it better. But I think it's not only about us in the future, being in the government and these kind of things, it's also we need to have a big shift in politics. We see it in Norway that there are many young people trying to get into parliament and really trying to influence the government already now, from my generation, which I think is really needed. I hope it continues, that younger politicians can get into the government of many countries around the world and also when it comes to the new companies of the future, my generation knows that it won't be smart to invest in oil or become an engineer focusing on oil rigs, so I think just knowing this will make a big difference in how people choose what they want to work with in the future which is a big part of it. I am hopeful for the future, the youth have so much information available that the world becomes more connected and sustainable development will as a consequence of this become more prioritised (Norway, 17).

Chapter 6: Discussion

At first glance, the youth seem to understand their own role in achieving a sustainable future, as mere individuals, with no more power to change the world as the next person. They explicitly say that they are not that active, and only do small things. Several of the youth mentioned feeling like they are not contributing enough. Why is that, when all of the youth felt strong sense of responsibility to save the world?

One explanation can be that they got the responsibility thrusted upon them, as one of the youth said: "*it feels like we got all the issues on our shoulders, and we got the responsibility for everything»* without the tools to cope with and act upon this responsibility. Additionally, they had a strong sense of emergency over the challenges, saying "we are at the beginning of the end" and "everything is at stake our mere existence". This sort of pressure can have consequences for the youths mental health, as described by Sanson et al. (2019). This frame of thought contributes to a victimising perspective of youth, however it also shows the importance of positive adult facilitation to ensure healthy participation and empowerment.

Another explanation can be that they actually have the necessary knowledge and skills. Indeed, the youth showed a deep understanding of the complexity of sustainable development. They shared a lot of reflection and knowledge on specific events, as well as underlying factors for why these challenges exists. In addition, they provided insight into what actions were needed to make a change. Drawing on what Arnstein (1969) argued with people not willing to give up their power, there could also be structural barriers in place hindering the youth from meaningful participation. They youth genuinely believe that everyone should have the same opportunities, and they are not comfortable maintaining the current power structure in the world today, even if they benefit from it themselves. Advocating for change is not without its challenges. While one of the youth was critical of the hate politicians receive from youth and climate action groups, it should also be mentioned the harsh critique and bullying youth leaders, such as Greta Thunberg are facing. This can be used as an example of adult negative impact on youth participation, constituting active resistance based on the model of Reddy and Ratna (2002). Is this disproportionate amount of attention and scrutiny the price of entry? Or can we hold adults accountable for hindering youth participation? Not to mention the personal attacks and threats. When the youth see how other youth are treated by national leaders, people in power, grown-ups, this contributes to an unsafe environment for participation. The youth themselves have pointed out how extremely important it is for a well-functioning democracy and sustainable development to have safe sharing spaces and learning arenas for exchanging different viewpoints.

Furthermore, the idea of being just an individual seems to contribute to a sense of disempowerment among the youth. They said that they lack the influence and access to the arenas where the actual discissions are being made (e.g. big corporations, government etc). It does not help matters, that several of the youth expressed a disappointment that their parents did not understand them and what they are going through. They felt as though their experience was not taken seriously and trivialized through words like "it's so far away, don't worry about it, it's not your problem, there is nothing you can do anyways". Although it might have been said with the right intentions, this coincides with the somewhat patronising view of young people as described in the literature. These experiences are likely to contribute to the sense of a youth-adults disconnect, especially when the generational bond between the youth are so strong.

The results suggest that the youth view themselves as part of a global community, in line with the concept of active global citizenship. This might be a reason why they tend to empathise strongly with communities all over the world, and want to contribute, even if they sometimes struggle to know how to make a meaningful impact. Their knowledge, skills and attitudes as part of their understanding of themselves as active global citizens can also be seen as a motivator in their strong passion and willingness to make a change.

From the results it is clear that it is not an option for the youth to give up, and they struggle with the feeling of not doing enough, and when they act, it feels too little. They have experienced that the older generations did not deliver on their responsibility, and now they are the ones that has to solve it. They are not the ones that created the problem, but it will be their fault if they do nothing, and that is not something they are willing to put on the next generation, the same way that responsibility was put on them. However, not all the youth share this experience. In fact, many of the youth said they felt supported in their endeavours, especially from the adults in their schools and organisations. The projects, business and initiatives where the youth felt they had a lot of influence can be viewed as examples of adults positive impact on youth participation. Still, the specific details of decision making process and shared responsibility with adults is not known. Based upon the accounts given by the youth, they have supporting actors, in addition to finding power in being part of something bigger than themselves. It also shows how important it is to be part of a community.

They also impose this responsibility onto others, and feel a responsibility to spread awareness and educate the people around them. But what separates this group from the others? Are they the only ones that knows what is going on? That is obviously not the case, however the way that they are exposed to it through their social media accounts could be an intensifying factor. Interestingly, the youth seemingly view themselves as "becoming" as well, having a strong believe that they will be able to make a bigger impact once they are the adults. Alternatively, this can also be understood as when they are adults, they will no longer be hindered by the same obstacles children and youth are facing on their way to meaningful participation.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

To summaries, the youth showed a deep understanding of the complexity of sustainable development, and had daunting views on the future if action is not taken. They all expressed a strong sense of responsibility, mainly due to the fact that they are aware of the injustices happening around the world. However, the individual experience of this responsibility differed. In broad terms, the youth describe their role as a small one, with little power and influence compared to other actors, such as government, companies and adults. However, this do not discourage the youth in believing that change is possible. They all share a strong sense of a generational bond, tying them together, supporting each other in the quest for a more sustainable future, a future where we survive, thrive even.

Based on this analysis, the youth's reflection on this topic can be used as a guide to further investigate the sense of responsibility among the youth population as a whole, taking a professional responsibility towards positive facilitation of youth participation.

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Are you interested in taking part in the research project
"The last generation – youth and sustainability"?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to explore how young active global citizens understand their own role in achieving a sustainable future. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project
The purpose of the master's thesis is to explore how young active global citizens understand their own role in achieving a sustainable future. It is important to include the voices of youth and to better understand their lived experience with sustainability and its implications.

Who is responsible for the research project?
NTNU – Norwegian University of Science and Technology is the institution responsible for the project. The master student is Margrethe Aurora Seljenes and the Supervisor is Hilde Refstie at department of Geography.

Why are you being asked to participate?
You have been asked to participate because you have an association to organisations that promote active global citizenships, such as CISV, AFS, and UWC. This project will focus on the experience of globally engaged youth between the ages of 16 and 24 years. Around 5-10 youth from around the globe will be invited to participate.

What does participation involve for you?
If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve that you participate in an *online interview*. It will take approx. 45 minutes. The interview includes questions about your own experience with sustainable development and the future. The interview will be recorded (audio + video). After the interview you will be asked to write a *short reflection note* based on the conversation we had. This will be stored electronically. I also wish you and the other participants to meet in a *group interview* to discuss the findings of the individual interviews. This is a way to get your feedback on my interpretation, and for the group to further reflect upon the experience collectively. The group interview will also be recorded. The recordings is a way for me to make sure I remember the information and it will be deleted at the end of the project.

Participation is voluntary
Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purposes specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- Only the master student will have access to the personal data.
- Your name and contact information, as well as the recordings from the interview will be securely stored on a private NTNU server, and deleted at the end of the project.
- It will not be possible to identify you in the published master thesis. Only age and nationality will be mentioned to be able to separate the different participants from each other in the text.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?
The project is scheduled to end August 1st. At this point, all your personal data will be deleted, including contact information and digital recordings. The collected data will be anonymised in the published work.

Your rights
So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:
- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?
We will process your personal data based on your consent. Based on an agreement with NTNU – Norwegian University of Science and Technology, department of Geography, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?
If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:
- NTNU – Norwegian University of Science and Technology via Margrethe Aurora Seljenes by email margrethe.a.seljenes@ntnu.no or Supervisor Hilde Refstie by email hilde.refstie@ntnu.no or phone +47 901 03 741.
- NTNUs Data Protection Officer: Thomas Helgesen (thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no, +47 930 79 039)
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Hilde Refstie   Margrethe Aurora Seljenes
Supervisor   Student

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project *The last generation – youth and sustainability* and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- ☐ to participate in an interview with a follow up reflection note
- ☐ to participate in a group interview
- ☐ for my age and nationality to be published along with excerpts from my interviews

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. August 1st

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(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix B: Interview Guide Individual Interviews

Interview Guide

Date:

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Nationality:

Affiliation (if relevant):

Introduction

- Introduction of researcher and participant
- Explanation of how the interview will go
- Clarification of participation and confidentiality, recording, etc.
- Not interested in their political opinions and beliefs, but their civic engagement sort of speak. If you are a member of a youth party, you can simply say this, without mentioning the actual party.

Depending on what topics the participant brings up, follow up questions regarding that topic will follow. Also, questions like, could you tell me more about that etc.

Sustainable Development

- Sustainable Development, what does this mean to you?
- How do you see the future of the world?
  - How come?
- What do you see as the biggest problems in the world today?
  - In your own words, how would you describe this problem?
  - What is at stake?
- What areas of Sustainable Development are most important to you?
  - Why this area?
  - Any other area?
  -

Role of Youth

- Do you participate in any actions that addresses sustainable development?
  - If so, what is your motivation?
  - With whom do you do this?
  - If not, elaborate more on why not.
- Who else participate in this?
- How would you explain your own role in Sustainable Development?
- Do you feel you have a responsibility?
  - If yes, how would you describe it? I
  - f no, could you explain more on why not?

Participation/Agency

- How is your role the same or different as other people, such as adults, politicians, fellow youth?
- How would you describe your own influence on a sustainable future?
- Where do you feel you have most influence,
  - least influence?
- How does this make you feel?
  - What do you think about this?
- Is there someone or something that supports you?
  - Who, what, in what way?
  - Should they?
  - Do you have any strategies for making yourself feel better?

Summery and closing remarks

- What do you take with you from this conversation?
- Is there something else you would like to add?
- Any closing remarks on the topic?

- Do you know anyone else who could be interested?
- Thank you

Appendix C: Interview Guide Focus Group

Group Interview Guide

Date:

Present:

Introduction

- Introduction of researcher and participants
- Explanation of how the group interview will go
- Clarification of participation and confidentiality, recording, etc.

Summary of the preliminary findings

- [After each topic] What are your thoughts on this? Is there something you would add? Change?

Further reflections

- If climate change was the most important issue, you said we have to start there. Is there another way to look at this? For example by working on other aspects of changing people's attitudes towards climate through education. What are your thoughts on this?
- You all said something like "I am not doing that much, I wish I could do more", and then went on to list a lot of thing you did. Why do you think that is? Why doesn't it feel enough?
- Do you feel a strong sense of responsibility to save the world?
- All of you want change. What, who and how are the obstacles for this change?
- Some of you see the government as the key actors, others says money has a bigger influence, and some point out it is up the people to act. How do you see this?
- Will you be the same as your parents?
- Where do you find support? Who are the actors on your team?

- Do you think this is a cause shared by your generation? Is yes, how would you describe it? why do you think that is?

Summery and closing remarks

- How are you feeling after this conversation?
- Is there something else you would like to add?
- Thank you