

Sabine Fatima Dorani

Children and youth's civic engagement in an adult-sized world

Master's thesis in Childhood Studies

Supervisor: Linn Cathrin Lorgen

May 2023

Sabine Fatima Dorani

Children and youth´s civic engagement in an adult-sized world

Master's thesis in Childhood Studies
Supervisor: Linn Cathrin Lorgen
May 2023

Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences
Department of Education and Lifelong Learning



Abstract

This study examines how children and youth experience civic engagement within the Norwegian context. It seeks to understand how civic engagement is understood by the participants, and what facilitates and challenges their participation. By doing so, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing debate about children's participation as a process of being or/and becoming. Grounded within Childhood studies, children are recognized as social actors and childhood is seen as socially constructed. Thus, taking into account how civic engagement is constructed by children and for children. Qualitative and multi-method data collection is used to create a systematic research process. This has resulted in conducting individual interviews and the creation of a 'research bag'. The research bag consists of a variety of visual activities, giving the participants the opportunity to reflect on their civic engagement in an explorative and meaningful way. A total of five participants ranging from 12 to 18 years old, from different geographical areas in Norway, have participated within this research. Their engagement varies from taking individual action to being a member in a youth organization.

This research reveals the uniqueness of the participant's civic engagement. Civic engagement is situational and responsive to current discourses, and therefore in need to be researched continuously. Children and youth practice their citizenship inside, but also outside adult-frameworks which are often neglected and not acknowledged as acts of citizenship. Furthermore, children's social life has been impacted both positively and negatively during their civic engagement. Whilst civic engagement can enhance social support, it can also reduce it. In line with previous research on children's participation, this research reveals how children's civic engagement has been met with two conflicting signals. Children are met with both praise and critique when being civically engaged positioning them in an ambiguous area where the right to participation is sometimes not fully enjoyed.

Acknowledgment

First and foremost, I would like to express gratitude to all the participants who volunteered in this research project. Your involvement within the political sphere and devotion to raising your voice was truly inspiring. I hope you continue believing in the power your voices have.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Linn Cathrin Lorgen. Your continuous support and guidance throughout this project have been instrumental in shaping this research project. Your work ethic, patience and encouragement have been inspiring. I would also like to extend my gratitude to all the professors and staff within the master program of Childhood Studies. A special thanks to, Tatek Abebe, who helped me structure this thesis project.

To my husband, who encouraged me and supported me throughout this project. I couldn't have completed this project without your engagement, unwavering love and support.

Lastly, to my son. You have been a source of motivation to complete this project before your arrival.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.2 Problem statement	2
1.4 Research questions.....	3
1.5 Personal interest	4
1.6 Thesis outline	4
Chapter 2 Background	6
2.1 The development of late modern Norway.....	6
2.2 The Norwegian identity.....	7
2.3 Norwegian Childhood.....	9
2.4 Children ´s rights	10
2.5 Discourses on youth ´s political participation	13
2.6 Summary	14
Chapter 3 Theoretical approach	16
3.1 Childhood in social research	16
3.2 Social constructionism	17
3.3 Actor-oriented perspective.....	20
3.4 Children as citizens.....	22
3.5 Civic engagement	24
3.6 Summary	27
Chapter 4 Methodology	28
4.1 Methodological framework: designing ethical research.....	28
4.2 The role of the researcher: a reflexive analysis.....	30
4.3 The data collection phase	33
4.4 The participatory research tools.....	35
4.5 Semi-structured individual interview	40
4.6 The right to information and consent.....	42
4.7 Summary	43
Chapter 5 Analysis I: Practices of Civic Engagement	45
5.1 The participants	45
5.2 Citizenship as participation.....	46
5.3 Reasons for participation	54
5.4 Summary	61
Chapter 6 Analysis II: Implications of civic engagement	62

6.1 Social life	62
6.2 Learning through participation	66
6.3 Battling ageism	68
6.4 Summary	72
Chapter 7 Conclusion	73
7.1 Final thoughts	75
References	76
Appendices	84

List of Figures

Figure 1: Invitation information day	36
Figure 2: Research bag	37
Figure 3: Art created by the participant	57
Figure 4: Research tool 3	67

List of Tables

Table 1: Main questions and detailed questions	3
Table 2: Research phases	34
Table 3: Overview thematic analysis	42

List of Abbreviations

NSD	Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata
NTNU	The Norwegian University of Science and Technology
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child
NGO	Non-governmental organization
LNU	The Norwegian Children and Youth Council

Chapter 1 Introduction

Over the course of the years, we have seen a new wave of youth leaders who are actively involved in shaping and constructing modern society. Youth are now more than ever voicing themselves about matters that are affecting them, locally and globally, in countries such as Norway. Children and youth are continuously rising up against the social and political structures that have been embedded in society and want to take an active lead in co-determining and reshaping these structures. Motivated by different reasons, youth are prompted to be engaged in influencing government policies as well as promoting collective action (Lochocki, 2010). The increasing eagerness of youth, together with the plethora of opportunities provided by governments and municipalities, have given rise to a generation of youth practicing civic engagement. This study seeks to explore children and youth's experiences during civic engagement and how they give meaning to their involvement in civic engagement.

Children and youth's participation is not a new concept and has been widely acknowledged since the 1970s (Kjørholt, 2002). Youth and adults are invested in developing a better living standard, where all children are entitled to protection, provision, and participation rights. However, it was not until the late 80s that children gradually became right bearers of international laws (Liebel & Saadi, 2012). The convention on the right of the child (UNCRC, 1989), which was ratified by Norway in 1991, gave children the right to participate in decisions affecting them. Children's participation has since then been important in many local communities in Norway (Kjørholt, 2002). Using these rights, children and youth are continuously seeking for sustainable solutions for matters affecting themselves, peers, and future generations. Whilst participation among children and youth is not a new concept, patterns of civic engagements have changed (Lochocki, 2010).

From a young age, children in Norway are encountered with models of democracy. Democratic practices are embedded within the Norwegian school curricula to familiarize children with decision-making processes through student-councils (Børhaug, 2007). Furthermore, children's right to participation has been enshrined in many citizen's projects and municipalities (Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006). A noteworthy project was the Save The Children project where children from fifth till tenth grade participated in the Norwegian parliamentary election that started in 2017 and still continuous. In 2021, almost 70.000 children participated in this mock trial and used their voice as righteous citizens (Barna, 2021). The project was used as a prominent tool to make children and youth experience democracy and to practice how to become rightful citizens (Lorgen & Ursin, 2021). Whilst this democratic encounter was adult-initiated, children and youth have shown interest in democratic practices outside fixed frameworks and curricula as well. In 2018, 1.6 million students worldwide joined Greta Thunberg in the climate movement and protested against climate change (Jung, Petkanic, Nan, & Kim, 2020). In Trøndelag, a municipality in Norway, 3000 students protested which resulted in fruitful collaborations between youth and the Trøndelag country council. Children were invited to express their visions about a more sustainable future – recognizing children's agency (Ursin et al., 2021). Whilst children and youth are becoming more and more visible within the political sphere and decision making process in Norway, their position remains uncertain (Lorgen & Ursin, 2021). Furthermore, youth participation continues to be

described as tokenistic creating little to no empowerment for youth (Bessant, 2004; Nylund, 2020; Thomas, 2007). It is therefore important to develop further on the body of literature on children and youth's participation in the political sphere to examine civic engagement from youth's perspectives. The main focus in this study is to highlight how youth, individually and collectively, use their voice to shape modern society to become more visible in the political sphere in Norway. By focusing on children and youth's perspective, this study will develop an insight in how they experience civic engagement and the importance of it in their everyday life.

1.2 Problem statement

In Norway, there has been a rapid growth of participatory engagement, with a focus on public decision-making activities. Multiple studies have explored the development of youth participation in public decision making, youth organizations and community. However, there is an evident need for participatory research that will identify children and youth's unique experience during their time of participation (Gallagher, Hinton, Tisdall, & Elsley, 2008; Shier, 2001; Sinclair, 2004; Thomas, 2007). A recent study showed that an adult-initiated project aimed at promoting and educating the future responsible citizens and neglected the political participation aspect (Lorgen & Ursin, 2021). Thus, while children's voices are being promoted as valuable, it is fueled with notions of incompetency and not-ready-yet. Furthermore, the recent concluding observations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2008) reported to strengthen the implementation of article 12 to make participation more meaningful and accessible in youth councils in all municipalities. Moosa-Mitha (2005, p. 381) argues that children's participation and agency is often neglected because of 'adultist' assumptions. Children's participation and interactions that are perceived as different are often overlooked and neglected by adults. Moreover, Kjörholt (2008) argues that much research and literature on children's participation focusses on the normative assumptions and neglects children's experiences. According to Kjörholt (2008) there is an evident need for empirical research on how children's right to participate impact children and youth in local and cultural contexts.

The concept of participation has often been criticized as being ambiguous and Theis (2009, p. 344) calls it an 'empty vessel' that can be filled with anything. According to Theis (2009), children within the political sphere are regarded as technical actors and not as political actors. Thus, children are in the position to provide meaningful information but are often excluded when decisions are made. He also questions the single event projects that give a stage for children for a fleeting moment and proposes a more structural mechanism that ensure a long-term approach (Theis, 2009).

Indeed there is a tension between seeing children as competent social actors, and protecting children's needs and best interest when including children and youth in the political sphere (Lorgen & Ursin, 2021; Wyness, Harrison, & Buchanan, 2004). By exploring children's perspective on what they experience as important and believe is in their best interest, this research aims to examine this tension from children's perspectives. It seeks to develop a nuanced understanding of youth's social realities and experiences while being civically engaged. Civic engagement within the context of this research encompasses everything from developing knowledge, sharing skills, and taking action to create a change within the community (Lochocki, 2010).

1.3 Research design

The current research project aim is to explore how children and youth experience civic engagement and the importance of it in their everyday life. Moreover, it tries to understand the benefits and challenging aspects of children and youth's participation within the political sphere. By doing so, it provides the participants with a voice within the literature, worthy of being heard in their own right. Answering these questions will give a better understanding of youth's social, political orientation and how they give meaning to their citizenship rights. Children are acknowledged as social competent actors and this research draws inspiration from social constructionism theory and the actor-oriented perspective. By doing so, this research attempts to grasp how childhood is constructed for and by children (Prout & James, 2015). Qualitative data collection will be used to create a nuanced and a systematic research process. It does so by adapting right-based, child-centered participatory methods. A mix of traditional and participatory techniques are used to make children's voices visible within this research. Through a right-based, and using participatory tools, their position as social actors and as right-bearers are acknowledged and respected. A total of five participants – age 12 to 18 - from different geographical areas have participated within this research. The participants are all engaged within the political sphere in different manners. Their engagement ranges from taking individual action to being part of youth councils and political organizations. Within this project, the terms children and youth are both used. The terms children and childhood are used as everyone below the age of 18 is referred to as a child within the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Children (1989). The term youth within this respect, is acknowledged as a phase characterized: 'by a diversity of beliefs, values, worldviews and expectations about the future, as well as differing senses of agency and responsibility' (O'Brien, Selboe, & Hayward, 2018).

1.4 Research questions

The research project's main objective is to find out how the participants experience their involvement within the political sphere. Answering the following two research questions will give a better understanding of children's social and political orientation. The two main questions, together with the more detailed questions are highlighted below:

Table 1: Main questions and detailed questions

1. How do children and youth describe their involvement in civic engagement?

- What does civic engagement mean to the participants?
- What are the reasons for civic engagement?
- How do the participants see their role in society?
- What do the participants consider as their responsibility in their community?

2. What role does civic engagement play in children and youth's everyday life?

- How does civic engagement shape their day-to-day life?
- What are some valuable lessons - challenges and opportunities - they have learned from their civic engagement?
- What hinders or facilitate their participation within the community?

1.5 Personal interest

The MPhil Childhood Studies program at NTNU has given me new insights and perspectives on children and youth. In my professional career as a middle school teacher, my ontological view was dominated by development psychology, driven by Piaget's and Vygotsky's developmental thinking. However, Childhood studies offers a new way of thinking about children and youth. It attempts to give a voice to children and regards them as social actors and not just as receptacles of adults teaching. This had a significant influence on my teaching practice and has resulted in genuinely seeing what children are capable of, giving children space to create an understanding rather than pouring knowledge in them. Subsequently, this changed my view on participation and made me critically aware that participation does not have a universal meaning across the world. Reflecting on my time as a child and youth, I was surrounded by two different concepts of participation. Growing up in an Afghan household, I saw images of hardship that children, especially girls, in Afghanistan experience and still do. Simultaneously, I was privileged to experience the other side of participation as well in the Netherlands where children's participation had an entirely different meaning. Seeing these two totally different ways of children raising their voice made me value both practices, and acknowledge how social, historical, and economic factors shape a child's agency and everyday life practices. Regardless of hardship, social or historical factors, children participate in a manner that they find feasible and are active citizens within the society in their own unique way. I have noticed how difficult it can be for young people to be taken seriously and to have their voices heard in conversations and decision-making processes that affect their lives. This inspired me to study children who notice or suffer injustice and are committed to give up their spare time to stand up and to be heard. Even though they are aware of their marginalized position within the society. I was intrigued in exploring children and youth's voice in situations where they want to raise their voice and be heard, driven by intrinsic motivation. I believe that young people have unique perspectives and experiences that can be valuable in shaping social and political change. Through researching children's activism and civic engagement, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of the role that young people can play in shaping the world around them and to support efforts to promote their rights and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes.

1.6 Thesis outline

The thesis includes the following chapters:

Chapter 1 introduces the research project, highlighting the research statement, personal motivation, research purpose and the research objectives.

Chapter 2 provides the background context in which this research is situated. It focusses on the historical, social, and cultural forces that children and youth in Norway are situated. It briefly presents the emergence of the Norwegian identity and how this has influenced the Norwegian childhood. Furthermore, it contextualized the implementation of children's right in Norway and children's rights practices.

Chapter 3 positions this research project within the theoretical framework. It highlights the epistemological viewpoint and concepts that are used in this research project. This research applies the foundational principles of childhood studies that acknowledges children as social actors and childhood as socially constructed. Important concepts such as citizenship and civic engagement are highlighted and analyzed as well.

Chapter 4 provides the methodological approach that has been used to acquire knowledge. It provides an in-depth explanation of the design of the methods and the data collection stage. The traditional and participatory tools, together with the strengths and limitations of each method is reflected on. The pitfalls, potentials and ethical considerations that shaped the quality of this research are highlighted as well.

Chapter 5 presents the empirical results obtained through interviews and participatory research tools. This chapter discusses and analyzes the first research question: *How do youth describe their involvement in civic engagement?* It will present participants' practices of civic engagement fostering their right to citizenship. Subsequently, it will investigate the reason behind their involvement within the political sphere.

Chapter 6 presents the empirical results for the second research question: *What role does civic engagement play in children and youth's everyday life.* This chapter presents the implications civic engagement has on the participant's social life, what opportunities it provides and what obstacles they encounter.

Chapter 7 is the final chapter in which concluding remarks are made and further implications are addressed. The strengths and limitations will be highlighted as well.

Chapter 2 Background

Children and youth are according to childhood studies not seen as a universal category, but rather shaped by historical, social, and political structures within a society. How children and youth are constructed within a specific society is strongly connected to historical circumstances that has shaped the discourses around children and youth that are in place today (Ansell, 2016; Jenks, 2004b). Within the Norwegian context, the development of the Norwegian welfare state has been an important factor for children and youth to grow up in an egalitarian society with ample of opportunities. Although, children and youth shape the society as well, they are born in manifested economic, social, and cultural circumstances (Qvortrup, 2017). It is therefore important to critically examine the Norwegian identity that shapes children´s everyday lives. Hence, this chapter focusses on the historical, social, cultural, and political forces that shape Norwegian childhoods.

2.1 The development of late modern Norway

This research project is situated in the Nordic country Norway. With less than 6 million inhabitants, Norway is a country with a relatively small population. Stretching along the Atlantic Ocean, characterized by its many fjords and mountains, Norway has been an attracting site for both tourists and migrants. With a public funded education system and a strong safety net, this strong welfare state is considered as one of the most equal societies providing an equal safety net for all (Friberg, 2021). Norway was seen as an ethnically homogenous country and is often referred to as an egalitarian country (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2008). However, during the 1970s an increase in immigrants and refugees shifted Norway from a homogenous country to modern pluralism (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2008; Vassenden, 2010). Norway´s geographical name dates back to the 9th century, yet it wasn´t until 1814 that Norway established its own democratic constitution, and the discourse of nationhood came into existence. Until 1905, Norway was in a union first with Denmark and then with Sweden. After 500 years, Norway was seen as an independent state focusing on rapid industrialization and capitalization (Fasting & Sorensen, 2021). It was considered as a poor, developing country until the industrial revolution gradually emerged in Norway in the 1850s. With a low population density and a low production and consumption per capita, timber and fisheries were back then the only well-established export trade (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2008). The turning point in the era of industrialization occurred when the Norwegian textile industry and ship building industry emerged. In the early twentieth century, Norway shifted its traditional export activities from being a raw material supplier to manufacturing finished goods (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2008). During the second half of the nineteenth century, Norway reached an extraordinary peak in economic growth and prosperity. The industrial development doubled the average income and led to more consumerism. In 1969, Norway experienced another unprecedented peak when large amount of natural gas and petroleum were discovered, accelerating Norwegian economic development to a new high. Citizens were and are still enjoying one of the highest quality of life (Eriksen, 1993). In the nineteenth century, the structural change in economic activities went parallel with change in societal structures. There was a growing interest in a strong welfare state and local governments enlarged its services for the public. The idea that it is the state´s responsibility to look after the citizens providing them with services and resources was becoming a common though (Fasting & Sorensen, 2021). To this day, Norway is seen as a strong welfare state with equal rights and opportunities for all

citizens (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2008). Egalitarianism with a touch of individualism is a term that describes the Norwegian identity as we see today – as explained below. Moreover, it has been the framework in the Norwegian education and upbringing of children and youth to teach them the shared national culture and more importantly – the Norwegian identity (Eriksen, 1993; Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2004). The economic prosperity since the early nineteenth century, the strong welfare state and the demographic changes has contributed to the Norwegian identity as we know it today.

2.2 The Norwegian identity

The development of Norwegian nationalism and nationhood have a relatively short history, dating back to the beginning of the 19th century (Eriksen, 1993; Vassenden, 2010). According to Eriksen (1993), Norwegian nationalism distinguished itself from other European countries preferring the countryside life and the simple life over urban life and military pride. The most educated and elite people from the urban cities travelled to the urban side seeking for Norwegian characteristics. This gradually symbolized the Norwegian nationalism, creating a distinctive nationhood (Eriksen, 1993; Vassenden, 2010). Eriksen (1993) highlights that nationalism and nationhood are both cultural traits created by nationalists and that the notion of nationhood is constantly changing in new forms. Labelled as an egalitarian individualistic nation, Norwegians valued and still value their privacy, equality, and integrity. The concept of equality is often described as *likhet* in Norwegian, which means both similarity and equality (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2008). The concept of *likhet* has prompted many debates and according to Gullestad (2002), this concept could have contradictory meaning and therefore one should distinguish between the different meanings. On one hand, the word *likhet* could propose an egalitarian society with little to no inequalities within social, economic, and political areas. On the other hand, the word *likhet* could undermine the increasing ethnic pluralism, excluding cultural pluralism. An example of the latter could be found in the past cultural standardization regime against the ethnic minority group – the Sámi people (Eriksen, 1993; Maagerø & Simonsen, 2008). Being considered Norwegian back then meant having roots in the ‘Caucasian Race’ (Kyllingstad, 2017). In order to prevail the Norwegian nationalism and a homogenous nation, a strict assimilation policy was introduced in the 1950s century where everyone needed to be identified as ‘Norwegian’ (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2008, p. 181). This form of measurement was later found again in the late 1970s when a new wave of ethnic minorities, this time from outside Norway, set foot in Norway (Kyllingstad, 2017). As per 2022, 15,1 percent of the Norwegian population has an immigrant background and half of these immigrants are from a ‘non-white’ race (SSB, 2022). These two major demographic shifts within the Norwegian society have shaped the Norwegian identity as we know it today through process of identity formation (Friberg, 2021). According to Jenkins (2008, cited in Friberg, 2021), identity formation is a process shaped by external categorization and internal self-identification. The Norwegian identity has been scrutinized by many scholars to grasp what *Norwegianness* in the modern society means, not only to ethnic Norwegians, but to ethnic minorities as well. In this respect, the concept of *Norwegianness* has influenced the children’s everyday life and their engagement in civic engagement as described later.

2.2.1 Collective individualism

One aspect of *Norwegianness* is about having a shared sense of national identity. A shared sense of national identity is a requisite for social cohesion and solidarity within a

society, especially within an egalitarian welfare state (Friberg, 2021). Gullestad (2002) refers to this as 'imagined sameness'. This concept implies a sense of feeling the same to prevail the equal value. According to Gullestad (2002), this type of 'identity' or 'sameness' is rather imaged and not observed. The sense of sameness within the Norwegian society can be connected to the concept of collective individualism. Both equality and the individual integrity are highly valued within the Norwegian egalitarian welfare state. Thus, the state has the responsibility to arrange a stable safety net for its citizens, whilst the citizens are actively engaged in the society. Whilst, Norwegians often value their privacy, independency and rural identity, the term collective individualism highlights the collective value of shared responsibility between the state and the individual (Bakke, 2021). The notion of work is therefore central, benefitting the individual and the society. Grounded in the egalitarian belief, all forms of work are regarded as equally important (Bakke, 2021). Adding the egalitarian belief, collective individualism has set the foundation for an extraordinary social trust that is embedded in the Norwegian identity.

2.2.2 Social trust

Since the Norwegian constitution was established in 1814, Norway gradually established its stable democratic system with a strong welfare state forming the crux (OECD, 2022). Over the decades, Norway has been reporting high levels of trust, both social and institutional. According to a 2022 report from the OECD, Norway has scored well above the average when it comes to trusting the government (2022). Norwegians have considered public institutions as trustworthy and reliable and have continuously trust them since the 1960s (Miller & Listhaug, 1998, cited in OECD, 2022). Trust in this report has been defined as 'a person's belief that another person or institution will act consistent with their expectations of positive behavior' (OECD, 2022, p. 15). This form of trust is grounded in values such as high levels of social cohesion, the early development of literacy, and the local welfare system (OECD, 2022). Thus, the high levels of integrity, a strong welfare state and good economic conditions has led to high institutional trust in Norway. Another yet important finding from the report is that low levels of trust are mainly found among younger and older cohorts, within remote regions, and among people with lower levels of income and education (OECD, 2022). Ivarsflaten and Strømsnes (2013) has similar findings regarding social trust. They highlight that people have low level of social trust in communities with more economic inequality. Another aspect that could influence social trust among citizens is ethnic diversity. According to Putnam (2007, in Ivarsflaten & Strømsnes, 2013), this could reduce the social trust within a society due to a lower level of social capital. Social capital in this respect, encompasses social networks and resources obtained through social relationships. Social capital is an important driver in people's well-being and having trust of others (Morrow, 2001). Nonetheless, Norwegians have reported generally high level of trust in each other with about 60% of people reported that they believe in trusting people (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). This could lead to a positive view on democratic institutions and more active participation in civic organizations (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). The OECD report highlighted that public trust increased during the novel COVID-19 crisis in 2020. Thus, Norwegian people tend to support the government in time of crisis more than usual. Norwegian people were less likely to break restrictions and more likely to comply with measures and restrictions compared to other countries (OECD, 2022). However, there are several challenges that could potentially harm the public trust in the future. The decrease in active labor force, aging population, rising costs in healthcare and pension are examples of potential challenges (OECD, 2022).

Rothstein and Uslaner (2005) argue that social trust is caused by both economic equality and equality in opportunity. Both interrelated aspects could be found within the Norwegian society providing a great foundation for social solidarity among Norwegian citizens.

2.3 Norwegian Childhood

During the 1980s, children started to become more equal and independent within the family structure as well as within the society (Gullestad, 1997). As part of child rearing practices, Norwegian parents teach their children to adopt democratic values such as independency and responsibility (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2008). Parents aim to pass on core values to develop reflectivity and social awareness; to be their own individual yet be aware of their surroundings (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2008). A perfect example of the Norwegian core value is the individual egalitarianism. Children are expected to solve their own conflict with other children, teaching them the notion of independence (Gullestad, 1997). However, these modern ideas about child rearing practices – focusing on independence and play – came into existence after the industrialization period. Children´s play became more valued and children´s work was disappearing drawing a sharper boundary between childhood and adulthood (Gullestad, 1997). Norway was one of the first countries that introduced free education for everyone, and children´s lives became more homogenized and structured. Children all over the country started to have similar daily activities defined by schools, home and after school activities (Maagerø & Simonsen, 2008). This institutionalization starts at a very young age when children start to go to day-care. Norwegian day-cares are providing care, play, social and linguistic awareness. It is a setting for children to create and challenge children´s culture, facilitating a place for children to be social actors (Nilsen, 2008).

The nature and the outdoor have been of high value, and there is an increase in nature day-care. Thus, there is a great emphasis on nature, developing a sense of interconnectedness with nature (Nilsen, 2008). Children in Norway are associated with freedom, rough play and with the outside (Gullestad, 1997; Kjørholt, 2008; Nilsen, 2008). This central focus on nature throughout children´s lives is not just to teach children the value of nature and the benefits of being in close contact with nature. It is also a way to continue the cultural reproduction process and to teach children the national culture and identity (Nilsen, 2008). However, it is worth mentioning that sustaining the outdoor life has become more challenging the past decades. One reason is the change in family structures. Women´s position in the household and public sphere has drastically changed from being a full-time care provider at home to a working position (Gullestad, 1997). The full-time working parents enroll their children earlier in kindergartens and children are less free to move around on their own in their local communities. Rather than outside, children are more institutionalized and staying inside after school engaging with electronic games and television. Neighborhoods are considered less safe due to traffic, crime and less attractive due to urbanization. According to Gullestad (1997), children are not only institutionalized in the past decades but children are encouraged to be more independent. Thus, children are encouraged to participate independently within families and in society – becoming an active agent. This discourse of children and participation has been a core value in the upbringing of children in Norway since the 1970s. It has changed the way children are conceptualized and their position in society, giving them influence in society and positioning them as competent human beings (Kjørholt, 2002). To exemplify, a common practice in Norwegian kindergarten is the morning child meeting where children decide what they

want to do during the first part of the day. In this way, children are encouraged to exercise their right to be heard from a very young age in kindergarten (Kjørholt, 2008). Although, children and youth are afforded several rights, such as the right to participation, scholars have argued that careful attention is needed in order to empower children in their own best interest (Gullestad, 1997). Many projects have been initiated to empower children aimed at giving them a voice in schools, homes and on a political level. These projects emerged gradually after the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (Kjørholt, 2002). Nilsen (2008) highlights that the discourse on children's rights has impacted the character traits and how we conceptualized children and childhood in contemporary days. In this respect, this project seeks to understand how the discourse on children's rights has influenced children's forms of civic engagement.

2.4 Children's rights

According to Freeman (2007), rights are fundamental in children's lives as it recognizes children as rights bearers. Those with rights can exercise agency and thus participate in decision-making processes. They have the ability to negotiate, alter and shift social assumptions and constraints (Freeman, 2007). Although most of the rights for children were mirrored in previous declarations, such as the 1948 UN declaration and the Geneva declaration of Human Rights, some argued for a separate declaration for children to strengthen their position in society and to extend their scope of activity (Hart, 1991). Subsequently, the 54 articles in the UNCRC dedicated to children is legally binding which makes it not only politically and morally powerful but also legally (Sandberg, 2015).

The UN Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) appeared in a historical context where there was a lot of emphasis on new ways of seeing and theorizing children and childhood. The new perspectives on children and childhood emerged in the 1970s – 80s led by several movements that promoted children's rights (Liebel, 2012b). Children were seen as competent social actors and right-bearers. The UNCRC was introduced in 1989 after a decade of several readings, drafting and establishing consensus among member states and NGO's was finalized (Quennerstedt, Robinson, & I'Anson, 2018).

The UNCRC could be interpreted in several ways and the most common way is to divide it in different areas or guiding principles. The rights in the convention are also often described as the three p's, include *provision*, *protection* and *participation* (Hanson, 2012; Liebel, 2012a). Children's rights have been conceptualized by many scholars since the implementation and is still highly scrutinized within multiple disciplinary studies. It is an enigmatic concept that is socially constructed and experienced differently across the globe. Liebel (2012a) argues that rights need to be reflected in cultural and political structures before children can embrace these rights. For children to use their right to their utmost potential, the living situation of children must be identified and contextualized. Others argue that that the rights have a western notion in nature which makes the implementation of these rights difficult in other cultures (Abebe & Tefera, 2014). Hanson and Nieuwenhuys (2013) therefore suggest seeing rights as living rights. They argue that children's rights cannot be limited to universal codifications and children's rights become meaningful through social practices. Whilst the UNCRC has been implemented within legal frameworks and dominating international children's policies, it is fueled with many limitations, tensions, and inconsistencies (Abebe & Tefera, 2014; Liebel, 2012a; Quennerstedt et al., 2018). These inconsistencies and tensions were visible during the early stages of the drafting process. Quennerstedt (2018) argues

that without a level of flexibility and 'vagueness' in language, it would have led to a failed declaration for children's right. An example could be found in the examination of article 3 'the best interest of the child', which acknowledges that every decision made should respect and regard the best interest of the child (Sandberg, 2015). Whilst there were some arguments about the potential vagueness and danger in the interpretation of this subjective article, a clear consensus on the meaning of this article was never debated (Alston, 1994 cited in, Quennerstedt et al., 2018). As a result, the principle 'the best interest of the child' continues to be a complex principle conflicting with other articles and discourses such as the right to education or participation (Boyden, 1997; Kjørholt, 2008). According to Liebel (2012a), how this principle is implemented highly depends on how it is put into practice by the assigned authority. Secondly, civil, and political rights, such as freedom of expression, were initially neglected and resisted. Some state parties argued that these rights are not important to children and children lack a level of development to exercise these rights. Whilst these rights have been included in the last year of drafting, two major standpoints that added restrictions to these rights are still visible (Quennerstedt et al., 2018, p. 45):

1. Children have civil and political rights, but the convention must express how these should be balanced against the rights of parents.
2. Children have civil and political rights, but the convention must express how these need to be adapted to children's evolving capacities.

These two standpoints had major implication on allowing children practicing their civil and political rights in the following decades. It created inconsistencies and room for interpretation of most principles. To exemplify, children who practice their right to participation in empirical research are constrained by ethical research practices. Although children are seen as competent actors, they still have to gain consent from parent or guardians (Skelton, 2008). Hence, practicing this civil right can be experienced as challenging. This could have major implications in research like this that values children's civil rights. Children's rights are therefore by many seen as a benchmark and as a starting point rather than a finished product (Freeman, 2007; Quennerstedt et al., 2018). Subsequently, it has also opened a stage for many scholars to conceptualize children's rights within different standpoints. There is a clear contrast between those who favor the 'liberationist' principles and the 'caretaker' principles. The liberationist movement, acknowledged and promoted by Farson & Holt (2014), proposes to see children and adults as equals. To give an example, Farson and Holt, both argue that children should have the right to vote, and competency should not be correlated with age, as some adults might be incapable to make informed decisions as well. On the other hand, the caretaker thesis proposes arguments against self-determination rights for children (Archard, 2014). Caretakers are in the position to make decision for them as children are prone to make irrational decisions and are not yet fully developed. However, many scholars reject the idea of seeing these two ideologies as a dichotomy and acknowledge both approaches in a balanced manner (Hanson, 2012). Hanson (2012, p. 73) argues for a more nuanced yet a broader range of approaches and suggest four 'schools of thought' as a heuristic tool to provide a starting point for reflection and analysis of how children and rights are viewed by different actors. These schools of thought range from paternalism where children are seen as becoming and in need for only special rights to protection, to liberation where children are seen competent and equal to adults. The welfare approach comes after paternalism and sees children as both becoming and being. Hanson (2012) describes UNICEF as adhering to this approach. The aim is to meet children's protection rights first before expanding the participation rights.

Similar to the welfare approach, the emancipation perspective sees children as both becoming and being, but the focus is reversed. Within this approach, children are seen as competent unless it is proven differently. Thus, children's participation rights are at the forefront (Hanson, 2012). The school of thought is an analytical framework to study children's position in rights. Critically looking at your standpoint as a researcher has implications for how research is conducted. Within this current research, children's rights are viewed from the emancipation approach. Children are seen as competent human beings, who possess equal rights yet acknowledges the need for special rights in certain circumstances (Hanson, 2012).

2.4.1 Right to participate.

Children's right to be heard is one of the guiding principles that ought to be considered in all 54 articles within the convention. The right to be heard is anchored in article 12 and 13 that are both guidelines for interpreting the right to participate. Article 12 ensures that children can express their views freely in all matters affecting them (Shier, 2001). Opportunities should be provided for children to do so. Article 13 ensures that children have the right to express their opinion. The right to participate is widely acknowledged within the Children Act, the Welfare Act, schools and daycare programs, and an extra provision was introduced during the 2014 constitutional reform in Norway to strengthen its position (Nylund, 2020; Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006). In Norway, children must be given the opportunity to be heard from the age of seven on decisions affecting them. From the age of 15, they have the right to make decisions regarding education, religion and politics (Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006).

Participation has been associated with multiple meanings. Some argue that the term lacks clarity as it is widely used (Lansdown, 2009). Participation could be both on a collective and individual level (Thomas, 2007). It could also be an outcome or a process in itself. It could be involvement in decision making or in mere activities such as games, cultural activities, and conversations. Like other principles, the right to participate and the right to be heard have been based on several discourses over the last decades. Since the emergence and the implementation of the UNCRC, regional and local authorities have developed several projects enabling children and youth to practice this right (Kjørholt, 2002). Most projects were aimed at giving children and youth a voice on a local level in schools and organizations (Kjørholt, 2002). However, children's right to be heard and participate was not only used to empower them but also a way to construct socialization. Children were seen as a resource for the local community to strengthen and promote the local communities. Thus, a discourse that was not focused on participation rights but to continue and strengthen local communities (Kjørholt, 2002). Skivenes and Strandbu (2006) have argued for a better child's perspective to create a better understanding of children's opinion rather than just letting them participate in activities. This child's perspective is based on four general procedures that ensure children have the opportunity to form a meaning, to express themselves, to be taken seriously and to be informed when a decision is made (Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006). However, recent research still shows that participations rights are still instrumental in nature (Nylund, 2020). Whilst youth are more and more involved in decision-making activities and organizations such as youth councils, they have no power to make a binding decision (Nylund, 2020). In addition, the right to be heard is still understood as an individual right. Under the constitutional right, authorities are not obliged to hear children as a group, making it an instrumental right in collective matters (Nylund, 2020).

Although, Norway tends to be a leading nation promoting children's right to participation, there are many blind spots (Nylund, 2020; Søvig, 2019). However, there is still a high level of participation in voluntary organizations (Ødegård & Berglund, 2008). The periodic follow up report to the UN committee (2016) shows that 65% of youth between 13 – 15 participate in organizations with some of them participating in political decision-making organizations.

2.5 Discourses on youth's political participation

One way to measure political participation is through voting. Everyone below the age of 18 is considered a child under the UNCRC and in most countries this category is eliminated from their political voting rights (Nylund, 2020). However, as described earlier, Norway has attempted to acknowledge children's voting rights, and participation through several projects over the past decades. One of a prominent project was initiated by Redd Barna since 2017. With this project, children 5th till 10th grade were given the opportunity to cast a vote during the parliamentary election in Norway (Redd Barna, 2021; Lorgen & Ursin, 2021). Although children's vote was limited to a mock vote, the aim was to promote children's right to be heard and to educate children about democracy (Redd Barna, 2021). Another attempt to give children access to political voting rights was initiated in 2015 during the municipal elections where the voting age was lowered to 16 years in a trial scheme. Although the voting has not been permanently lowered, the ombudsman argued to lower the voting age permanently as this might foster youth's sense of responsibility within societal decisions (Nylund, 2020).

Granting youth political voting rights has been advocated by many scholars. A prominent argument against giving children political rights is based on capacity. Children are depicted as lacking knowledge to vote and therefore it might harm the child voting against their own best interest (Wall, 2014). Another argument is that children are easily influenced by adults and therefore do not have the capacity to vote independently (Wall, 2014). Whilst Wall (2014) advocates for voting rights for children and proposes to grant children proxy voting right at birth, Lochocki (2010) highlights that children and youth seem less interested in traditional forms of political participation such as voting. New forms of civic engagement are more and more attractive to children and youth nowadays. Among these forms of engagement are voluntary work, informal political actions, awareness-raising, altruistic acts and general social participation (Lochocki, 2010). Indeed Norris (2004) does argue that these are not two fixed distinctions and *cause-oriented* practices have roots within the *traditional-oriented* participation. Youth are more invested in immediate and goal-oriented ways of participation (Lochocki, 2010). Youth are mostly invested in these forms of participation, especially in protests activities (Ødegård & Berglund, 2008). Children and youth are also participating in different political activities rooted in youth organizations, environmental organizations, human rights organizations, and voluntary group community.

These different forms of participation can all be positioned within the model of participation, proposed by Shier (2001). Inspired by Hart's level of participation, Shier proposes five levels of participation. Shier (2001) argues that this model acknowledges that children make decisions independently of adults all the time. On the first level, children are being listened to only when the child initiates and decides to express a view. On the second level, children are supported to express their views. Children are provided with the right tools and opportunity to voice themselves. However, on level three, children are not only expressing themselves, but their views also have to be taken into

account as well. This level of participation is translated in article 12 in the UNCR. In order to endorse the UNCR article 12, children must be participating at least on level 3 (Shier, 2001). Level four goes a little bit further and involve children in decision-making processes. This level of participation is required by the Norwegian government (Regjeringen, 2021). Within this level, children are joining the decision-making processes, yet adults are still in charge of sharing the amount of power with children. Sharing power and responsibility occurs on level five. This model can support and enhance children's participation in especially traditional participation, where children participate in voluntary organizations.

2.5.1 Traditional participation vs. Cause-oriented participation

As mentioned earlier, children and youth's participation is seen as pivotal within the Norwegian society. All children and youth have the right to participate in planning and decision-making processes primarily within their municipalities (Regjeringen, 2021). Youth organizations provides the Ministry with insight in child and youth policy issues which makes it an important party in securing children's rights to be heard. The Ministry is responsible to provide support and grants to facilitate and encourage youth participation (Regjeringen, 2021). One of the organizations that works in a tight relation with the Ministry is LNU¹. LNU is considered as an umbrella organization that provides insight for politicians, securing good conditions and funding for youth organizations all over Norway. Their main goal is, among others, to secure children and youth are heard in all decision-making processes that they are concerned with, that their expertise is recognized and they can access relevant information (LNU). However, studies have highlighted that fewer youth are eager to commit to traditional political participation. 57% of youth prefer new forms of civic participation while 34% participate in formal political organizations (Ødegård & Berglund, 2008). This is mainly due to the low-threshold activities that are connected to what Norris (2004) call cause-oriented activities. Cause-oriented activities focus is to target a specific issue and use a mix of strategies to demonstrate your standpoint (Norris, 2004). Cause-oriented activities have a greater impact on not only government and parliament, but are also targeted towards different sectors within the public, private and nonprofit organizations (Norris, 2004). Another aspect that influences children and youth political participation is the cultural resources children and youth already possess. Familial cultural resources have a greater influence on cause-oriented activities than on traditional activities. The pattern of political engagement is also influenced by the construction of self-identity (Ødegård & Berglund, 2008).

2.6 Summary

This chapter presented the background for the current study and identified a variety of cultural, historical, and geographical factors that influenced the context that participants experience everyday life. As discussed, Norway is a relatively homogeneous country with a high value on egalitarianism, social welfare, and individual freedom. The strong sense on national pride and the connection with the natural landscape have characterized the Norwegian childhood with an emphasis on outdoor play and independency. Children are raised to participate within the family and community to develop a strong sense of community and a shared commitment to social justice and equality. Multiple channels are in place to teach children levels

¹ The Norwegian Children and Youth council

of democracy and to enhance their participation within several relational spaces, such as family, school, and community.

Chapter 3 Theoretical approach

This research project is positioned within childhood studies, also referred to as the social studies of children and childhood. This is an interdisciplinary research tradition acknowledging different theoretical perspectives. Prout and James (2015, p. 11) argue that different theories produce different childhoods, which are all 'real' within the context of such a theory. This chapter will therefore present and discuss the theoretical basis that has shaped the approach of this research project. Within this research project, childhood is depicted as socially and culturally constructed respecting the plurality in childhood(s). It acknowledges ideas, understandings, images of children and childhoods that are circulating in society and changing through time and place. I therefore draw on social constructionism perspective, which is introduced and critically discussed in this chapter. In addition, this research aims to understand children as social and competent human beings. The actor-oriented perspective will therefore be discussed to acknowledge children's knowledge, agency, culture, and identity formation. When combining social constructionism and an actor-oriented perspective, this research attempts to grasp how childhood is constructed for children and constructed by children (Prout & James, 2015). Subsequently, the concepts of citizenship and civic engagement will be discussed in relation to this study. Firstly, how children and childhood are researched within childhood studies will be presented.

3.1 Childhood in social research

Many scholars have attempted to conceptualize the enigmatic concepts of children and childhood. Different ideas about children and childhood have resulted in several epistemological shifts in the past years. The idea that children are passive human beings and projects shaped by adults and society was widely accepted within the research field until the 1970s (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008). These ideas were mainly based on three dominant themes (Prout & James, 2015). Developmental psychology created the backdrop for the first concept which is *naturalness*. Within developmental psychology, childhood is perceived as a universal state of 'not yet being' (Jenks, 1982; Martin Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). Children's development was seen as natural growth, developing from irrational to rational human beings. *Rationality* is the second concept that dominated in that period. Children were seen as irrational and only become rational, 'sophisticated' human beings as they mature through time. Both rationality and naturalness were driven by the third concept which is *universality*. Childhood was seen as singular, and children were all developing through a specific order that will eventually lead to a rational, competent adult (Prout & James, 2015). This way of conceptualizing children influenced the depiction of children in scientific research during that time. These three dominant concepts were not only the framework in developmental psychology but were also prominent within the socialization theory (Prout & James, 2015). There was this idea of role expectation where every individual should be adapting the norms and values of the society (Gallacher & Kehily, 2013; Prout & James, 2015). In other words, childhood was seen as a socialization period where children are learning the potentials of becoming participants of the complex adult life. It was argued that children were ignorant of social values, and they have to internalize adults directions in order to become socially compatible adults (Gallacher & Kehily, 2013; Prout & James, 2015).

Both theories represented future-oriented view on children as described above. However, by the 1980s, the mainstream approaches such as developmental psychology and socialization theory were gradually rejected and criticized (Gallacher & Kehily, 2013; Prout & James, 2015) as these two approaches were criticised for seeing the child as inferior. Children were seen as incompetent and passive beings. Subsequently, children's value was limited to becoming future adults (Gallacher & Kehily, 2013). Researchers within the field of childhood studies critiqued developmental psychology for researching children in isolation as a 'laboratory specimen' (Montgomery, 2003; Prout & James, 2015, p. 11). By the 1980s, Jenks together with other early contributors created new ways of thinking, viewing children or rather representing children differently within a multidisciplinary research field. This new approach focused on seeing children no longer as passive recipients but as social actors and childhood as socially constructed phenomenon (Tisdall & Punch, 2016).

Simultaneously, the importance of child participation was recognized by the UNCRC which put the focus more on researching children in their own right and cultural context. Both childhood studies and the UNCRC gained increasing popularity, nationally and internationally influencing domestic law and policy interventions (Tisdall & Punch, 2016). Cultural and social differences were valued and there was a growing consensus that the concept of children and childhood is not universal across time and space (Prout & James, 2015). This emergence of new way of thinking has been identified by many scholars as *the new social studies of children and childhood* (Gallacher & Kehily, 2013; Jenks, 1982; Prout & James, 2015). Although both developmental psychology and socialization theory have been heavily critiqued, it is still an accepted practice and ideology (Montgomery, 2003; Prout & James, 2015). Ideas about socialization could still be found in practices of teachers and expectations we have from children depending on their age, for example (Montgomery, 2003; Prout & James, 2015). However, Abebe (2019) argues that age alone does not define the maturity of a child. The starting point of adulthood is culturally sensitive (Montgomery, 2003).

To guide researchers in theorizing children and childhood within the social studies of children and childhood, Prout and James (2015) have identified guiding features. These features are built upon the idea that children are social beings with agency, and contribute in constructing and determining their own social lives (Jenks, 2004a; Prout & James, 2015). In addition, children play an active role in their own life, the life of others and are part of the social structure (Jenks, 1982; Lange & Mierendorff, 2009b). Within this new paradigm, a greater focus is also put on how children are shaped culturally rather than just naturally, thereby acknowledging the plurality in childhood(s). Hence, Montgomery (2003) argues that children are actors and socially competent in their culture. They are a product of a particular time, place, and culture. This is an important feature in this research project as children are seen as meaning makers within their own community through active participation. It is therefore needless to mention the importance of studying and analysing children's social life. One way to interpret children's social life and cultures is through a social constructionist lens.

3.2 Social constructionism

One of the mantras within childhood studies is that childhood is understood as socially constructed (Prout & James, 2015; Tisdall & Punch, 2016, p. 252). Social constructionism is an epistemological position within different fields (Burr, 2015). Whilst there is no single definition or description of what social constructionism encompasses,

common assumptions and approaches are identified within this broad field. Firstly, it opposes positivistic thinking and moves away from understanding the world in an unbiased manner (Burr, 2015). As Montgomery (2003) points out, social constructionism focusses on ideas and not facts. Ideas, in this case about children, change depending on time, space, culture and social context. This brings us to the second key feature within the social constructionist approach. How we understand the world is culturally and historically sensitive (Burr, 2015). Historically, children have been conceptualized in different ways and manners. The idea that childhood is a time of evil and wilderness was a dominant viewpoint around the 17th century in the Western world (Ansell, 2016; Montgomery, 2003). Children were seen as sinful and could only be purified or enlightened through discipline and parental control (Montgomery, 2003). This Puritan view has common features with what Jenks describes as the Dionysian view (Jenks, 1996, in Ansell, 2016). During this period, children were to be protected from themselves and disciplined by parents. Children were to be seen and not to be heard (Ansell, 2016). Another significant viewpoint on childhood emerged in the 18th century which could be identified as the Apollonian viewpoint, or the romantic viewpoint (Ansell, 2016; Montgomery, 2003). During this time, children were seen as innocent, and childhood was considered as a time for play and happiness. Whilst both viewpoints are oppositional, traces of both viewpoints are still visible in how we still construct children and childhood (Ansell, 2016). In contemporary days, children are as described above, seen as human beings that need to be heard on all matters affecting them. Childhood is still a time of free play and separated from adulthood, yet their views and participation rights within the community are promoted and acknowledged. However, the degree such ideals are realized can vary.

This brings us to the third key feature within the social constructionist perspective. Our knowledge about children is constructed and shaped by our interactions and daily encounters with people. Thus, what we may regard as the truth varies over time and what we may find acceptable behaviour varies across time and space as well (Burr, 2015). This way of thinking also implies a sense of power relations where some actions are more acceptable than others. A great example is the current notion of *the best interest of the child*. The best interest of the child is a guiding principle within the UNCRC and needs to be considered in every single right. In western countries, education is believed to be in the best interest of the child. However, in some majority countries with a different social, cultural, and economic context, work rather than education is considered as the best interest of the child (Boyden, 2013). These two ways of thinking during the same time yet different space has implications in what is considered as acceptable and what we may regard as the truth. Since article 15 in the UNCRC protects children from work that interferes with their education, education is constructed as more permissible within current national and international policies. Since this research project is positioned within a western country, it is therefore important to recognize and highlight that truth is constructed differently. Thus, how children understand their position within the society through daily interactions differs across space.

As mentioned above, interaction is a pivotal source of knowledge production within the social constructionist perspective. Social constructionism argues that concepts and categories are developed and produced through interaction and the usage of language (Burr, 2015). It is argued that our understanding of the world is a result of the conceptual frameworks created by people. Whilst mainstream psychology depicts languages as a 'passive vehicle for our internal state', social constructionism sees

language as a vehicle of knowledge (Burr, 2015, p. 11). Thus, knowledge is created and enacted through interactions and processes. This research project will benefit from this way of thinking as it aims to understand how children position themselves within the society through their daily interactions with adults and peers. It seeks to understand the worldview of the participants within the existed and created conceptual frameworks. It also acknowledges that the truth and knowledge produced in this project is situational and not universally applied. Thus, how and why the participants are active in civic engagement is a situational truth yet equally valuable.

3.2.1 Micro and macro social constructionism

There are two strands within social constructionism that should equally be considered when researching within this perspective (Burr, 2015). Through *micro social constructionism*, children's interactions and sense-making on the micro level are analysed. As described above, the focus here is placed on how knowledge is produced from below. This way of knowledge production is also widely accepted within the actor-oriented perspective which will be discussed later. The second strand is *macro social constructionism*. It acknowledges the power of interaction and language yet focusses on the macro structures that open space for these interactions (Burr, 2015). These macro structures encompass social relations, institutionalised practices, material structures and social structures (Burr, 2015). When looking through the macro social constructionist lens, this research project is positioned within the Norwegian society, where youth's civil engagement is an institutionalized practice (Regjeringen, 2021). As described in the background chapter, Norway ratified the UNCRC and acknowledges and respects children's participation and decision making in matters affecting them (Kjørholt, 2002). It is a practice that has been highly encouraged since the 1980s and ample of opportunities for youth participation are provided on international and national level. This study therefore benefits from analysing the macro structures and the background that this research is positioned in to understand how childhood in Norway is constructed for children and youth by social practices and structures. However, this research aims to understand children's everyday life and the daily encounters when being involved in civic engagement. Hence, the analysis of this project will be through a more micro social constructionist lens.

3.2.2 Discourses

Social practices are heavily influenced by discourses that circulate within the community. Discourse is a key concept within social constructionism that refers to a series of events or representations of people produced by images, stories, metaphors, or statements (Burr, 2015, p. 75). The concept of discourse within social constructionism emphasises how language and macro structures create limitations and opportunities in what we think and how we say things, and also what is acceptable and what can be done (Burr, 2015). An example of a discourse affecting children and youth in Norway is the children's rights discourse (Nilsen, 2008). Since the ratification of the UN convention, the qualities ascribed to children has changed and children and youth are seen as more 'participatory, 'competent', 'autonomous' and 'independent' (Nilsen, 2008, p. 41). Another discourse that circulates within the Norwegian society is the discourse of *Friluftsliv*. Friluftsliv or the outdoor environment is an important aspect in children's life and the creation of a 'proper' childhood (Nilsen, 2008). Children are seen as active agents in the reproduction of the friluftsliv which is an important traditional leisure activity (Nilsen, 2008). Discourses like these can influence how children think and how they express themselves while participating in civic engagement. It impacts how children

construct their lives and what they see as important. Thus, the concept of civic engagement is entangled in a variety of discourses. It is therefore important to acknowledge and understand the discourses that shape youth's participation in civic engagement. Climate change could for example be an important aspect that youth are voicing themselves about since they have been brought up with the idea of *friluftsliv* or protecting the environment. Many youth projects in Norway aim to develop a protective attitude towards the environment (Kjørholt, 2002). The actor-oriented lens helps us understand how children and youth navigate these discourses affecting them.

3.3 Actor-oriented perspective

In addition to the social constructionism theory, the actor-oriented perspective plays an important role within childhood studies, seeing children as social actors (Abebe, 2019). They are active meaning makers and are both 'doers' and 'thinkers' (Prout & James, 2015). Long (2003) argues that human beings are active agents and are not passively affected by external factors. He argues that external factors impact the lives of adults and children, yet it is the adults and children who shape and give meaning to these external factors (Long, 2003). When analysing children and childhood through the actor-oriented lens, children are seen as competent human beings. Whilst children and adults are regarded as equal, they are not identical. Children need to be taken seriously, even when their perspectives conflict with the adult's perspective. The child's perspective needs to be considered and to move away from adult-centrism in mainstream research. The focus within this perspective is to acknowledge children's perspective. This meaningful participation has been incorporated not only in academia but also in legal frameworks (Abebe, 2019; Robson, Bell, & Klocker, 2007). This research is positioned within the actor-oriented perspective as it tries to identify how youth use their agency and position themselves within the society. Furthermore, it aims to identify how civic engagement allows them to exercise agency. This research will also look closely at how children negotiate and resist adult control and expectations when being politically involved. Central within this perspective is the concept of agency.

3.3.1 Agency

Just like the theorization of children and childhood, the concept of agency is theorized within multiple research areas (Robson et al., 2007). Each scholarly approach conceptualizes and prioritises the concept differently and has its own weaknesses and strengths. Within this research project, the concept of agency will be illuminated from different approaches that this research will benefit from. However, this research will specifically benefit from Robson et al's approach seeing agency on a continuum (2007). Robson et al's approach can be positioned in both social constructionism and an actor-oriented perspective. Agency is understood as an individual's own capacity to act and shape one's own live yet it is shaped by whom they interact with, emotions, abilities, and disabilities (Robson et al., 2007). Thus, children are active meaning makers but the ability to enact their agency is connected to the daily adversities children and youth face, and in what manner children use their agency is shaped by the context. In addition, children use their agency to fulfil expectations on different levels such as, economic, social, and cultural. An example of a cultural expectation within the Norwegian society is to respect nature and environment for example (Nilsen, 2008). Robson et al (2007), therefore argues to conceptualize agency within a continuum. They argue that children and youth's agency vary from no agency to public agency depending on the situation. Thus, public agency means to be actively involved in improving personal lives. Children and youth's agency could be self-initiated, expected, requested, or forced (Robson et

al., 2007). An example of self-initiated agency is the youth political protest against global environmental issues (O'Brien et al., 2018). In this case, youth are opposing and challenging the dominant values and institution by protesting and dissenting power. Youth use their agency to express their political engagement through spontaneous public gatherings, joining activities and protests. These forms of political dissent shed light on youth's ability to use their agency to act against dominant beliefs and traditional political processes. They also argue that climate activism or dissent could be the result of frustration and failed expectations (O'Brien et al., 2018). On the other hand, Robson et al. (2007) defined this as having little agency where children and youth are acting out of necessity to improve their lives. Whilst agency on a continuum is a valuable framework to draw from, Punch (2016) has criticized it for its limits. According to Punch (2016), this framework does not explicitly mirror the power and participation concepts. She also highlights the importance of perspective and whether children's agency is regarded as negative or positive depends on whose perspective is illuminated.

Klocker (2007) has added the concept of 'thick' and 'thin' agency to the concept of continuum agency. Children and youth's agency can get thicker or thinner over time and depending on the situation (Klocker, 2007, in Abebe, 2019). Thick agency refers to having access to a broad range of choices and options. Thus, having the possibility to choose which schools and activities to attend thickens one's agency (Abebe, 2019). Thin agency, on the other hand, provides little to no opportunities for children and youth to enact their agency. The concept of thick and thin agency is important to draw attention to as social structures can limit or expand children's agency. Thus, social structures and discourses can act as 'thickeners' or 'thinners' (Abebe, 2019, p. 80). In this case, providing children and youth with opportunities to voice themselves and to participate could 'thicken' or 'thin' their agency.

Indeed, children live interdependently with others and therefore relational agency needs to be taken into consideration (Abebe, 2019). To create a more nuanced understanding of agency, the generational relation needs to be reviewed (Mayall, 2009; Punch, 2016). Children's quality of life is highly dependent on parents' material resources such as money and access to services. Parents influence is also evidence in children's involvement in civic engagement. Ødegård and Berglund (2008) have argued that parents' cultural resources influence children and youth's attitude towards civic engagement. Children and youth are more likely to participate when their parents are participating in communal activities as well (Lochocki, 2010). Although, Giddens (1991, in 2008) argues that social class has less influence on political attitudes and actions due to newer forms of political participations, Ødegård and Berglund (2008) argue against this. In their research, they have identified that familiar cultural resources are more influential for cause-oriented activities than in formal political activities. Cause-oriented activities where the immediate results are visible such as boycotting, petitioning and strikes. In addition, friends and peer networks where social and political issues are frequently discussed impact youth's political participation as well (Ødegård & Berglund, 2008). Hence the importance of peer culture needs to be considered within the actor-oriented perspective.

Children and youth are all members of multiple peer groups. Children and youth create their own peer culture which is not completely separated from adult culture (Corsaro, 2009). Corsaro (2009, p. 302) calls this *interpretive reproduction*. Children acquire information and knowledge from adult cultures and adapt and reproduce it within their

own peer cultures. Children and youth's peer culture is pivotal in their daily lives as they try to gain control and share this control with others. A shared peer relationship is an important key component in building what is mentioned by Shaw, et al (2014) as community agency. Through interactions among local groups or in this case peers, a mutual understanding will be created, and common needs will be discussed.

This research tries to understand how children and youth use their voice to become a meaningful 'citizen' within the local community. When combining social constructionist and actor-oriented perspectives, this research attempts to grasp how childhood is constructed for children and by children. Thus, how social structures facilitate or hinder children's opportunities to construct a meaningful life through their interactions with adults and peers. Through the actor-oriented perspective this research will zoom in children's perspective and their everyday lives yet acknowledge that children's perspectives are shaped by discourses, social, economic, and historical forces. It seeks to identify how children and youth thicken their own agency by participating in civic engagement, and what they have personally gained from participating. Thus, it explores what role civic engagement plays in their everyday life and participation as a citizen.

3.4 Children as citizens

As described earlier, children are entitled to express themselves and to have an opinion about matters that affect them through Article 12 of the UN Convention on the rights of the child. They are seen as valuable members of the society, are right holders and are called citizens (Larkins, 2014; Lister, 2008). The term citizenship is a culturally sensitive concept and has been scrutinized on different levels. On a formal level, citizenship can symbolize the right to have a passport and obtaining a legal status of membership. On a more substantial level, citizenship is fueled with traditions, cultural and social movements (Lister, 2008). More recently, it relates to a sense of belonging and identity formation. Within this research context, children's citizenship is understood as a practice (Lister, 2008). Using Marshall's traditional definition of citizenship, Lister (2008), ascribes children's citizenship to four main building blocks; membership, rights, responsibilities and equality. Citizenship through membership means to be part of the community and to be involved in decision-making processes in the wider community. Children can demonstrate citizenship as membership through participation in youth councils or organization for example. Secondly, children are citizens through the rights they have and claim. Citizenship is also translated into responsibilities that community members enact. Children are attributed certain responsibilities within the community imposed by the state. In addition, children can enact responsibilities voluntarily and see responsibility as part of being a 'good citizens' (Bjerke, 2011). The last building block is to be seen as an equal within the society and to be recognized as valuable members. This means that children should have access to participation and their voices should be included within decision-making process. Although, children are seen as legal citizens, universally children are excluded from certain rights mostly on political level. It is within this final building block that differences between adults and children's citizenship rights become mostly apparent. Whilst the United Nations, national and international policies promote children's right to participation, the political agenda towards children's inclusion is still characterized by ambiguity (Wyness et al., 2004). The concept of children's right to citizenship has been explored within two dominant, yet oppositional viewpoints. The liberationist perspective sees children as competent enough to have full access to citizenship rights, such as the right to vote, marriage and work. Whereas the paternalistic perspective sees children in need of protection and children should be

represented by their caretakers on the political level (Cohen, 2005; Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Both perspectives have influenced the current childhood and the rights they possess. On one hand children are characterized as autonomous individuals and on the other hand in need for protection (Jans, 2004; Wyness et al., 2004). Both perspectives are apparent within children's citizenship rights. The dominant definition excludes children from some parts of citizenship on the grounds that they are not 'rational' enough yet the United Nations and the European Union aim to address children as social agent and promote children's participation (Larkins, 2014; Wyness et al., 2004). The concept of citizenship is pivotal within this research to understand how children use their agency to claim their right as citizens within the community. Furthermore, it seeks to understand how children navigate the challenges of exclusion and identify themselves as citizens through participation or civic engagement. Moving away from citizenship as a legal and social status, will help us understand citizenship on a continuum and the relational spaces that children are contributing within the community (Larkins, 2014). Another prominent approach is to see children's citizenship from a child-sized perspective (Jans, 2004). Here, citizenship is argued to be a dynamic and a continuous learning process. Whilst there are an ample of approaches defined as 'child friendly' such as the child-sized (Jans, 2004) approach, I will draw from the *difference-centred approach* (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). This research will benefit from this approach as its core focus is the 'lived' experiences of children's citizenship and recognizes children's practices and differences (Larkins, 2014). This approach differs from the mentioned approaches as it tries to acknowledge childhood without measuring it against the adult norm.

3.4.1 A difference-centred approach

One of the approaches that moves away from seeing children's citizenship through a paternalistic lens is the difference-centred approach (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Moosa-Mitha (2005) argues that current mainstream perspectives excludes children from citizenship based on their identity as children. The difference-centered citizenship moves away from measuring children's ability within an adult framework and calls for a more 'radical, democratic conceptions of citizenship' (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, p. 372). Within this approach citizenship is more fluid and recognizes the citizens' different experiences of belonging and participation. It acknowledges that individuals are different but that does not mean they are 'less than' (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, p. 378). Through the lens of the difference-centred approach, children's experiences of belonging within the community and social institutions are analyzed, as well as the relationships within these institutions. When looking at children's citizenship through the difference-centred approach, children are seen as autonomous and possessing agency. Agency can be enacted on the individual level as well as on the collective level. On the individual level, citizens gain a greater understanding of the individual self which can lead to self-confidence. On the collective level, agency fosters participating against oppressions. It recognizes and values children's practices of participation. Within this approach children might not possess the right social tools, but they certainly react, resist, and have a view to interact within the society and community. This way of approaching children's citizenship is beneficial within this research as it tries to understand how children and youth resist, react, and interact within the social conditions.

Indeed, there have been many local and national interventions that provided children and youth with opportunities to participate within the political sphere. Yet at the same time, scholars argue that some of these interventions are tokenistic in nature (Kjørholt, 2002; Wyness et al., 2004). Basic assumptions that have excluded children's

perspective from the political sphere derive from a paternalistic perspective. Within the paternalistic perspective, children are seen as 'not mature enough' to make the right decisions. According to Cohen (2005), this perspective completely denies children's citizenship. Children are seen as incompetent, and the parents are the responsible caretakers that knows what is in the best interest of the child. However, as Wyness, et al (2004) argue, this measures the child's competence based on age, which is heavily criticized within childhood studies. Another assumption is that children are going through a so-called transitional phase. During this phase, children are in a period of learning and understanding the world around them. They are developing the necessary tools to become a full citizen (Wyness et al., 2004). Cohen (2005, p. 229) identifies this as the 'minor' view. It is a future-oriented perspective seeing the child as becoming. The idea of seeing childhood as a preparatory phase or as incapable is criticized within childhood studies and many scholars have argued for a more child-friendly approach to the concept of citizenship. As Lister (2008) argues, there is a lack of recognitions and respect for the responsibilities that children and young people exercise within the community. Children therefore do not enjoy genuine equality of status as citizens. Social actions and public decision-making constitute a more important signifier of effective citizenship. Moreover, as Alderson (2007) has pointed out, treating children with respect can increase their competence.

3.5 Civic engagement

The term civic engagement has been defined in multiple ways and Adler and Goggin (2005) argue that the definition is highly dependent on who defines it and what their interests are. It is therefore important to illuminate the various definitions and points of view about civic engagement. Subsequently, civic engagement will be analyzed through the lens of different perspectives. A definition that fits the purpose of this study will be highlighted as well.

In their article, Adler and Goggin (2005) have given examples of various definitions such as civic engagement as a collective action, political involvement, or social change. Adler and Goggin (2005) define civic engagement as active engagement in the community to improve and to shape the community. However, Amnå (2012) argues that this definition is focused on the local level and proposes a broader definition. According to Amnå (2012, p. 613) civic engagement deals with '*values, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, knowledge, skills and behaviors concerned with conditions outside the immediate environment of family and friends*'. Civic engagement can therefore be enacted in different spaces such as the public sphere, the civil sphere of the personal sphere. Thus, within the local institutions such as the local councils, schools or at home. Putnam's definition (Putnam, 2000, in Adler & Goggin, 2005) goes beyond that and includes informal social activities such as visiting friends. Amnå (2012) also argues that the key point in civic engagement is choice. The individual's agency to choose to be active or to remain passive is crucial when being civically engaged. Youth's civic engagement can be observed in multiple settings (Shaw et al., 2014). On a grassroots level, it is the local youth organizations that creates the setting for youth to engage. In Norway, the '*kommune*' or the municipality plays an important role here as each municipality should have a youth council present. Schools are another important setting where youth can contribute civically. In Norway, every school needs to have a student council that includes students from 5th grade to tenth grade. Non-governmental organizations that are operating on various international and national levels is another setting where youth can become civically engaged. Youth can also be engaged within governmental and political

institutions not just on a local level but also on a national and global level. Civic engagement is therefore a rather broad concept and should therefore be conceptualized as a continuum (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Shaw et al., 2014). Civic engagement can range from individual action on a private level to collective action on a public level (Adler & Goggin, 2005). Forms of youth activity are rather shaped by a variety of perspectives which will be discussed in the following paragraph.

3.5.1 Purpose of civic engagement

To understand the purpose of youth civic engagement, three key perspectives are highlighted with each having its dominant strand. The first perspective is *the democratic citizen*. Within this perspective, the main dominant strand is based on the survival and enhancement of democracy (Shaw et al., 2014). Young people's participation is pivotal within this perspective for democratic process to exist and continue, and therefore civic skills should be taught from a younger age. Since young people under the age of 18 are legally not in the position to vote, the focus within this perspective revolves around other forms of civic activities that demonstrate young people's capacity to be engaged within the democracy. Indeed, there are some concerns around the decline in youth civic engagement over the decades which can affect the future of democracy (Lochocki, 2010). However, patterns in civic engagement among youth in Norway, for example, show that young people are not less involved in civic engagement, but new forms have been preferred over classic forms as described earlier (Lochocki, 2010; Shaw et al., 2014). This is often described as 'episodic engagement' (Lochocki, 2010, p. 49). A form of engagement that is short-sighted and more goal oriented. It is within the *democratic citizen* perspective that local and national projects were developed to promote children's right as citizens since the 1980s in Norway (Kjørholt, 2002). These projects initiated by the municipality were aimed to give children the right to participate but also to sustain the local community and thus the Norwegian democracy (Kjørholt, 2002).

The second perspective focuses on positive youth development (Shaw et al., 2014). Here the emphasis is on young people's development, behavior, mindset and becoming more resourceful. Research has shown that youth that are civically engaged are more internally driven and have a higher self-esteem (Balsano, 2005). Positive youth development (PYD) is usually defined in terms of five attributes. Once youth have developed *competence, confidence, positive connection, character, and compassion*, a sixth one will emerge and that is to *contribute* within the community (Balsano, 2005; Shaw et al., 2014). These characteristics are fueled and prompted by social and personal assets that are made available to youth. Youth who are civically involved in their younger age are also more likely to be civically involved in their adult life, making it an important driver for the democratic system. Developing a positive democratic attitude is therefore an important aim within youth participatory projects in Norway (Kjørholt, 2002).

The third perspective stems from the *community connectedness*. Civic engagement within this perspective is viewed as a tool that stimulates 'trust, safety, support networks, and information' (Shaw et al., 2014, p. 307). Civic engagement creates a stronger desire to connect with the wider community and interact about issues that matters to them. Whilst the concept of agency could be applied at all levels of civic engagement, 'community agency' is linked with this perspective (Shaw et al., 2014). Many youth projects in Norway aim to develop a sense of belonging or 'tilhørighet' within small local communities (Kjørholt, 2002). Belonging and a sense of identity are

pivotal within the Norwegian national identity as described in chapter 2. Local authorities therefore aim to include youth in participatory activities to maintain and sustain the local communities (Kjørholt, 2002). A common feature in sustaining the local community is the feeling of solidarity. Solidarity is expressed through sharing knowledge and showing support and empathy within the community (Smith, 2012).

Numerous studies have shown the benefits of civic engagement on the individual level and the community level (Lochocki, 2010; Shaw et al., 2014). Youth that are civically involved are more likely to have higher educational aims, and are more intrinsically motivated in school (Lochocki, 2010). Involvement in civic engagement brings enjoyment, friendships and enhances a variety of skills such as collaborative learning and research skills (Shaw et al., 2014). Within the community, youth's civic engagement fosters stronger community networks, sustains the democracy, and improves the recognition of children and youth as right bearers (Shaw et al., 2014). However, as highlighted by many scholars, youth civic engagement is not equally 'available' to all youth (Balsano, 2005; Lochocki, 2010; Ødegård & Berglund, 2008; Shaw et al., 2014). Youth who are civically engaged are more likely enjoying higher levels of capital such as economic, social, and cultural. Youth that are marginalized are less likely to be civically involved. However, to include and attract a more diverse group of youth, the Norwegian government has set up a project called *Mangfold og inkludering* (Diversity and Inclusion) in 2008. With this project, the government opts for a more diverse group of youth to participate (Regjeringen, 2021).

Civic engagement within the context of this research encompasses everything from developing knowledge, sharing skills, and taking action to create a change within the community. The research project seeks to understand how youth are civically engaged within their own community and what their attitude and beliefs are towards civic engagement. In addition, it aims to understand how children and youth are coping with adversities and how they use their agency to overcome them.

3.5.2 Civic engagement and identity

Identity and civic engagement reinforce each other constructing a so-called virtuous cycle (Crocetti, Jahromi, & Meeus, 2012). In other words, civic engagement stimulates identity formation and identity formation nurtures civic engagement (Crocetti et al., 2012). Whilst identity is a broad concept and acknowledged within multiple disciplinary fields, identity within this project will be approached through a social constructionism lens (Burr, 2015).

Identity through social constructionism

The concept of identity is often conceptualized within social constructionism through a discursive lens (Burr, 2015). Within social constructionism, identity is a formation of discourses presented in our culture. It is constructed through our communications and discourse that we give meaning to. For example, the discourse of what we define as a child, youth, or adult. The product of all these discourses results in one's identity (Burr, 2015). All these discourses carry a specific meaning that defines someone's identity, which is culturally sensitive. An example is the dichotomy of child and adult. Those who are identified by others as a child are often perceived as immature and irrational, whereas the adult is often defined as mature and rational. Burr as well as Gee (2015; 2000) argue that there is a plurality in identities and they are constantly shifting. According to Gee (2000), a person's identity can be recognized based on actions and

interactions in a given context. Furthermore, mainstream identities are frequently resisted within society. When interacting with others, individuals are constantly negotiating rights, power, and actions (Burr, 2015). An example is the climate change activism as described earlier. One way youth have rejected or dissented against the mainstream discourse on climate change is through disruptive dissent (O'Brien et al., 2018). Disruptive actions are often considered to challenge power relationships and the system. In other words, youth were negotiating and creating pathways for taking action, expressing agency and influence mainstream discourse in order to be recognized as a certain kind of person. Civic engagement could in this way also be seen as enhancing one's sense of self and identity (Shaw et al., 2014).

3.6 Summary

This chapter has presented the theoretical basis that has shaped this research project. The project is positioned within childhood studies and acknowledges the plurality in children and childhood. Childhood within this project is conceptualized within social constructionist and an actor-oriented perspective. Both perspectives draw attention to how childhood is constructed for children and constructed by children. In other words, how discourses and societal forces influences children's ideas and understanding of the world around them – making them social actors and citizens. The way children shape their civic engagement is based on these discourses and the social relationship that they have. Citizenship within this project is understood as fluid and moves away from measuring it against an adult template. This project tries to illuminate the concept of children's citizenship through civic engagement and how it has shaped their identity as citizens.

Chapter 4 Methodology

The following chapter presents the theoretical basis for the methodological approach in this research project. It includes the methodological framework and procedure that influenced the choice of method, the analysis as well as ethical practices. It does so by adapting a right-based, child-centered, and participatory methodology, where children's positions as social actors and as right-bearers are acknowledged and respected. Furthermore, it provides a nuanced understanding of children's experiences (Gallagher, 2008). Translated within this research project, child-centered, participatory methods are used to examine youth's subjective views on civic engagement and their everyday life experiences. However, research like this is filled with multiple layers of ethical considerations (Abebe, 2009; Christensen & Prout, 2002; Morrow, 2013). Hence, the ethical issues before, during and after fieldwork will be discussed as well.

4.1 Methodological framework: designing ethical research

As described earlier, there has been a paradigm shift in how children and childhood are theorized within the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies. Seeing children as social actors and knowledgeable agents has also led to a methodological shift from researching *on* children to researching *with* children (Abebe, 2009; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). This new perspective on empirical research can be attributed to childhood studies, the children's rights agenda and the participatory approaches originated from development studies (Abebe, 2009). This study uses the *Right To Be Properly Researched* manuals created by Ennew. et al as a starting point (2009). The manual uses four UNCRC articles as guiding principles in creating a right-based yet systematic scientific social research (Ennew et al., 2009). These four articles are (1) art. 3.3. 'Research must be done in a scientific manner' (2) art. 12 'Children's perspectives and opinions should be considered' (3) art. 13 'The research methods need to enable children to express their opinions and (4) art. 36 'Children should be protected from any harm (Manual 1, Ennew et al., 2009). These four guiding principles are embedded within the design of this research project.

It has been pointed out that in order to meet the standard of right-based research, research must 'conform to the highest possible scientific standard' (Ennew et al., 2009, p. 1.18). Based on article 3.3 in the UNCRC, this means that research needs to be carried out in a systematic manner and orderly process. Within this research project, the use of qualitative data collection was used to create a nuanced yet systematic research process. Qualitative research aims to position the child as active co-constructor of knowledge (Lange & Mierendorff, 2009a). Moreover, qualitative research gives access to rich data and enables the participants to speak about their experiences. This corresponds well with an actor-oriented perspective that seeks to explore children's perspective and truth. Knowledge produced through qualitative research gives us insight in someone's perception of reality resulting from social situations they encounter (Kuper, Reeves, & Levinson, 2008). Thus, how children experience civic engagement through their everyday life social situations will be examined. One way to conduct qualitative research, along with the more traditional methods such as interview and observation, are the usage of participatory methods (Grant, 2017). This research project used hands-on, child-centered participatory methods such as jigsaw puzzle, sentence completion, ranking, photo collage in addition to semi-structured individual interviews. Several

researchers have argued for using multiple methods that conforms to a scientific research standard (Ennew et al., 2009).

Using one method is by some seen as insufficient and does not meet the children's rights to be properly researched (Beazley & Ennew, 2006; Ennew et al., 2009). The usage of *triangulation* is therefore beneficial and advised in order to create more space for participants to engage with the topic, and to compare and contrast the data before disseminating any conclusions. Triangulation is understood as a research technique to produce more nuanced and comprehensive set of findings (Kuper et al., 2008). Additionally, Gregarious (2015) argues that combining methods may reduce unequal power relations and shed light on different levels of truths.

The second guideline is article 12 that promotes children's participation in research. Participatory research is favored by many researchers within childhood studies as it provides access to children's perspectives rather than the adult perspective (Punch, 2002). Participatory research 'ideally' involves the participants in all processes of the research from 'identifying the problem' to 'disseminating the results' (Ennew et al., 2009). Although participatory research is desirable where participants are co-researchers, it has many ethical challenges that could lead to disempowering rather than empowering (Abebe, 2009). Within this approach, participants might feel overwhelmed and pressured in making decisions about the research (Abebe, 2009), and it can be rather time-consuming (Grant, 2017). The original plan was to include the participants in two phases; the collection phase and the dissemination phase. During the dissemination phase, a meeting would have been set up where participants would get to provide feedback on findings. However, due to practical and personal circumstances, this was not possible within the available time frame of the project. As Abebe (2009) argues, researching children is very situational and indeterminate in nature which can unfold in many directions.

The third guideline is article 13, which focuses on the research methods chosen. Child-centered participatory tools are used to gain insight in children's views and opinion about civic engagement. This includes jigsaw puzzle, photo collage, sentence completion and individual interviews. Here, I have drawn inspiration from the *Mosaic Approach* as it uses a combination of traditional and participatory tools to analyze children's perspectives (Clark, 2005). The mosaic approach has been influenced by the concept of voice and how we can make children's voices visible in research. Using the mosaic approach, the researcher tries to bring different pieces together to create a framework of children's world (Clark, 2005). The Mosaic approach gathers knowledge in two sets of data collection. Firstly, participatory tools are used to gather information and each tool will form a piece of mosaic. Secondly, the collected data will be used as a basis for a dialogue, clarification, and reflection of the collected data (Clark, 2005). The main reason for using the mosaic approach as a research approach is due to its focus on children's lived experiences and reflexivity. Through this approach, children have the opportunity to reflect on interpretations. Clark (2005, p. 17) calls this 'internal listening'. Through the mosaic approach, children learn how to find meaning in what they experience. Thus, in this case, what it means to children to be involved in civic engagement which could be interpreted in different ways for different children. Rather than reflecting on the concept of civic engagement, they reflect on their lived experiences. Thus, how civic engagement has shaped and continue to shape their lives is

highlighted. How the mosaic approach has been used in this research project will be elaborated in more detail in the *Data collection section (4.3)*.

The last guiding principle that shaped the methodological framework for this research project is embedded in article 36 that protects children from any harm by creating an ethical strategy. As a researcher, we have the duty to protect our participants from harm before, during and after the research project. The ethical strategy and potential issues that have arisen during this study will be elaborated in the second part of this chapter.

In short, the methodological framework for this research is inspired by (1) the methodological shift in childhood studies that aims to research *with* children rather *on* children, (2) the right to be properly researched that aims for right-based research and (3) the mosaic approach that aims for a rich participatory approach. Although participatory research opts for producing knowledge from children's perspective rather than the adult perspective (Beazley & Ennew, 2006), James (2007) questions the 'authenticity' in children's voices that are represented. James (2007) argues that researching children's voices is not sufficient and that researchers need to be mindful of what Geertz called 'ethnographic ventriloquism' (Geertz, 1988 in James, 2007). Thus, careful attention is needed when representing children's voices, as representing children's voices and views involve process of interpretations, translation, and mediation. Whether research with children should be the same or different than research with adults is heavily debated within childhood studies (Christensen, 2004; Punch, 2002; Thomson, 2013; Solberg, 1996). Children within this research are seen as similar to adults with different competencies (James et al, 1998 in Punch, 2002). The methods chosen are child-friendly not because the participants are not able to comply with traditional methods, but to keep the research interesting. The methods used within this research could easily be used for adults as well with the same intention. However, a reflexive and critical approach in using any method with children or adults, is pivotal to create awareness of the opportunities and limitations that each method produces (Abebe, 2009; Punch, 2002). Furthermore, an ongoing reflexive analysis about the researcher's roles and position is required to limit some ethical issues (McGarry, 2016).

4.2 The role of the researcher: a reflexive analysis

Within qualitative research, reflexivity, or what Warin (2011, p. 811) calls 'relational awareness' is an important aspect to enhance the quality of the research (Barker & Smith, 2001). Reflexivity has gained an increasing focus within childhood studies and researchers are critically reflecting on their role as a researcher (Abebe, 2009; Berger, 2015; Solberg, 1996). Within the research field, the researcher's position is heavily influenced by personal experiences and characteristics (Berger, 2015). By having a reflexive approach, the researcher attempts to be aware of how these processes influence the participants, the research outcomes and vice versa. According to Berger (2015), the researcher can impact the access of the field, the researcher's relationship and the way information is being gathered and concluded. It is therefore pivotal to be aware of one's role by continuously acknowledging and self-evaluating one's personal position and 'luggage' within the research process. Reflexivity is an ongoing process and should be considered in all research phases (Barker & Smith, 2001; Berger, 2015).

Before starting this research project, I have long thought about my personal luggage that I carry and how it can affect or influence the research and the participants. Being a

teacher and wanting to research youth, I knew that my identity as a teacher could influence the participants and my position as a researcher. As Berger (2015) highlights, the researcher's background can influence the researcher's usage of language, the questions asked and how outcomes are shaped. Being a teacher first and then a researcher, I was aware that my academic background could benefit me, as well as limit the research process. I was aware that my background in teaching would benefit the development of participatory tools and engaging activities which I know how to adapt to individual needs. I had learned a lot from my professional career how to develop engaging activities that will elicit the information required from the participants. In addition, I was familiar with 'youth language' and could easily engage in conversations with them. Christensen calls this the 'cultures of communication' (Christensen, 2004, p. 170). Although I was not familiar and directly engaged with the participants in this project, I was aware of these modes of communication and 'culture' through my role as an educator in a Norwegian context. In addition, I was aware that using my knowledge as a teacher could create activities that participants could associate with school. So, I had to be mindful of what questions and what sort of activities I chose to create a balance between engaging yet research-like activities and to avoid what Gallagher and Gallagher call 'schooled docility' (2008, p. 506). The teacher role could heavily influence the interview process as well. I was aware that I could fall back into the teacher role and being perceived as a teacher who interrogates her pupils. I was afraid of unconsciously correcting them or giving them feedback. I therefore tried to be aware of this during the interviews to not 'fill in the gaps' when there was a fleeting pause. Researchers such as Solberg have tried to apply the 'the professional code' during research with children: 'the principle of approaching adults and children as equals' (1996). Although, I must admit that this is easier said than done. I have caught myself several times during the transcribing phase that I finished the participants sentences when there was a pause. For most participants, English was not their first language, so I automatically would help them sometimes when finding the right words when there was a long pause.

Most importantly, I reflected on my relationship with some of the participants. Some of the participants knew me as a teacher before I introduced myself to them in the role of a researcher as they were part of the same school community as I was working. I was a contact teacher in sixth grade and for a short period, I reduced my position to an on-call position to be able to focus on this research project. This means that I could substitute for any of the participants' teachers and get 'closer' to the participants in the role of a teacher. However, this is something I wanted to avoid, so I specifically requested the leadership to not book me in for those classes in particular. I would, however, sometimes see the participants in the hallways yet not treat them any differently than other pupils. I did this in order to make sure other pupils would not ask them any questions out of curiosity that could put the participants in a difficult situation. I am aware that this situation could influence and shape the researcher-researched relationship. The participants might be willing to share more information that could be sensitive. On the other hand, they could exclude some information that they might not want to share with a 'teacher'. Moreover, the participants might feel obligated to participate, or on the other feel safer to participate as they are already familiar with me. I was aware that I could potentially treat them differently than other participants, but I tried to limit that through remaining critically conscious about it. In addition, from my experience as a teacher, I had acquired the skills to see children equally. Furthermore, the participants did not seem confused about my role as a researcher and a teacher and

the conversations we had felt mutually comfortable. I made sure to make them aware that this is all voluntary and tried to limit the pressure which I will describe in more detail in the second part of this chapter. A researcher can take on different roles during the research process. As a researcher it is important to be aware of this role and reflect how you want to present yourself.

4.2.1 The atypical friendly role

The reflexive, internal dialogues that I had during the beginning of the research phase have also made me aware of the role I want to take on with not only the participants I knew but also with the other participants. First of all, being an 'outsider' where I had little to no knowledge about voluntary youth participation in civic engagement outside of the school context, influenced my decision to take on the 'atypical adult' role (Corsaro, 2003). The outsider role can enhance the feeling of empowerment and situate the participant in the expert position (Berger, 2015). My goal was to be a listener and 'an incompetent adult' that wants to learn from the participants as they are experts in what they do during civic engagement. Although, Corsaro (2003) overcame that barrier of being seen as an adult to being seen as atypical adult over a long period of involvement and engagement in children's peer culture, I tried to take that role by showing small gestures during the three meetings we had. For example, I would let the participants explain things in more detail or I would look puzzled, or surprised. Simultaneously, I wanted to take on 'a friendly role' to establish a degree of trust and mutual respect (Abebe, 2009). Similar, to Corsaro, Abebe (2009) invested a fair amount of time in establishing trust and mutual respect. However, given the limited time and meetings I had with the participants, I had to establish a trusting relationship during the introduction meeting and during the interviews. I made a deliberate attempt to present myself as a learner and a facilitator. I tried to do that by showing genuine interest in what the participants are doing and at the same time not just listen to them but to hear them. To achieve this, I tried to ask follow-up questions and to engage with the answers that were given. However, as Lewis (2008, in Spyrou, 2011) argues, a researcher's role can vary among different settings and different participants. Being an outsider during the research process brings many opportunities and limitation to the forefront. As described earlier, it gives the opportunity to position the participant as the expert. On the other hand, it can lead to a lack of awareness of sensitive areas of discussion (Berger, 2015).

4.2.2 Tackling the power imbalance.

Approaching the research field in a reflexive manner can reduce the power imbalance in the researcher-researched relationship as well (Berger, 2015). Addressing the power asymmetry in a reflexive manner is therefore an important practice (Ahsan, 2009). Whilst we can never hide our identity as adult, by recognizing our identity and characteristics we can attempt to recognize how it might influence the research project (Spyrou, 2011). To exemplify, I had to deliberately think about the research setting and where I wanted to conduct the interviews. Certain institutional spaces are induced with associations with adult authority and thus power (Spyrou, 2011). So, I decided to give the participants two options that I thought they would feel comfortable with. The first one was the library, a space the students are familiar with and, to try to minimize any adult authority that could influence the research project. The second option was the university, which is a space that the participants can associate me as a fellow student or researcher and not as a teacher. Although both spaces are places with adult authority, the adults do not have a direct relationship with the participants, such as the home or the school.

To minimize the power imbalance, my aim was to create a trusting relationship with the participants. I tried to do this by organizing an introduction day where I explained the research. This introduction day was held at the university in a closed meeting room. For those who joined the research later, an online meeting was hosted. I brought some snacks with me, and we did an activity which I will elaborate further on the data collection section. I also tried to engage in conversations to create an equal understanding. During the interviews, I shared some of the frustration they had and gave them some examples of how I can relate to them. To exemplify, one participant outed her frustration about the public transport and how inconvenient it can be. I fully engaged in the conversation and gave examples of why I feel frustrated too about the public transportation. Indeed there is a certain power asymmetry embedded in this research where I as the researcher define and control the research agenda (Abebe, 2009; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). This power asymmetry is also visible during the interview process where I as the researcher am in the position to define and control the conversation (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). However, as Christensen (2004) argues, power can not only be viewed as a matter of social position, yet it moves between the different actors and different social positions. Children are also in the position to control or 'perform' power during the fieldwork (Abebe, 2009). To exemplify, at the end of one of my interviews, one participant said with a dominant tone 'Are we done now?' and wanted to stand up. In this way, the participant showed power to an extent in a very ruling way. Children for example have control over the knowledge that they want to share or not to share. Hence, they have some degree of power over the knowledge production and ultimately the outcomes of the project as well (Abebe, 2009).

4.3 The data collection phase

In this section, the data collection will be elaborated in more detail. The process of recruitment will be discussed together with some challenges that I encountered. Subsequently, the research tools that are used during this research will be elaborated together with its limitations and opportunities.

4.3.1 Entering the field.

The process of recruitment and entering the field started in Spring 2021. During this time, I was not practicing the role of a teacher and was fully focused on this master's project. After I developed a research idea, I started contacting several youth councils and organization with the aim to start a fruitful collaboration. Back then, my initial aim was to recruit participants through a youth organization and involve the youth organization within my research project. Many emails were exchanged, and some gatekeepers showed genuine interest. However, time limitations and the English language barrier would ultimately result in not engaging any further. I ultimately got in contact with an organization that seemed very interested and keen on collaborating with me. I joined one of their monthly meetings to get familiar with the youth and their projects. I also got to introduce my project and asked if anyone would be keen on participating. Several youths showed interest with whom I set up a meeting to elaborate further on my project. However, I had to postpone the project for a year.

While working on finalizing the proposal, methods, and legal approvals from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) and NTNU, I got the opportunity to work full-time as a teacher for a year. This postponed my research for a year, and I started to continue the research project in Spring 2022. Taking a year break gave me a lot of

insight in how I want to continue this project. Being a teacher greatly facilitated the recruitment process as well. I had to make the decision to continue the project nearby or continue with participants that live far away. Being a full-time teacher made it challenging to collaborate and meet with the youth council that was in another city, so I decided to recruit participants from the same city that I was residing at that moment.

I was aware that a student from upper grade was voluntarily involved in civic engagement, so I set up a meeting to discuss the project and to see if this would sound interesting. Luckily the participant showed great interest and the recruitment process started from there.

4.3.2 Sampling

Selective sampling was used to select participants accordingly and suitable for my research aim (Coyne, 1997). As this current research project focused on youth involved in civic engagement, I was particularly looking for youth in between the ages 12 – 18 that are investing their time voluntary in civic engagement. It was not a requirement to be directly affiliated with a youth organization as by now my aim was to research participants directly and individually. One reason for this was to have the possibility to recruit participants who are engaged in different forms of civic engagement. Once I had identified one participant with the characteristics I was aiming for, the snowball sampling started (Ennew et al., 2009). The participant was the gateway to two more participants and one of them was able to recruit one more participant. So, at this stage I had four participants from the same area yet who are involved in different forms of civic engagement.

My aim was to recruit two more participants to get a total of six participants. The goal was to create in-depth and nuanced insight in close communication with a strategically composed sample that is well suited for answering the research questions. Several methods are used which is a time-consuming endeavor. Furthermore, Mason (2010, p. 1) argues ‘frequencies are rarely important in qualitative research, as one occurrence of the data is potentially as useful as many in understanding the process behind a topic’. I contacted the youth organization that initially showed interest and requested if they could be of any help. The gatekeeper was eager to help and invited me to their first monthly meeting in February where I presented my project. One more participant was included after this meeting, due to time concerns.

4.3.3 The data collection process

The data collection phase has been inspired by the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2005). It is a two-staged process that tries to piece information into one picture. As described earlier, the Mosaic approach has some distinct elements that I saw suitable for this research project. It is a multi-method approach that aims to identify different voices or languages of children to move away from conceptualizing voices as fixed and straightforward. Voices are constantly constrained, shaped and multi-layered (Spyrou, 2011). Furthermore, it focuses on children’s lived experiences in a participatory manner that treats the participants as knowledgeable agents in their lives (Clark, 2005). The research process, together with the two data collection stages, are shown below.

Table 2: Research phases

Phase	Intention	Tools used
Information day	To introduce myself and the research project. To hand-out the research-bag and consent form	The Blob-activity (data was not collected during this session)
Stage 1	Participants will do the activities from the research bag at home that will give insight in the two themes that are the red thread in this research.	Jigsaw puzzle – sentence completion – ranking – photo collage – photovoice
Stage 2	Interview based on information obtained during stage 1 to reflect and interpret the data in a nuanced manner	Semi-structured interview

4.4 The participatory research tools

4.4.1 Information Day

To ensure the participants have a clear understanding of this research project, it is pivotal to respect children's rights to information before they are asked to make any decisions to participate (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). I had therefore planned an information day to allow participants to get familiar with the research before giving consent. Furthermore, I wanted to use this day to get familiar with the participants and to build a trusting relationship with them (Abebe, 2009). I created an invitation leaflet that I sent to the first participants and kindly asked to pass this invitation to anyone that might be interested to join the information day. The invitation leaflet helped to prepare the participants on what to expect (Alderson & Morrow, 2011) and to spark some curiosity. The leaflet was created on Canva.com and the color scheme has been used throughout the entire project to create consistency and unity.



Figure 1: Invitation information day

On this day, three youth showed up to receive more information. The meeting was very pleasant, and the youth were happy to join the research. I provided some snacks as this was an after-school meeting and I knew they would appreciate it. Subsequently, it made the meeting more casual. I briefly introduced myself and then I let the youth introduce themselves through the blob-activity. The participants each had to draw random blobs on a A-4 paper with markers. I then asked them to draw something about themselves within each blob. The more blobs they had, the more things they had to draw. I told them specifically that this is not part of the data collection, but just a fun way to get to know each other and it could be seen as an effective warm-up activity (Punch, 2002). However, it could also limit some participants as they might not feel comfortable drawing due to artistic incompetency (Punch, 2002). Once everyone was done, I showed them my drawing that I made at home to start the conversation. The youth had to explain each drawing too.

This was a very insightful activity as we all had a difficult time identifying each other's drawings and give a meaning to it. We had a meaningful discussion about the importance of communicating our perspectives and intentions. This was a great starting point to discuss the research more fully and clearly. At the end, all three youth showed their interest and decided to participate. I handed out the research bag and we set a date for completing the activities.

4.4.2 Stage one: The research bag

As Clark (2005) mentions, the first stage within the Mosaic approach is to collect data using multiple methods. Within this stage, participatory tools are used to equalize the power-relation (Ennew et al., 2009) and to shed light on children's lived experiences (Clark, 2005). Although, Gallagher (2008) questions the idea of giving power to children through participatory techniques, I believe using these techniques will enable the participants to feel comfortable while being engaged in this research (Punch, 2002).

Whilst Gallagher (2008) is not opposed power, he is critical about the idea that 'power' can be given by adults to children through certain techniques. I specifically chose to create a research bag, so participants can work on the activities in their own time and space. Since the participants are engaged with outside school activity, I thought it was best for them to work on it during the time they found suitable. However, this also means that as a researcher I had no insight in how the activities are done, but it would also give the participants more control over the creation of the data. Below, I will elaborate on what I have included in the research bag. The limitations and strengths of each tool will be presented as well.



Figure 2: Research bag

Within the research bag, the participants can find two envelopes and an information booklet. The information booklet consists of an information letter and the consent forms for the participants and the guardians. The information booklet will be elaborated later during this chapter.

The first envelope consists of three activities that will provide insight into the first research theme which is 'How do youth describe their involvement in civic engagement?'. The participants received an instruction note and an individual instruction card for each activity.

Research tool 1 'Puzzle My identity'

The first activity is a jigsaw puzzle; a fun, playful way to get engaged with the research project. The participants were provided with an instruction card with 9 questions on the back side and the materials needed to create the jigsaw puzzle. The questions ranged from 'meaning of your name' to 'describe yourself in 3 words'. The jigsaw puzzle was a great starting point to stimulate discussions during the interview stage. Participants could decide whether they wanted to draw their answer or just write it. The collected data was used to create the participant's profile and to get some contextual knowledge. Most participants enjoyed doing this activity and one even wished to do activities like

this more often in school. The jigsaw puzzle was a very straightforward tool and a powerful medium with, in my opinion, little ethical limitations.

Research tool 2 'Actions I have taken'

The second activity is called 'Actions I have taken'. The participants were asked to create a collage with actions they have taken. An activity like this is referred to as 'visual stimulus' (Ennew et al., 2009). The participants were asked to use pictures, drawings, notes, anything that reminded them of a particular action. This activity is a great source for a discussion and as Ennew et al. (2009) mention, children often find it easier to talk about a picture instead of just answering a question. In this way the participants would have sufficient time to think about all the actions they have taken. Translating this activity into the research theme, this activity was used to ask the participants more in-depth questions about opportunities and limitations they experience during civic engagement. The participants were all asked to write one or two sentence for each image. This was done to avoid misinterpretation which is ethically of importance (Grant, 2017). The blob activity came in handy here as I could exemplify how important it is to always add descriptions to images otherwise, we would create our own interpretations which may not correspond well with their intended meaning. Furthermore, they were asked to avoid including pictures of others. Unfortunately, not all the participants engaged in this activity (two in total), so during the interviews I had a more detailed and rich conversation with those who created a photo collage than with those who didn't.

Research tool 3: Flashcards

The third activity is called 'Flashcards' and is inspired by the activity 'sentence completion'. This activity provided information through sentence completion. Although sentence completion is usually used for sensitive topics (Ennew et al., 2009), I used this to get a picture of what role civic engagement played in the participants' skills building. The five questions posed were:

1. Since I am participating in civic engagement, I have changed in the following ways: _____
2. In the future, I see myself as: _____
3. My strengths when taking action are: _____
4. I would describe myself as: _____
5. My hopes and dreams for the future are: _____

To accommodate for different preferences of communication, this written activity enabled the participants to reflect on their civic engagement. In order to avoid this task to look like a school-like activity, I decided to design it more like mini cards that they can fill out instead of having it all on one piece of paper.

My hopes and dreams for the future are ...

Since I am participating in youth organizations, I have changed in the following ways ...

In the future I see myself ...

My strengths when taking actions in the community are ...

I would describe myself as ...

Research tool 4: 'It all starts with me'

The second envelope starts with the fourth activity which is called 'It all starts with me'. This is a ranking activity. This ranking method tries to identify what participants see as their priority in civic engagement (Ennew et al., 2009; Grant, 2017). The assignment was to make a top ten list of what a citizen's responsibility is within the community. The aim with this activity was to elicit information about things that matter to the participants and how they implement these in their everyday life. In this way, the ranking was an excellent way to find out how youth understand the world around them (Grant, 2017). Furthermore, it showed how the concept of citizen responsibility varies among the participants and the way they conceptualize it. To exemplify, one participant did not only identify responsibilities within the outside community but also inside the home setting.

Research tool 5: 'Take a snap'

The last activity was a photographic technique where participants were asked to take self-directed photos of objects, places, people that reminded them of moments when they raised their own voice. This activity was a mix of photovoice and recalling. Photovoice is another technique that allows us to gain insight in children's perspective (Grant, 2017). Although this activity can seem similar research tool 2, this activity serves a tool to elicit more nuanced information about how the participants use their voice. Again, I made sure to provide them with the right ethical information to only add pictures of people that are unidentifiable, to avoid collecting personal data about a third person. A limitation within this activity could be that some participants might not want to share or do not invest enough time to engage in this activity. This was noticeable during this research. Two of the participants did not engage in this activity which affected the richness of the interview. To exemplify, during the interviews we talked less about specific actions these participants took which resulted in a shorter interview.

4.5 Semi-structured individual interview

After collecting the research bag and analyzing the activities, the second phase started. During this phase, pieces of information collected are used as a starting point for reflection and interpretation (Clark, 2005). Semi-structured interviews are used to discuss the themes from the participant's own perspective (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Although, I initially planned a focus group discussion, I changed it to semi-structured individual interviews because of two main reasons. Firstly, at that point, the participants joined the research at different moments making planning and carrying out a focus group problematic. Secondly, the participants all had their individual research bag and in order to grasp everyone's experience, an individual interview appeared to be more valuable than a group discussion. As Lloyd-Evans (2017) argues, in a group setting one can create general assumptions and not focus on individual's stories and experiences. I wanted to avoid making general assumptions and analyze everyone's unique manners of participation.

The interviews were semi-structured. I developed an interview guide in advance and adapted the guide based on the answers collected during the first stage. I made sure each interview was personalized and focused on individual experience. For example, I would ask the participants to elaborate on the pictures they took and some responsibilities they wrote. All the interview guides had a similar structure, starting with some basic questions about the first stage (See appendix 3). The first questions were about the research bag and whether they enjoyed the activities in the envelope and if they learned something from it. One of the participants mentioned that she didn't realize how much she was involved in civic engagement until she reflected on it during the activities. She was quite proud of that and enjoyed reflecting on it. This could be seen as a nice reciprocal gesture by giving the participant a sense of achievement. The body of the interview was about how the participants experience taking actions and which opportunities and limitations were involved. I also tried to gain an understanding on what skills and knowledge they have acquired from civic engagement. Semi-structured interviews are regarded as more informal and there is space for the participant to practice power and guide the interview (Ennew et al., 2009). This is also reflected in the length of each interview. Some interviews were 45 minutes long whereas others were around 90 minutes long. To conduct a successful semi-structured interview, a positive atmosphere can be created through careful listening, non-verbal communication and observing and interpreting what the participants are saying (Baumbusch, 2010). In addition, each participant was provided with a snack and a water bottle during the interviews as a reciprocal gesture.

The interview seemed to be experienced as pleasant, and they all ran smoothly. Some participants were even surprised at how quick it went by and mentioned that they enjoyed the interview. It seemed like they all spoke with confidence, and I could tell they are used to raising their voice and to express themselves towards adults.

The qualitative interview approach aims at producing knowledge that is constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Brinkman and Kvale (2009) conceptualize this as the 'traveler'. Being a 'traveler' during the interview means that knowledge is shaped, constructed, and changed. This subsequently has influence on the knowledge produced which is often seen situational and a joint meaning-making process (Westcott & Littleton, 2005). As an interviewer, one needs to be reflexive and recognize that the responses given to questions are influenced by the

meaning participants ascribe to interviewer's questions (Westcott & Littleton, 2005, p. 143). The participant's responses are in addition also influenced by the contextual setting. I have therefore, as described, decided to do the interviews in a library or at the university. Both research settings seemed to be experienced as pleasant and the participants who had their interview at the university looked fascinated and impressed by the building and other students. Both participants were perceived a little bit shy in the beginning and while we were walking towards the room. As soon as we were inside the closed room and no other students were directly visible, the participants had a more laid-back attitude. One interview, however, was conducted in an open space within the library as I couldn't book a room in time. Although I found a quiet spot where there were no other people sitting, we got distracted a few times when the guard walked by. The participant seemed relaxed and at ease despite conversing in an open space.

Certain practical implications are important to be aware of before and during conducting interviews. First of all, open-ended questions are valuable to encourage participants to reply in more detail (Westcott & Littleton, 2005). All the questions created were open-ended questions. However, after hearing the recordings, I realized I asked a lot of double questions sometimes which could have been confusing for the participants. I should have focused on one question at the time and asked more follow-up questions. Conducting interviews is a craft skill developed with experience. Although I felt like my interview technique had some weaknesses, I have gained valuable experience from it. Furthermore, it is important to not change children's use of language. Children speak and interact about their feelings in a unique manner which sometimes include inappropriate words. I was aware to not eliminate any words or terminology. To exemplify, some participants used words that might be considered as inappropriate in other settings.

4.5.2 Data storage and analysis

During the interviews, an external voice recorder was used to record the interviews. Voice recorders appear to be valuable during social research and during conducting interviews as it allows the research to fully focus on the interviewee rather than on notetaking (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Subsequently, using a voice recorder allows for capturing in-depth knowledge during the transcription phase (Nordstrom, 2015). Interviewing while simultaneously taking notes may lead to loss of material. There are however some limitations involved in using a voice recorder. The interviewee might feel intimidated by the voice recorder and might want to give you information that they think is appropriate (Rutakumwa et al., 2020). All the participants gave consent and I put the recorder a little bit further away, so it wouldn't distract the interviewee.

Before conducting the interviews, the participants were asked to give consent. Written consent and verbal consent were sought. The recorded information was then stored and treated confidentially in a storage area called NICE-1. This is a storage area provided by the university that is in accordance with the guidelines from both NTNU and NSD.

In order to translate the data from the recorder into empirical data, the data has been transcribed into written language. It is within this phase where the lived social interaction with its visible expressions and tones become a written transcript (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). It is therefore important to approach the transcription with care and attention to grasp as much information as possible. Hence, I have transcribed all the interviews myself to grasp as much information as possible and to increase my

familiarity with the data (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Since I experienced the interview myself, I was more aware of the interviewee's non-verbal language and the tone of voice. Although it was a time-consuming task, it was worth to engage in the process. Since the focus in this research project is not on the linguistic features but on the meaning, only laughs and pauses have been included in the transcription (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

A thematic analysis can be useful to locate themes and patterns in a reflexive analytical manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I have drawn inspiration from a form of thematic analysis guide developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). It is a six-phased, non-linear process that should be approached with care and attention. Firstly, it is important to familiarize yourself with the data which means re-reading the data and to make notes. To exemplify, I have transcribed the data first and re-heard the recording to add some missing pieces and to search for some overarching codes. The second phase is generating codes to organize the data in groups that will result in themes which is the third phase. Here, themes are generated and then reviewed in phase four. I was aware to extract sufficient examples when creating a theme to create a rich analysis. The software NVIVO was used to organize the data in a systematic and clear manner. The themes were reviewed and refined to accord with the research's main aim. The thematic analysis resulted in the following two themes and subthemes that will be discussed in the next chapter:

Table 3: Overview thematic analysis

1 Practices of civic engagement	2 Implications of civic engagement.
(A) Citizenship as participation	(A) Social life
(B) Reasons for participation	(B) Learning through participation
	(C) Battling ageism

4.6 The right to information and consent

All participants received an information booklet with all the information they needed to be informed about this research and to comply with the right to be properly researched. The booklet was written in 'youth-friendly' language and it is a nice way to have all the necessary papers organized in one booklet (see appendix 2). The participants were asked to read and fill out the consent forms before working on the envelopes. They were to sign it and hand it back together with the envelopes.

Consent is an ongoing process and respecting this, gives children autonomy and prevents harm or abuse of information (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). Children and their guardians need to give informed consent. This involves presenting the information to them, making sure they understand the information and making sure you have a response (Cocks, 2006). Under the Norwegian law, children are protected in research which means that consent must be obtained from both the guardians and the child. However, this creates tension in research like this where children's right to participate and expression about matters affecting them is emphasized. As Skelton (2008) argues, this leads to a political and ethical tension within research. On one side, children are projected as competent, social actors and simultaneously they are not able to participate without their guardian's approval. Nevertheless, seeking consent from both parties

ensure children's right to be properly researched (Ennew et al., 2009). Luckily, seeking consent from the guardians and the participants were not experienced as difficult during this research project. Furthermore, the participants were all familiar with the concept of consent. Most of them are involved in a youth organization, so it was not an unfamiliar practice. However, I was aware that my role as a 'teacher' could have affected their decision to participate. Throughout the meetings we had, I tried to search for mixed signals from the participants, but luckily, they were all enthusiastic and no signs of 'unwanted' consent was present.

4.6.2 Confidentiality

Respecting the participant's privacy is an important practice (Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Ennew et al., 2009). In this respect, undertaking confidentiality was included within the ethical strategy of this research. Offering the participants full confidentiality helps protecting the participants and mitigates the fear of saying the truth (Ennew et al., 2009). To ensure the participants felt safe and their confidentiality was respected multiple reflexive actions were taken.

First of all, the participants' name and place of residence have been anonymized so that they can't be traced back. The participants were offered to provide their own pseudonym which some of them did. I specifically told them that it should be a name that no one associates them with, as one of them wanted to use a nickname. I created a pseudonym for the ones who did not reply to the offer. Secondly, the data was handled and stored with care (Ennew et al., 2009). The participants were told to seal the envelopes once they are done with the activities, so no one else will have access to it. An external voice recorder was used during the interviews. The raw material has not been discussed with anyone else has only been transcribed and analyzed by me. Thirdly when other material was used in the final report, such as the art image from one of the participants, further permission was sought.

Offering full confidentiality could also be challenging in some cases where the researcher needs to report harmful incidents (Ahsan, 2009). I was aware that if this might happen, as a researcher I had to consider ethics as situational and discuss this concern with the participant. Luckily, the research topics discussed were not induced with sensitive themes, so there were no conflicting implications.

I was aware that being part of the same school community could challenge the confidentiality part of the research. Since I had an on-call position during the research process, I would only be occasionally present. However, I had to be mindful to not discuss any matters with my colleagues during small breaks. I had some instances when I talked about how difficult it is to recruit participants and they would suggest some students from upper classes. They would even mention some of the participants. However, I just replied saying that it is a good suggestion and continue discussing something else. The participants were all familiar with the practice of consent and confidentiality making this process run smoothly.

4.7 Summary

To get a glimpse inside the participants worldview, multiple right-based participatory methods have been used. By applying the atypical friendly role, I have tried to gain the participants trust and mitigate any power imbalances that I had control over. Through a critical yet reflexive manner, the methods, the participants, have been explained and

presented within this chapter. The methods used within this research have resulted in a limited number of challenges and participants seem to have experienced the process of this project as pleasant and insightful. The next chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of the knowledge produced from the participatory research tools and interviews.

Chapter 5 Analysis I: Practices of Civic Engagement

The following chapter will present the results of the empirical analysis. The thematic analysis of the participatory tools and the interviews have resulted in the following two main themes: (1) Practices of civic engagement and (2) Implications of civic engagement. The first analysis chapter will investigate the research questions: *How do youth describe their involvement in civic engagement?* This chapter will discuss and present how the participants give meaning to their citizenship through civic engagement. The following objectives have been drawn from the analysis: (1) citizenship as participation, and (2) reasons for participation. Citizenship as participation presents different practices of civic engagement. The second objective discusses different reasons for political engagement. Furthermore, this chapter discusses their perspectives on these practices and its limitations. The second analysis chapter will develop an understanding in youth's experience that impact their everyday life. Firstly, a brief description of the participants is presented with the information they have provided during the first data collection phase. The participant's age, how they describe themselves, general interest, and interest area of civic engagement are included. This will produce a clear picture of each individual and reveal the uniqueness of each participant's involvement.

5.1 The participants

Participant 1: Kit

Kit is a 15-year-old girl who describes herself as *'imaginative'*, *'observant'* and a *'cat-lover'*. She is interested in drawing, going on walks and boxing. The love for drawing is visible in her involvement in civic engagement. She likes to express her political engagement through paintings and art and what she calls *'a weird conceptual art style'*. She is not involved in a youth organization but likes to attend protests or express herself online on forums. Furthermore, this participant explains that she is particularly interested in spreading awareness about civil rights such as racism (the BLM movement), women rights and LGBTQ rights. Kit argues that she wants to use her voice to represent the community of children. Her strength when taking action in the community is to think rationally, with little bias to get a clearer full picture.

Participant 2: Lila

Lila is a 15-year-old girl who describes herself as *'social'*, *'smart'* and *'predictable'*. She loves being social but also values her alone time. She likes discussions, which is visible in her involvement in civic engagement. This participant says that she is particularly interested in environmental politics and wants to become a political investigative journalist. She has written several articles about climate change and has given many speeches about this topic – with her largest audience being 2500 people. She is involved in several different youth organization and had multiple meetings with the city council. Lila explains that her strength during civic engagement is that she does not believe in giving up.

Participant 3: Ruben

Ruben is a 16-year-old boy who describes himself as *'open-minded'*, *'modest'* and *'introvert'*. He likes gaming and sees himself as someone who always tries to help others. His strength during civic engagement is pointing out the facts that matter. He explains that he is involved in a youth organization, and that he is particularly interested in improving the community he lives in. He wants to represent the youth that live there and be the bridge between youth and the municipality. He has been engaged in several projects within the municipality such as making free food accessible at schools and planning and designing public space to make it more youth friendly.

Participant 4: Tessa

Tessa is a 16-year-old girl who describes herself as *'hard-working'*, *'caring'* and *'curious'*. In her spare time, she likes to be with friends and family, reading books and watching shows. She sees herself as a youth politician and her strength is to work hard for different causes. Her interest lies in politics, and she likes to give speeches and talk to politicians. She likes to know the economic side of politics and how money is invested in projects within a community. She is involved in several youth organizations and wants to make a difference within the community she lives.

Participant 5: Jane

Jane is a 17-year-old girl, who describes herself as *'outgoing, positive, and creative'*. Her favorite things to do in her spare time are playing tennis and being engaged in politics. Jane is involved in two different political youth organizations, one Norwegian and one European. She aspires to be a candidate for the city council she lives. Jane has been active in several projects and likes to voice herself about topics such as school politics, the EU, and international relations. The main reason why she is involved in civic engagement is to be a voice for her peers and to be an active person within her community.

5.2 Citizenship as participation

This section will discuss and reveal the different patterns of civic engagement used by the participants. The participants were asked to elaborate and give examples on how they are involved in civic engagement and acts of citizenship are elicited from the conversations.

One way to explore children's citizenship practices is by analyzing how children participate in everyday life (Larkins, 2014). Within this respect, children's citizenship is intertwined with participation practices in relational spaces. Children can practice their citizenship in relational spaces such as the home, neighborhood, direct community and as this research shows in different parts of the world and online. Within these relational spaces, children practice their citizenship by contributing and exercising their agency that is unique to each child. Agency could therefore be seen as relational and negotiable depending on the interactions (Abebe, 2019). As reflected in the activities and interviews, the participants are particularly interested in raising their voice in the following three topics. These three topics had a central position in our dialogues and participants mainly discussed their experiences revolving around these topics. Firstly, participants seem to be engaged with *environmental politics*. Environmental politics is a prominent topic of engagement among youth in recent years and is contextually based

(Walker, 2017). Understanding patterns of environmental politics among youth in different contexts and time is therefore important to analyze. Both Kit and Lila have used their voices to express themselves about the current development of climate change. Lila was inspired by Greta Thunberg to be more engaged in civic engagement with a focus on climate change. The dialogues we had revealed how important this phenomenon is and how much time the participants have invested in spreading awareness through protests, debates, and speeches. When asked to talk me through the climate protest Lila answered as following:

Lila: *I have to say that even though that the adults supported us, it was us three doing it. Because we set up the entire (...) and we were like 'Okay, now we are going to do it'. We started making posters. We got our break time in school and made posters with the class. I still have 40 posters laying at home. I made posters at home. I made banner/flyers and everything. And then we had to set a date and I think it was about March 13th or 15th one of those days. Around that time in March. And we said now we are not going to change it and we are going to do it no matter what. And we did and my dad was with us that day.²*

Here, Lila explains parts of the process and some actions she took to raise her voice. She invested her time during school hours and after school hours to make sure she could spread awareness. She was determined to continue with the protest and involved her classmates and parents to support her to make her goal become reality. Climate change seems to be an important topic of discussion among all the participants. Not all of them might be engaged with it in the same manner but all of them described it as an area of importance.

Secondly, the improvement of the *direct community* seems to be an important matter. Direct community in this sense is as a network of people who live together and meet their daily needs together (Brennan, 2008). Several participants are investing their time in improving the community – especially for the younger generations. They want to improve the living conditions within the school domain and within the urban setting. One can argue that they use their community agency through civic engagement. Community agency reflects building local relationships and addressing local issues (Brennan, 2008, p. 59). In general, Norwegian children and youth have a strong attachment to the community they grow up in (Gullestad, 1997). Furthermore, fostering participatory rights within the community is seen as a tool to strengthen the local community (Kjørholt, 2002). Ruben for example is currently working on a project that aims to create more space for students in school where they can study and meet. Tessa is engaged in a project where they invite a psychologist to talk about important topics in school. As explained by Ruben, he feels like his participation is most effective within his direct environment:

Ruben: *Yeah, I want to change where I can. I can't do much about the other places but I can help this place. And if everyone everywhere helps their own place then the world will be a lot better.*

According to Ruben, raising his voice is mostly effective within his direct community. For him, civic engagement means taking action in places where you could see the direct results of it. Furthermore, he argues that every individual should contribute within their

² Transcription convention
(...) =omitted segment
... =pause/hesitation

own community to bring positive change. One could argue that Ruben thinks that every individual has a responsibility within their own community and change starts on the community level. Not only are youth interested in the development of the community, but efforts are made to develop youth's social and psychological development as well (Brennan, 2008). Every year, the youth council where Ruben is part of invites a sexologist to talk about relevant topics in 8th and 10th grade. Ruben finds it really important to discuss this and to break the stigma around sexuality. Furthermore, they invite people from *Stophatprat (Stop hate speech)* to have a conversation with 9th graders to talk about bullying. Stophatprat is an international youth movement for human rights and hate speech.

The participants seem to have a vast knowledge about what structures are in place within the community as well. Tessa for example shows an understanding of the deeper structures that creates a community:

Interviewer: *Is there a specific area in raising your voice that you are really interested in?*

Tessa: *Uhm... for me, I really love economics, health and you know how the infrastructure in Norway is. The structure of the community and how the community has been built up and how the nation is built up. What kind of taxes do we pay and to what extend should things go to. I love speaking about... not speaking but acting on that matter that we need to change the way our structure is. What kind of party does the best for our country.*

This dialogue shows that some participants are not only interested in bringing direct change to the community, but they are also interested in the deeper structures and policies within the community. Tessa for example is interested in understanding different policies and political parties that are in place. For Tessa, civic engagement also means acquiring knowledge about the community. According to Tessa, bringing change is not only done on a surface level but starts with structural change.

The third topic that these participants find important is *civil rights*. Here, the participants raise their voice about matters that does not directly affect them but where they find it important to take action. Lila for example does not only go to climate change protests, but also went to a protest about domestic violence against women and racism debates. Kit was very invested in the Iran protests about women rights and shared her knowledge about it with her class to spread awareness:

Interviewer: *You are also spreading awareness in your class.*

Kit: *Yeah, I like doing that.*

Interviewer: *Tell me a little bit about that. Why did you decide to do that?*

Kit: *In Iran... the reason why I was so interested in this insane protest is because my best friend, who is also my online friend, who I've had for more than a year. She is an ex-Muslim; meaning that she converted from being a Muslim to being an atheist and now she is Christian. She grew up in a very like religious household. It's really sad to hear that she has no one else to talk to. So, I obviously care more about that because you know... she is my friend. And when I noticed Iranians are pretty civil like honestly, I don't think I have ever seen that many men in a woman's rights protest. But it's just the government being really bad (laughs). And then people assuming the government equals the people. And then, I wanted the share with my class because I think that you know. I kind of just you know, some people in my classroom are a bit (laughs)... a bit... they don't share the same beliefs like me. I also wanted to see what their reaction was. A lot of times they just talk about uhm... women have rights... and I am like yeah, they do in Norway but not there. Uhm, so yeah. That's why.*

As reflected here, the ability to give meaning to their citizenship goes beyond the rights and issues that directly affect them. Here, Kit recognizes that the rights she enjoys are not enjoyed by everyone around the world. For her, it is important to spread awareness about this to her direct environment and discuss the implications of rights in a broader sense.

In general, children are sensitive towards global issues such as the environment and peace around the world (Jans, 2004). All the participants have shown interest within these three topics and have acted in different manners to claim their rights as citizens. Despite their age, the participants have shown that they have already a solid and a fast amount of experience in raising their voice. They have shown interest in politics for a longer period. One of the participants reflected on when she was younger and thought that politics was just about left- and right-wing parties. However, soon she realized that the thoughts she had about the environment and bringing change could be conceptualized as politics as well. This shows that from a young age she 'unconsciously' had a political understanding. Citizenship in this essence can be described as the individual's relationship with the wider community (Smith, Lister, Middleton, & Cox, 2005). Drawing on a social constructionist perspective, children's participation can be depicted as socially and historically sensitive. The importance of these themes reflects the situational discourses that are currently in place. To exemplify, the environment and youth activism have been a recent mobilization led and inspired by Greta Thunberg (Bergmann & Ossewaarde, 2020). The importance of these three main topics: *environment, direct community and civil rights* are visible in the patterns of civic engagement. The following two paragraphs will describe these patterns in more detail. Focusing on traditional participation and cause-oriented participation.

5.2.1 Traditional participation

The participants within this research are civically engaged in different manners. Both traditional participation through youth councils and organizations, and cause-oriented participation are favored among the participants. As described in the background chapter (2.5.1) political engagement, or civic engagement can be categorized as *cause-oriented* participation and *traditional-oriented* participation. Whilst in *traditional-oriented* participation the main target is to influence the democracy and governmental channels, in *cause-oriented participation* the target is on a specific issue or policy (Norris, 2004). Indeed Norris (2004) does argue that these are not two fixed channels of participation and *cause-oriented* practices have roots within the *traditional-oriented* participation. The current analysis acknowledges *traditional-oriented* participation as *formal political activities*. Ødegard and Berglund (2008) argue that this includes participating in voluntary organizations yet with a political agenda. Among the participants within this research context both *traditional* and *cause-oriented* participation activities are evident. Whilst, research (Lochocki, 2010; Ødegård & Berglund, 2008) has shown a decline in membership in voluntary organizations, four out of the five participants within this research are engaged in a voluntary youth organization with a political agenda to influence policy and democracy. This is, however, mostly done within the direct community with some exceptions that will be elaborated in more detail. Actions of citizenship within voluntary youth organizations are evident in the following two dialogues from the interviews with Tessa and Ruben. Here they explain what it means to be involved in a youth council and how some of their meetings look like.

Dialogue 1

Tessa: *The youth council is a council that the municipality has. Every municipality in Norway. Uhm, every single middle school has to have a representative in that school in that youth council, and from a couple of high school. I am a high school representative now and I was a middle school representative last year.*

Dialogue 2

Ruben: *Every third Monday. We have a three-hour meeting roughly. And then we also have some stuff on the sides. So, we went to Utøya for example and uuh.. we can decide on that stuff during the meetings and there is a lot of pizza (laughs). Uuhmm... we are around ten people. Like I think 6 girls and 4 boys and one secretary which is ... she is not that old, and she has been with the youth council for 14 years.*

Interviewer: *Is she the one leading the meetings or the youth?*

Ruben: *It's supposed to be us ... we have a leader and a second leader. So, they take the most of the part... but the adult is the one who really takes charge. When we are talking a bit too much during the meetings.*

Interviewer: *So, the youth are supposed to lead the meeting. Do you guys decide on the topics or the adult?*

Ruben: *No, it's us who decide on the topic.*

Both Tessa and Ruben are involved in a youth council. As Ruben explains, they have monthly meetings where they discuss different topics that they want to address. Whilst there is an adult present during the meetings, it is mainly the youth that decides on the topics, although Ruben does mention that the adult leads the conversations. During their involvement within the youth council, they have engaged with multiple projects in and outside their community. Ruben mentioned that each youth council has a certain amount of budget and during the meetings the youth decide on what they want to achieve with that budget. This year for example Ruben explained that they used an amount of the budget to go to Utøya to join a conference there. Utøya is a small island where political engaged youth gathered. It was also the site of a terror attack in 2011. Utøya has a longstanding political significance for youth and is often visited by youth. Tessa and her fellow participants used a certain amount of the budget to visit an orphanage that they have been supporting for a long period. She mentioned that supporting an orphanage is something very common in youth councils in Norway. According to Tessa, each municipality connects with an orphanage that is not well off and supports them in different manners. Another project included planning a rooftop space above a mall. During our conversation, Ruben explained how he met with an architect, together with other youth council participants. The architect was interested in hearing what the youth want and what ideas they have on how to plan the rooftop. Ruben also met with the local political party that was interested in hearing what youth want, so they could present that to the community. One of the themes the youth council presented during the meeting was the bus schedule within their municipality. However, when asked about the follow up of the meeting, Ruben answered the following:

Interviewer: *During the meeting, did you feel like you were heard?*

Ruben: *A lot of them seemed pretty engaged in what we were saying.*

Interviewer: *Did they say anything about when it will happen?*

Ruben: *No, not much.*

Interviewer: *Have you heard anything from them after the meeting?*

Ruben: *No, we have not.*

As reflected in this dialogue, the participant felt like he was heard and that the adults were engaged. The youth were given an opportunity to present their ideas and thus to have a voice within their community. However, there has not been a follow-up and even though the youth's voices might have been heard, the youth are not aware of the change their voices have brought. As will be discussed in chapter 6, this is a prominent

occurrence that is reflected in many conversations I had with several youth. Arenas such as youth councils or youth organizations are sometimes experienced as having clear limitations and at the same time opportunities. Children are encouraged to express their views yet that does not mean that views are acted on (Smith, 2002).

The participants who are involved in traditional participation argue that being involved in the youth council is an effective channel to be active within the community and to have a voice. Although some research have shown that youth are diverging from engagement in organizations and political parties, Tessa challenges this notion:

Interviewer: *Do you feel like the community you live in gives you enough opportunity to participate?*

Tessa: *Absolutely! I think that (...) has been an amazing municipality connecting youth and giving them an opportunity to speak. I mean... I know that when I am done with the youth council, a political party will most likely be interested in me. And a lot of youth will be approached. It is really important to me, and I really think that (...) has given me that opportunity.*

Here, Tessa is really interested in developing herself within the political sphere and more importantly within a political party. Her participation in the youth council provides her with the opportunity to become a politician. Interestingly, when I asked her to tell me about her experience meeting politicians, she immediately responded that she regards herself as a politician as well – a youth politician. Seeing herself as a political actor reflects the idea of seeing children as ‘social actor’ and ‘social beings’. She identifies herself as a social actor that is competent and active in the present and not only in the making as a future politician. However, when Jane was asked the same question, she did not regard herself as political at all. Her engagement within the youth organization is for her to be ‘schooled’ to become a member of a political party in the future:

Jane: *So, I am in Unge Høyre so that is youth conservatives and there we discuss different political themes. We are like schooled to be politicians in a way and we go to many programs such as campaigns, programs, workshops and how to write chronicles and how to make a speech. And the European youth. Uhm... we work on international relations and the EU and try to have an active voice and yeah...international relation.*

What Jane describes here as ‘schooled’ is in tune with a highly debated discussion about seeing children as becoming. The multiple activities that they engaged with could be considered as teaching them how to become future politicians and to practice how to become rightful citizens (Lorgen & Ursin, 2021). Jane further argues that she does not see herself as a politician as of now, but she might feel like a politician when she has been elected within the borough she lives. For Jane, being a politician means to be elected which is an act that is often connected to politics. Right now, she identifies herself as a normal student who likes to raise her voice. However, ideas about both being and becoming are evident in this dialogue. One could argue that she is being schooled for the future but at the same time she demonstrates having an active voice and contributing in the here and now. The collage that Jane made during the activity ‘*Actions I have taken*’, showed her engagement that resonated the idea of being a social actor. Jane has for example hosted a seminar about young women’s private economy and was involved in a tv campaign about preventing and treating diseases that affect people across national borders.

The patterns in traditional participation within this research highlights that children are participating within structures provided by adults. The participants have described the

youth council within the municipality, school council, youth political parties and voluntary organizations as arenas of traditional participation. The organizations are important drivers and connectors to the wider community. Subsequently, one could argue that these organizations work as agency 'thickeners' (Abebe, 2019, p. 80). Thus, providing the participants with opportunities to enact their agency within the wider community. In addition, these organizations also serve as a gateway to projects outside the organization and connects the participants with other key players within the community – such as the architect project mentioned above. The participants are satisfied with the number of opportunities provided by the aforementioned organizations but have mixed feelings about how much their voices are represented within the community. Their monthly meetings are with adult support, and they receive economic support by adults. Thus, while the participants decide on the agenda, it is done so within a fixed framework with adult support. Translating this manner of participation within the model of participation proposed by Shier (2001), one can argue that children are participating on level four where children are actively participating in decision-making. Children are directly involved in decision making and deciding what ought to be done with the budget for example. However, adults seem to still have the overall responsibility and can decide how much power they want to share with the youth. This reflects what Jans (2004) highlights which is interventions taken to enhance children's membership within the community is often done so with adult support.

5.2.2 Cause-oriented participation

The participants within this research showed a great interest in cause-oriented participation as well. Here, I will provide three different examples that could be identified as cause-oriented participation: *protests, online forums and art*. As described above, Lila initiated a climate change protest together with her friends. The climate change protest can be seen as a form of episodic engagement with a specific goal that was not defined by an organization (Lochocki, 2010). The climate change protests that have been described have all been linked to the climate change protest initiated by Greta Thunberg in 2019. Prior to 2019, Norwegian youth rarely participated in climate change protests and are now more concerned with the climate change after 2019 (Haugseth & Smepllass, 2022). One of the participants mentioned Greta Thunberg as her role model and participated in *Fridays For Future*, a youth-led climate strike organization initiated by Greta Thunberg. Climate change protests are not the only protest that the participants engaged with, as described earlier. The *Black Lives Matter* movement was a prominent topic and Lila explains that her interest in protests started with the climate change protests but she is also engaged in civil protests now.

The second cause-oriented participation mentioned during the discussions was responding to online forums and news articles. Lila, Kit and Jane enjoy writing and responding to news articles or forums. Lila for example, when she writes an article, her aim is to present to adults how children and youth think about certain topics. Her first article was responding to someone who didn't believe youth should involve themselves in environmental politics. That particular person thought it would 'only cause bad mental kids' (Lila). In this way, she raised her voice to express her perspective and opinion about a matter that directly affects her. Lila's articles are not just an intuitive response, but she does deep research first before she writes an article. Her latest article was about the UN climate board and how little actually has been done, according to Lila. Jane enjoys writing opinion pieces for newspapers. Her aim is to address politicians and diplomats. She has been writing in many different Norwegian newspaper and some of

the topics include identity, school performances and exams. Similar to Lila, Kit enjoys reading online forums dominated by both adults and young people for hours and to post anonymously. As Bakker and Vreese (2011) have argued, online political participation is often overlooked and neglected when participatory engagement is measured. Children and youth use the internet to be politically active in different manners such as discussing and responding to online forums or signing online petitions. Online political participation should therefore be considered equally important when discussing children's practices of citizenship. Kit does not only use online forums to respond but also to critically read other people's perspectives:

Kit: *Uhm... I think... I think what has changed uhm... I think the thing that has changed me the most in civic engagement is listening to others. Cause uhm... I feel like when people really talk about you know the differences between this and that and what they think ... context and all of that... and when that is all jumbled into like my perception it's going to be skewed (laughs). It's 100% not going to be correct. So, I really like to take time to look at ... like online forums of people just talking and I just enjoy you know finding out things that I didn't know before. The way I try to like be a part of engagement... cause listening is one thing, but I also try to like you know speak up and try to raise their voices. Uhm and just like talking about what is going on in general in like ... cause I know like very well that not everyone is going into these really niche online forums and just like dig around for hours so... uhm.*

For Kit, civic engagement sparks a sense of curiosity and finding out things. She is well aware how people think differently about certain topics, and she would like to find out more about these different perspectives. One could argue that Kit tries to be open-minded and knows that there is room for learning new things. Furthermore, she demonstrates notions of critical reflection and critical research skills as she knows certain ideas or believes might be deceiving or incorrect. As Evaland (2004) points out, acquiring political information has implications on the individual's ability to make informed decisions within democracy and thus being an informed citizen. Thus, as reflected in the dialogue, the participant is not only civically engaged by taking action aimed at bringing change, but she is also taking action to retain and acquire knowledge to enhance awareness about the world around her. For Kit, citizenship is not just about taking action but also about critically listening to other's people opinion.

The last type of cause-oriented participation is spreading awareness through art. Whilst arts is often neglected as a political participation channel, arts can be a powerful tool to connect communities and overcome adversities. Art could be used to convey messages that might be difficult to articulate (Greer, 2021). Kit uses art to convey messages that she finds rather difficult to articulate in written or oral text. Although Kit is the only participant in this sample group that uses art as a form of civic engagement, it is equally important to highlight this form of engagement.

Interviewer: *You also mentioned that you use politic art to express yourself and your standpoint. What opportunities do you see in making political art?*

Kit: *I see a lot... (laughs). I think that you know that not only children are overlooked in politics but also art is overlooked in a lot of aspects. I think that honestly, full heartedly, I think that art is going to save like a lot of people one day. I don't know... especially for me, I am not good at describing feelings like anger and like uhm being sad and like being happy. Like I don't know ... I can't write that in a word doc, and I can't do that. It feels so cliché and I am not good at writing, but I am good at colors and putting it on a canvas. And I just think that ... like if I continue doing this and continue doing it better, I want to show it to people. Like I want to have an exhibition one day and I am kind of working to it. Like there is a café that just chose random art and people can buy it. I can put stuff there, but I want to make specifically political art for a specific time. Like a good amount of*

people paying attention. I think that art is a good way to show in a non-verbal way and non-vulgar, maybe brutal way sometimes how things can really be.

This view seems to coexist with the notion of cultural activism, which Delicath (2004) describes as a mode of representing one's voice in their own language or image through cultural resources such as art. During our conversation, Kit mentioned how she would like to represent people through art and to convey a message to a community. Her art is directed to anyone, but mostly the government or the people in power. Her main goal is to make people think and reflect on current problems and she tries to elicit a meaningful conversation out of her art. As she mentioned 'I want to have like a 100-year-old random conservative lady be like; 'Oh she has a point, though' (Kit). This form of civic engagement which is often in a non-institutionalized setting is often overlooked as political participation (Delicath, 2004). However, Kit demonstrates an important dimension within political participation that articulates a certain voice. As Delicath (2004) argues, cultural activism is often used when other modes of participation are limited or non-existent. One could argue that Kit uses art to create an opportunity to influence and to participate in a meaningful way. Furthermore, cultural activism opens a way of articulating a unique vision, which Kit tries to do (Delicath, 2004).

Together with participation through online forums, this illustrates how there are a lot of important and overlooked arenas of civic engagement. It demonstrates different ways youth participate and act as citizens that needs more scrutiny. Another important aspect about civic engagement revealed within this research is that participants use cause-oriented participation within traditional participation. Traditional participation is mainly related to elections and democratic parties and since these participants are excluded from elections and voting, they use traditional participation to target not only democratic parties but also direct issues and policy concerns. These diverse and mixed types of civic engagement reflect what Quéniart (2008) calls a mutation in political involvement. Jane, for example, has been engaged in several activities through the youth council which can be identified as both traditional and cause-oriented participation. She has been using her voice in many different ways such as giving speeches, giving interviews and seminars, and was part of an election campaign in 2021. She has done so within the youth organization is she involved.

So far, the analysis revealed how the participants engage in multiple forms of civic engagement. Their acts, regardless the impact and on what level they engage, should be regarded as acts of citizenships. Children's practices of participation within this research can be conceptualize as 'citizenship-as-practice' (Lawy & Biesta, 2006, p. 43). The participants reveal that citizenship is not solely seen as a status but rather an inclusive experience enjoyed by everyone who claims it. The participants also challenge the notion of *becoming* 'good citizens'. Rather, they reveal that practicing citizenship is embedded in their everyday life through different channels. Whether the participants are involved in traditional or cause-oriented participation, all youth were motivated by similar reasons to participate and to claim their right as citizens.

5.3 Reasons for participation

From the analysis, multiple reasons for participation can be identified. The reasons for participation ranges from being a voice for others to claiming their rights to be part of the democracy. Multiple participants mentioned their dissatisfaction with the current policies and governments in power. Their participation is mostly directed either towards adults in control or towards their own peers to support them. This paragraph will shed light on three different reasons of participation. The participants consider themselves as

the future citizens and therefore should be included in decision-making processes. Secondly, the participants feel a sense of responsibility towards other peers. Thirdly, due to the exclusion in the political sphere and the right to vote, the participants want to claim their rights in other forms.

5.3.1 '...because we are the future'

Children are often excluded within the political sphere and children's rights is a highly debated concept (Cohen, 2005). Many of the participants think it is crucial to participate in civic engagement in order to represent their voices and needs within the society. Bringing about change and setting things in motion was often described as a core motivation, and participants expressed a feeling of responsibility for contributing to change and a wish to 'fix' things. Several of the participants showed dissatisfaction about the current way the democracy is operating and worry about their future. When asked why it is important for them to be involved in civic engagement:

Ruben: *Well... the youth is going to be here for the next 70 years. The 70 years are not going to ... so like. We need to talk about how we want it.*

Kit: *Because equality you know. I think that kids should have an equal representation and maybe even more because we are the future... like literally. And uhm... You know we don't have the right to vote and again I just think that is kind of like a bit of a weird thing.*

Lila: *I think they should be involved because it is their future they are talking about, like all the reports about economics. How to do this and that and it is us who is going to live with the consequences. Like 'Oh yeah, this can happen in 20 years'. In 20 years, we are the ones having that.*

Jane: *Mainly it's because, we are going to take over the world one time. So, we need to be prepared.*

The participants voiced themselves about their future and the concern about consequences of the current democracy on their future. Different emotions were visible when talking about 'their future' such as anger and despair, making the participants potentially prone to anxiety (Nairn, 2019). However, participants feel hopeful to bring change and emphasise the value of their participation. Previous research has shown how hope and despair can become drivers of social change in youth climate activism. At the same time, hope and despair can lead to a double burden where they feel a sense of responsibility to 'fix things' and to fix their own anxiety and despair (Nairn, 2019). The participants are assuming that they will suffer from the negative outcomes of today's decisions, demonstrating despair. Notions of *intergenerational justice* are clearly exemplified within these dialogues (Ursin et al., 2021). Intergenerational justice is a concept often used in political environment in which future generations are dependent on actions taken by members of the present generations. The actions participants are taking are attempts to enhance intergenerational justice and to mitigate long-term negative consequences. During our interview, Kit mentioned how hurtful it is to see how some adults who don't respect human rights have the right to vote and make decisions. From the extracts above, ideas about inclusion are evident as well. The participants show the importance of equal representation within the democracy. As illustrated by Lila, they are the ones living with the consequences. The dialogues above show that children view themselves as part of the society and that they can provide meaningful information about how they want to shape the society they live in. Representing their age group seems an important reason for most participants. Interestingly, Kit mentioned that she

wants to '... represent children who are interested in politics and stuff but not the boring politics, but in a 'let's make a change political way' (Kit). Here, she might refer to cause-oriented participation where one could immediately see result. As highlighted in a study by Gordon and Taft (2011, p. 1515) children want to 'create their own politics for their own generation'. This kind of politics could therefore be seen as 'generationed'. Children and youth see and experience social and political fluxes differently than older generations. According to Smith (2010), children show a great understanding of what their citizenship means and show concern about their participatory rights. The participants are again identifying themselves as social actors and argue that their voices should be respected and heard. This reflects Kulynych's (2001) argument that the inclusion of children's voices are pivotal for a well-functioning democracy. What these participations exemplify can challenge the notion of children being passive in the existing democracy. Rather, youth's political engagement is filled with present and future-oriented contributions and embedded with a vision of a future ideal society (Ting, 2017). They are not only engaged in the political sphere to bring a change in the present but to also bring a change in the future that, according to the participants, belongs to them. As Ruben argues, they are the ones taking over the world one day and need to be prepared for that. 'To be prepared' is a very interesting point that Ruben makes here, which indicates that Ruben finds it important that youth should become knowledgeable within the political sphere to know how to take over the democratic practices. Their civic engagement steers towards concrete actions and promoting their vision. This is something that is reflected in other studies as well (Quéniart, 2008). The participants are well aware how the current policies will and can affect their lives in the future and they are vulnerable by the decisions made by the older generations (Corner et al., 2015). As described in the following conversation with a participant, Kit is frustrated about the fact that only one category of people is represented in decision-making processes about future decisions:

Interviewer: *Who are you trying to convince with your art?*

Kit: *I am trying to ... I think. So, again like I think... I want ...representing people is the best way to convey anything to a community and like you know really get something out there. I think that my audience isn't necessarily those people who I am representing. I think it's literally anyone because ... I need anyone to understand what the hell is going on. You know, if you don't catch up, earth is gonna burn. But I think, I want my art to be directed towards the government. Like at people who have more power like adults. Especially, this one (shows her art). Not a totally good picture. That's supposed to be the older, more wiser... you know governmental figures. You can't really see it, but that is me... there. And like the fact that the spotlight is only on them. Sometimes it feels like they are just robots standing there speaking nonsense. They feel so ... not real because you know. It doesn't really matter for them, does it? It doesn't really matter for them, they are gonna grow 70 and die in a world that is half collapsed. You know, I might live in a world that is fully collapsed. So, yeah... I think that's what I am trying to...*

Interviewer: *Persuade?*

Kit: *Yeah...*



Figure 3: Art created by the participant

During the conversation we had, Kit showed her art piece that tries to illustrate how she feels about being excluded in decision-making processes. She mentioned a couple of times how angry she is at people in charge and how little they do to solve climate change problems. In addition, she explained that to her it seems like the people currently in power are not fully aware of what the consequences are or seem to not care about the consequences. Kit seems to be frustrated, hurt and a little bit desperate to get the message out that their future is in danger. Climate change problems can result in major stress and dissatisfaction among younger generation (Corner et al., 2015). Civic engagement for these participants could be seen as a shared responsibility to contribute to the present and future. They want to claim that responsibility and right of being to compensate for the failure of adult power. Similar striking statements can be found in Greta Thunberg's speeches where she indicates that because of adult's failure of care, youth have to step up and take responsibility to create a liveable future (Murphy, 2021). One could see this type of agency as forced agency as children and youth act out of necessity to improve their living condition (Robson et al., 2007).

5.3.2 Feeling of responsibility

According to Lister (2007), one of the building blocks of citizenship is responsibilities. On one level, children's claim to citizenship lies in the responsibilities they exercise. Responsibilities can be categorized as responsibilities encouraged by the state and responsibilities of one's own choosing (Lister, 2007). Smith (2012) adds that children undertake responsibilities at home, schools and communities. Children's identity as citizens emerge out of exercising their rights and responsibilities. During one of activities (research tool 4) the participants were asked to write down what their responsibilities are within the community. Several participants identified collective and social responsibilities as important. Social responsibilities such as: respecting each other, show love to each other, be a safe space for others and encourage healthy lifestyle to others. On a collective level, the participants mentioned: being an environmentally friendly citizen, youth politician, knowing your rights, pointing out falsities and obeying the law. The answers given are in line with the normative definition of being a 'good citizens' (Bjerke, 2011). Furthermore, it reflects the 'proper childhood' discourse that portrays children as rational (Nilsen, 2008). It also corresponds with the construction of political awareness and future citizens (Kjørholt, 2002).

When it comes to responsibilities voluntarily exercised, standing up for peers and being a voice for peers were prominent throughout this research. Showing love and taking care of each other are responsibilities that are present from a very young age as reflected in the following dialogue. When asked about the first time Tessa wanted to do something for the community, she answered the following:

Tessa: *‘Uhm... I think I always have been like a political child... always. Uhm, it’s just part of who I am. I don’t like just being told to do something and not having a say in it. So, I think I’ve just been like that for my whole life. And I remember when uuhm... I was a child maybe 8 or 9 years old. Uhm... we had this thing in our school that it was like a bench you would sit at it if you didn’t have someone to play with. And there was everyone like there would be a lot of children sitting on that bench and nobody would approach them. So, I kind of saw that those sitting on those benches, and I felt like nobody should be alone at school... nobody should feel unsafe. So, I really wanted to make a difference there... it’s not a lot but I tried to say hello to the people who were sitting on those benches’.*

This dialogue reveals the responsibility Tessa felt to approach the students who were feeling alone and make them feel safe inside the school environment. It shows how Tessa felt the social responsibility to be thoughtful towards others and to stand up for others. Tessa took the initiative voluntarily and practiced citizenships by taking care of others (Bjerke, 2011). Similar findings can be found in the extract below when Ruben takes responsibility to stand up for women during online video games.

Ruben: *I play a lot of video games. It is a fact that a lot of women on video games are harassed ... a lot. And I will always stand on the side of the people that aren’t harassing. I ... (long pause) that’s like ... I always help defend them. Partly to have them still being in the gaming community and also because that’s the right to do.*

Interviewer: *Do they talk about it or is it something common to talk about those things during gaming? Is it something you initiate?*

Ruben: *A lot of times women don’t really speak in the lobbies because people start talking trash to them. And if someone started talking trash, I will then... I will talk out loud.*

Here, Ruben uses his voice to stand up for women who are harassed during online video games. Ideas about standing up for others as a responsibility are evident as Ruben mentioned that that is the right thing to do. He is practicing citizenship by speaking up for others and to include women, who are often excluded, within the gaming community. As one of the participants mentioned ‘Civic engagement is about keeping humanity safe and feel welcomed’. Standing up for someone is not an action done in a fleeting moment, but it is a continuous process of standing up for humanity and fighting for each other’s rights. What Ruben demonstrates here seems to coexist with the notion of the ‘networked young citizens’ which is often a neglected form of civic engagement (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014, p. 143). A networked young citizen enacts citizenship through social media networks with the focus on social relations (Loader et al., 2014). Besides being engaged in institutional and traditional participation, Ruben demonstrates acts of citizenship in a less visible framework. Shedding light on these forms of civic engagement are pivotal to understanding contemporary forms of political engagement and to understand youth’s lived experiences (Loader et al., 2014).

The two dialogues above demonstrate an interesting image of when and how the participants are enacting their responsibility. As revealed, both participants stood up within their own peer community – in this case at school and online. Furthermore, their action was aimed towards other peers – in this case children or youth. Practices of

responsibilities among the participants could therefore be easily overlooked by adults as they are directed towards children and not directly visible in the 'adult' world. These type of citizenship practices exercised in hidden places from adults might enforce the assumption of underrated capacity of children and youth. This does however not immediately justify bestowing children with the same rights as adults, but it does reveal practices of citizenship that are important to children and sometimes hidden from adults. Actions in spaces like this are therefore important to be recognized in order to appreciate children's acts of citizenship (Lister, 2007).

This research also reveals that children are not only aware of the everyday life responsibilities such as social and individual responsibilities (Bjerke, 2011), but they have a greater understanding about other responsibilities as well. One of the participants mentioned 'consumer' as one of her responsibilities within the community. When asked if she could elaborate more, she argues:

Tessa: *I mean... if you and I would stop buying Buenos right now and everyone in the whole world would stop, they would go bankrupt. You have a certain responsibility; you are a consumer. I am a consumer, and if everyone stopped a brand, they would die out. And also, you have a responsibility as consumer to buy responsibly. Try to not support child labor, try to drive electric car, or take the bus. I think that's an important part.*

This example above shows that Tessa is not only aware of everyday responsibilities, but Tessa sees responsibility as a long-term engagement with deeper structures of the society. She is aware of the way the society works, which is one of the competencies related to citizenship (Theis, 2009). She also mentions buying in a responsible manner. One can argue that Tessa sees herself as citizen that shares the responsibility by protecting civil rights and taking care of the world by being sustainable. According to Lieberkind and Bruun (2021), Nordic youth have increasingly gained knowledge about social, democratic and political issues in recent years.

5.3.3 Claiming their rights.

Another reasons why the participants are involved in civic engagement is to claim their right as citizens within the community they live in. Equal representation was one of the reasons why the participants want to claim their right. Many participants argue that they want to be represented in the political sphere and feel that they are currently excluded. The feeling of exclusion also stems from the denial of the voting right. The participants are aware of the rights they have and from which rights they are excluded. Some argue that children have no place at the decision-making table (Theis, 2009) and some participants are conscious about that:

Interviewer: *Why is it important in your opinion that youth should be involved in civic engagement?*

Tessa: *I think that an example could be ... if you are sitting at a dinner table and you don't like potatoes... and you are being served potatoes and then you realize that you don't like potatoes. Well... If you don't like potatoes, then you have to get up and make your own dinner. And that's what I think. If you don't get a seat at the table, you have to make a goddamn table yourself.*

Tessa seems to use two metaphors to describe (1) finding solutions when you are not happy with the solutions presented by those in charge and (2) 'making a table' when there is no place for you at the existing table. As reflected in this dialogue, Tessa uses potatoes as a metaphor for the rights they have and seems to argue that she does not

like some of the rights she has been given. It seems like her involvement in civic engagement is partly because she is not satisfied and one way to claim her rights is to become an active citizen and to work her way around it with the 'ingredients' she has. In addition, she understands that it is not just the rights that she is not satisfied with, but she is well aware that her voice is not recognized within the normative democratic decision-making. According to her, children need to create their own space or table to claim their right and to voice themselves. This shows that children care about their role and position in the society, which is an important aspect of citizenship (N. Smith, Lister, Middleton, & Cox, 2005).

Equal representation is an important factor for children and this analysis has shown the importance of this for the participants. Several participants have voiced themselves about wanting to be included within the political sphere. Being excluded from voting rights was by some seen as a major reason to be engaged in different manners to claim a space in the political sphere. Some participants think voting is an important channel to claim your right, even though some research has shown the opposite (Lochocki, 2010). One of the arguments used by the participants was that voting capacity should not be defined by age but by experience. This is in line with the highly topic about children's citizenship and whether children should get the right to vote or not (Lister, 2008; Wall, 2014).

Interviewer: *So, why is it important in your opinion that youth should be involved in civic engagement?*

Kit: *Because equality you know. I think that kids should have an equal representation and maybe even more because we are the future... like literally. And uhm... You know we don't have the right to vote and again I just think that is kind of like a bit of a weird thing. Like we don't have the right to vote, we don't have the right to drive obviously. We don't have the right to teach, we don't have the right to other things... you know there is a list. You know duh obviously I am not in a 'full state'. But uhm... we should still have a say, cuz I don't think that the fact that I am 15 is going to affect everything I know of. I don't think the fact that you are ten or twelve is going to affect your beliefs. Cuz like, I don't think like I only thought that like really really uhm... right people. Like right wing people were like older people but then I saw a kid while I was working at a museum wearing a Soviet Union hat asking if there were any paintings about the Cold War. So, yeah, I don't think age cuz age and experience are two different things. Cuz, they say respect the elders because they have a lot of experiences. Like you have more experience in living obviously (laughs)... like duh....*

As reflected in this dialogue, The participant's main reason for civic engagement is to claim the right as an equal social actor within the society. Kit wants to make sure children are represented in democratic practices since they are excluded from voting rights. Children are often excluded based on assumptions that they can't make rational decisions about the community as they are not mature enough (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2020). The participant is well aware of the normative assumptions about competency and capacity that they are ascribed to. Kit is aware that she still needs to develop and that she is not in 'full state'. However, for her not being in full state should not compromise her say and mute her voice. Wall (2014) argues that political capacity does not suddenly occur when someone turns 18. Like Wall (2014), Lila argues that younger people below the age of 18 could also be trusted, and that people do not suddenly become trustworthy at the age of 18. Furthermore, Lila shows knowledge about voting, something that is often overlooked by adults (Wall, 2014).

Interviewer: *So, lowering the voting age. What kind of impact will that have?*

Lila: *Well, you can see that now happening, that the left side of the politics are going up way more because younger people are now allowed to vote. The young people who did the climate protests a few years ago. So, you will see a political change in it.*

Lila demonstrated to have understanding about the political system that includes left- and right-wing parties. From the extract above it is clear that she has critically analyzed and studied the patterns of voting as she is aware what young people are currently voting for. This questions the assumption that children are not mature enough to vote for decisions affecting the community (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2020).

However, not all the participants agree with giving children and youth the right to vote. Their opinions and arguments are in tune with what some scholars have argued for as well (See Cook, 2013; Wall, 2014 for discussions). When asked whether children and youth should have a voting right, some participants argued the following:

Jane: *No, uhm... or mainly because I could see myself and friends and youth in my age. They are not into politics, and they don't know much about it. Your vote is really important in the society. I think to set the age on 18 is when... I think we need to have an age to limit when you can do certain things like drinking, drive and voting.*

Tessa: *I think it's uh... It's a great opportunity but unfortunately a lot of 16 wouldn't vote. And then you will have a whole demographic that is not representative.*

Both Jane and Tessa argue against lowering the voting age and believe that not all 16-year-old are engaged in politics and interested in voting. They are both aware of the importance of voting and believe that the political voting system will be in danger when lowering it as some youths have limited knowledge about it and are most likely not voting. Overall, the dialogues steer towards co-existing feeling of not being fully included, yet the participants are not necessarily pressing for extending children's political rights.

5.4 Summary

This chapter analysed and discussed different forms of civic engagement the participants are involved with. Three important arenas of engagement were evident within this research which are: *environmental politics, direct community, and civil rights*. The participants voiced themselves about these topics in different manners ranging from traditional participation such as being a member in a youth council to cause-oriented participation such as protesting and raising awareness. The chapter revealed the uniqueness of each participants involvement and their motivation to be politically active. This shows the importance of moving away from a narrow understanding of what political engagement encompasses and to recognize participation exercised outside the frameworks as equally important. By doing so, children who are being acknowledged and recognized within the political sphere will develop a sense of democratic responsibility (Lister, 2007). Furthermore, multiple reasons for participation in the political sphere have been highlighted that shows that children and youth are eager to be included in political practices. They are the future citizens and have access to peer's lived experiences and know their needs and wants. Participating in civic engagement has been described as both enjoyable as well as challenging. The implications of civic engagement will therefore be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 Analysis II: Implications of civic engagement

The second objective of this research project is to explore the role of civic engagement in the participant's everyday life. The aim of this chapter is to develop an understanding of the benefits and the challenging aspects of children and youth's participation within the political sphere. Three themes have been elicited to answer the second research question: *What role does civic engagement play in children and youth's everyday life?* Firstly, the impacts on social life will be discussed – both positive and negative. Whilst civic engagement can enhance social support, the analysis also reveals how it can reduce social support. I will then discuss the opportunities that civic engagement offers and its impact on the participants, by reflecting on how the participants feel about raising their voice and what they have learned from it. Lastly, the obstacles that the participants encounter will be discussed which are mainly age related.

6.1 Social life

The significance of social support was evident in the interviews with all the participants. The participants were directly and indirectly asked about the social support they receive, and all participants have mentioned family and friends at least once during our interviews. Family and friends have been demonstrated to be an important driver within this research project, which is in line with previous studies (Quéniart, 2008). In addition, the support from teachers has been highlighted as well. However, the participants have also shed light on the negative impact of civic engagement on their social life. They describe how civic engagement has resulted in losing support and being excluded from friendships. Social support is a complex phenomenon including social networks and behaviour, and is seen as pivotal in youth development (Brennan, 2008). The role of family, peers and teachers will be discussed in relation to the participants civic engagement.

6.1.1 The importance of social support

Support from Family

Most participants have mentioned their close family as important support pillars for their civic engagement. They get their information from their parents and have daily discussions about civic engagement. The familial support is demonstrated by showing proudness, taking action together, taking the time to discuss certain topics, and sharing youth's civic activities with others (on social media for example). One of the interview questions was about their role model when it comes to raising their voice. Both Kit and Tessa described a family member as their role model. For Tessa, her sister is her role model because she gives her the courage to express herself and to make a change. Kit mentioned her mother as her role model. She talked fondly about her and how good she is at speaking up. She also takes long walks with her dad and feels comfortable 'ranting' about stuff to him. Studies have shown the importance of parental influence in political socialization among children (Lochocki, 2010; Ødegård & Berglund, 2008; Strandbu & Skogen, 2000). Although social class is becoming insignificant, in especially in cause-oriented participation, cultural resources within the family are still important drivers for youth to participate. Cultural resources can encompass books at home and political discussions with parents (Ødegård & Berglund, 2008). Parents are not only providing youth moral and educational support through discussions, but also provide

learning opportunities, social and financial recourses (Kelly, 2006). When Lila initiated the climate change protest, parents were important agents for the success of it. During our interview she explained how several newspapers were present during the climate strike. When I asked her if she contacted them, she explained:

Lila: *No, they contacted us.*

Interviewer: *How did they know that you guys are planning a protest on that day?*

Lila: *We put it on social media. Because my parents are biologist and one of the parents put it out on their work blog. And then, I don't know how it happened but I got a message from my teacher that she is picking me up next morning because a journalist was coming to record us. And after that, (...) and (...) also came³.*

As reflect here, parents have spread the word and used their resources to raise awareness to the wider community. Even Lila was surprised to hear that national newspapers were interested in the climate protests. This initiative from the parents have created a long-lasting connection for Lila as she still has contact with some of the reporters and occasionally shares her articles with them. In this case, parents played a role in enhancing Lila's social connections and relationships with the wider community (Kelly, 2006). Interestingly, when I asked Lila why it was important for her to organize her climate protest she answered:

Lila: *Well... it was basically me and two friends. It was in fifth or sixth grade... I think. And, we said that we wanted to make a change too, because the two of us... We were a group of three – two of us has biologist as parents. So, we were like 'ah we kind of have to, you know (laughing).*

What is striking about her statement here is that it seems like she felt a sort of obligation to take action and to raise her voice, because of her parents' occupation. Although she says this with a smile, there could be an underlying thought behind it. It is interesting to find out to what extent children and youth feel obliged to be involved in civic engagement because of parental influence. This was however not explored within this project.

From the dialogues above, support from friends have been evident too. Lila organized the protest together with her friends and usually goes to political events with her friends. Support from friends has been evident in other participants' civic engagement as well, as will be discussed in the section below.

Support from Friends

According to Ødegård and Berglund (2008), having political conversations with friends and peers seem to be more influential than having conversations with parents. Friends who are civically engaged strongly influence each other's civic behavior, and social connectedness is pivotal for civic engagement among youth (Lochocki, 2010). This is also evident within this research project as several participants have discussed the importance of friends and how civic engagement has led to new friendships within the political domain.

When I asked Tessa what she gained from participation in the youth council, she mentioned friends among other things. She considers the friends she gained as family

³ The participant mentions two other national newspapers

now. Similar to Tessa, Jane explains that civic engagement has affected her life in a positive way because she is with her friends when she participates, and she got to meet a lot of new people. Thomas (2007, p. 206) calls this the 'social relations' of participations. This aspect of children's participation is about the social part of participation where children gain opportunities for social connection and networks. However, Jane also mentions that it made it more difficult to make time for her other friends, or to meet people outside politics. This is mainly because she is occupied with projects and working on seminars almost every weekend, so making time for others remains difficult for Jane. Friends can also be the reason why youth are participating in politics. They can provide connections and they can be a moral support during different activities. In our interview, Lila mentioned several activities that she was involved in like going to several protests and debates. However, she always makes sure someone goes with her and that is usually her best friend.

Civic engagement is also seen as an opportunity to foster a sense of solidarity among civic engaged children in a wider sense. Participants have expressed a sense of belonging to a community and a feeling of being understood by peers who share the same interest. They find it easier to talk and discuss matters with likeminded individuals:

Kit: *It kind of felt like every single kid was in the protest and every single child was like talking about their experiences. We were all in solidarity in some way. And they all... they were all like pissed at you know several governments. At adults and every one of these kids were like kind of had enough. Like I don't want the world to burn ... that should be priority. And I think, again I was like at that moment I was like 'I can do something'.*

Kit expresses here how she felt in solidarity with other children who were protesting during the climate change protest. Feelings of solidarity while being civically engaged has been mirrored in other studies as well (Ursin et al., 2021). Solidarity here is translated as relating and empathizing with others (Smith, 2012). Being in a group of people who are fighting against injustice, made Kit realize that she can achieve something. It gave her hope and a sense of optimism. The sense of solidarity is often a reaction of injustice and not feeling listened to (Smith, 2012).

Support from teachers

The emphasis of supporting friends and family have been prominent in the analysis. However, support from teachers has been highlighted as well as important drivers for political participation. It is evident that a positive teacher-student relationship enhances children's academic, behavioral and emotional skills (Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004). Teachers can play a significant role in developing children's self-esteem and skills. This sort of support was demonstrated when I asked Ruben who his role model is in relation to civic engagement:

Ruben: *My teacher in 8th and 9th grade. It wasn't really my teacher. He was a teacher for other classes who I got pretty close with. And he ... sort of told me how to get over it and even now every once in a while, I still see him ... and that was one of the best times I have had.*

Interviewer: *To get over...?*

Ruben: *More like... pff... So, he is able to help like with words ... uhm if something bad happens for example bullying or something like that. He kind of helped me at least get over that. I shouldn't care about it. He kind of enlightened me about that.*

Interviewer: *So, he was a role model in personal matters and how to use your voice.*

Ruben: *Yeah...*

For Ruben, his teacher clearly made an impact on his personal life and taught him how to cope with adversities. Although, the teacher was not his direct teacher he managed to support Ruben and until this day impact him with his advice. On the other hand, teachers can also become an obstacle for participation. In the same interview with Ruben, he explained how some teachers were not supportive when they invited the sexologist to school. When I asked if Ruben feels heard when participating he mentioned the following:

Ruben: *Most of the time yeah, but every year we have basically a sex ed with everyone who is in year 8 and 10 grade. But the teachers disagree with us. They think it is too much talk about porn for example. We need to talk about ... they are like oh maybe we should change the name to 'the unusual day'. That is literally something someone said while we are trying to make everything about sex more usual. If it's unusual then young people would want to figure it out and try it at the age of 14 years old. The teachers don't really trust the students.*

Talking about topics that are seen as important for youth and children seems to be experienced as difficult. Ruben explains how he and his peers find it important to discuss topics around sexuality. He also explains in our interview that the youth council wants to talk about the idealization of porn and the danger of that for younger kids. However, what the youth found important was neglected by the adults and ideas what adults think youth need was pushed forward. This shows how youth's civic engagement is met with paternalistic attitudes. This is seen as a barrier for children's participation as parents and teachers think, or are afraid that children will participate irresponsibly (Hill, Davis, Prout, & Tisdall, 2004). Furthermore, this contradicts some theories within childhood studies, especially within the actor-oriented perspective. Children need to be taken seriously, even when their perspectives conflict with the adult's perspective. Subsequently, one could argue that adults might feel a sense of discomfort in addressing issues that are important to youth. The idea that childhood is socially constructed is evident here as discourses change throughout time and new ideas come to exist. Discussing topics such as sexuality is becoming more common and are normalized. These points of view may be interpreted as a challenge towards defining children's participation. On one hand, children are seen as social actors whose voices should be acknowledged and hold important insight. On the other hand, their voices are in danger to be muted because of certain labels attached to children by adults (Cockburn, 2005). These are labels such as unreliable, emotional, or incompetent. This split attitude has been highlighted in literature (Cockburn, 2005; Lorgen & Ursin, 2021; Thomas, 2007) and it seems to be an everyday issue. As Thomas (2007) argues, there is much more attention on adults' ideas about what children need and not what they wish. The dialogue above with Ruben demonstrates that civic engagement can lead to a loss of social support as well.

6.1.2 Losing social support.

Whilst civic engagement often brings a positive impact on children and youth's social life (Shaw et al., 2014), it can also lead to negative consequences. During our interviews, some participants have voiced themselves about the negative impact of civic engagement on their social life. Losing social support was prominent, and one participant argued that things would have been much easier if she wasn't political active at all.

Interviewer: *How is raising your voice influencing your day-to-day life?*

Kit: *... I think it really did change things around me. Things would have been much different if I was silent. You know... I lost friends ... I lost a lot of people, because of this. I*

lost trust and people lost trust in me. It's really annoying sometimes but the outcomes is... if there is a good outcome. I think it was worth it.

Interviewer: *'Did you lose friends because...?'*

Kit: *I mean I do think I see things differently than others... that sounded so like (laughs)... I think.*

Besides describing the positive side of civic engagement, Kit also mentioned how she has lost friends. She argues that she sees things differently, which is also one of the reasons she wants to spread awareness about certain things. Something she also mentioned when she discussed her presentation about the situation in Iran. However, for Kit, political participation is more important than losing some friends. She believes in the good outcome of it and thinks it is all worth it. While children are fighting to become more included within the political sphere and the 'adult' world, they can become excluded from their own world. Similar to Kit, Lila as lost some friends and even adults within her community have shown dissatisfaction towards her political activism. When asked whether civic engagement has affected her circle, Lila answered:

Lila: *It certainly has in a way. Cuz the community I live in was very conservative and I have like put that a bit on the side. I still talk to them, but I don't bother anymore going into those arguments anymore. Cuz I am like there is no point. While I was doing that... I often got teased and often send like 'Why do you even care'. Like throw plastic on the street in front of me.*

Interviewer: *Adults or friends?*

Lila: *Mostly, my friends. but it has affected my circle yeah. I was like you guys can leave and I can go to but at this school it's a lot more respectful and everyone is really engaged in making a change.*

Lila mentioned a couple of times how adults and friends within her community voiced themselves negatively towards her. During the climate change protest, parents started complaining once she managed to get the school engaged. She feels like people are less respectful towards her because of what she stands for and even show actions of bullying towards her by throwing plastic in front of her. The loss of social support has also led to her being more resilient and not to 'be bothered' anymore. Both Lila and Kit have shown forms of resiliency despite the presence of negative outcomes of civic engagement. New ways of dealing with adversity and learning new skills have been a prominent opportunity youth have gained during their civic engagement. The next paragraph will analyze these opportunities in more detail and develop further on how youth have learned *through* participation as opposed to learning *as preparation for* participation (Gordon & Taft, 2011).

6.2 Learning through participation

There is a broad consensus among researchers that civic engagement is fueled with multiple opportunities for children and youth (Cicognani, Mazzoni, Albanesi, & Zani, 2015; Kulynych, 2001; Shaw et al., 2014). Civic engagement has positive outcomes on the individual level as well as on a community level. On the individual level, children who are civically engaged gain, among other things, personal skills, resources and a feeling of empowerment (Cicognani et al., 2015). This paragraph about learning through participation discusses the opportunities and skills acquired through participating within the political sphere.

The participants within this research described a feeling of empowerment several times. Participants express feelings of pride to participate and a pleasure to serve the community. They feel proud being in decision-making processes and are more open and

aware. As one of the participants mentioned 'giving things is one of the greatest gifts a persons can do' (Kit). Here Kit refers to her monthly donation to a boy in a SOS children's village, a non-governmental organization that supports orphans. This altruistic action gives her a feeling of accomplishment. The flashcard activity also reveals some skills acquired by the participants such as thinking more rationally and learning about different ways to help others. They have become hardworking and making a change feels like an accomplishment and positive.

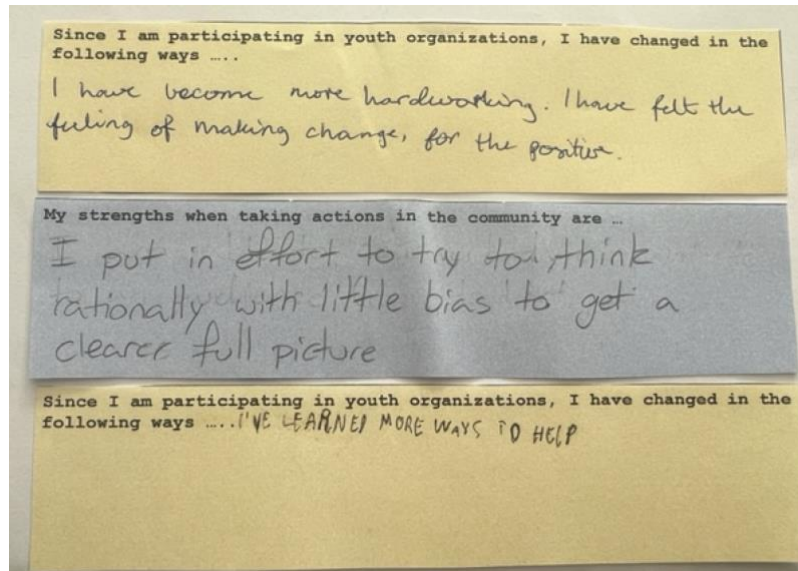


Figure 4: Research tool 3

Civic engagement has not only been seen as an opportunity to acquire a sense of proudness and accomplishment, but also as an escape of one's own problems. When I asked Kit to tell me about a moment she is proud of she mentioned raising her voice in the first place while struggling with a bunch of other stuff. She continued:

Kit: 'It almost feels like you know... It's like I put all of that stuff aside and focus on this one thing and doing something that you know is going to make me feel better and others as well. Even if they don't know it. And also, I just want to spend time away from me (laughs) sometimes. I want to raise my voice because I want to raise concerns about other people cuz I think that that is a good way to step back. I am not going to deal with this issue now, I am going to deal with these people's issue in that. I think that is a cool solution (laughs).'

For Kit, being involved in civic engagement gives her an opportunity to escape from her own concerns and challenges. It seems like to be rewarding for Kit to help others when she does not know how to help herself sometimes. It gives her a moment of good feeling. The opportunity of escaping one's own problem is also documented by Shaw et al (2014). Youth enjoy the opportunity to act upon and take responsibility for other's well-being in order to redirect their focus to the needs for others (Shaw et al., 2014).

6.2.1 Strategies learned.

As mentioned above, the participants have demonstrated certain strategies and skills learned through their involvement in civic engagement. The strategies learned are a result of the many obstacles they encounter during their participation. These obstacles are either age-related or related to conveying their opinion in the political sphere. Although some argue that linguistic competency is a prerequisite for citizenship

(Habermas, 1990, in Kulynych, 2001), some participants demonstrate expertise in linguistic skills:

Tessa: *You have to be good with your words. Not reveal too much, not reveal too little. You have to be really good at not necessarily lying but playing not necessarily playing either... but be good with your words and the way you talk. You have to win the audience. The audience has to trust you.*

Ruben: *Hmm... We try to decide like... so we always say 'We are going to do this' We always try to do that instead of 'Oh maybe we should do this'. If there is something we need to wait for a response for an email... we are pretty stubborn until we get a no.*

Both Tessa and Ruben show awareness of how to use language as a strategy to accomplish something. In Tessa's case, she uses language to win the audience and to make sure they can trust her, while Ruben uses language as a tool to get to his goal. They both demonstrate how to converse in public effectively and use these strategies during their civic engagement. As demonstrated in other research, many youth participants portray themselves as strategic political thinkers (Gordon & Taft, 2011). This again demonstrates youth's abilities and questions the assumption that citizenship requires a certain level of human capacity (Kulynych, 2001). Not only language is used as a tool to convey a message, but also the notion of age has been used well:

Lila: *I do think I have to do things differently because of my age. Well, it's both like a technique I used and like something I have to do. I am younger and I will argue with my age a lot of time. So, if I am writing an article, I will use my age and like 'I don't believe I as a 15-year-old will have to say this to you...' Something like that because they need to see like oh yeah, she is actually someone quite younger than me.*

Interviewer: *So, you are using your age as an advantage as well?*

Lila: *I am using it as an advantage as well because I think that is a great advantage that I can say. And I have used it since the climate protests, and I am like 'I am in 6th grade what are you guys doing.*

Here Lila describes a technique she uses to convey a message to adults. She is well aware that she needs to use certain techniques and attitude to convey a message because of her age and how children are portrayed within the society. Children often have a great understanding of their own social position within the society. They understand the power dynamics and authoritarian figures (Kulynych, 2001). Children and youth often develop their citizenship competencies through their civic engagement (Theis, 2009). Lila shows how she can tackle that power dimension by using her age as an advantage and questioning the authorities as mature. She as a 6th grader needs to explain to the authorities how severe the climate situation reverting power towards her. Youth activist, just like Lila, are well aware of how age differences foster challenges in being accepted as political actors. The next paragraph will develop further on this challenge and discusses how ageism impacts children's political participations.

6.3 Battling ageism

For children and youth to enjoy their citizenship rights and to be acknowledged as members of the society, their participation needs to be effective and meaningful (Kulynych, 2001). Since the implementation of the UNCRC and thereby children's right to participate, children are more and more included in decision-making process. The discourse on children's participation has led to a substantial growth in children's participatory activities (Kjørholt, 2002; Thomas, 2007). Within childhood studies, a wide range of literature has been devoted to analyzing children's participation within the political sphere to address the various outcomes of it (McMellon & Tisdall, 2020).

Although children and youth are more visible as political actors, as evident in this research, researchers still have mixed feelings about the effectiveness of their participation (see introduction chapter). Similar mixed feelings have been addressed within this research by the participants as well. Notions of not being understood, not being taken seriously and not being heard have been evident during the conversations and activities. This paragraph is devoted to these obstacles which are all related to ageism. According to Gordon (2007) children and youth's experiences regarding ageism within the political sphere is often an unexplored theme. In most cases, ageism is explored on the macro level and its impacts on social relationship between generations is ignored. Ageism is understood in terms of prejudices against someone's age (Bergmann & Ossewaarde, 2020).

6.3.1 'They hear us, but they don't listen to us'

Throughout the analysis, the participants frequently expressed themselves about the little impact their participatory activities make, on the receiving end. They show satisfaction in the opportunities offered by youth organizations but express how difficult it is to make adults act upon their voices. The following extracts from Lila's interview is a depiction of this:

Lila: *I felt like I was heard in a way. Most of the people agreed with me but I also think that is kind of the problem that they agree but they don't do anything with it.*

Lila: *... every time I would be invited to for example bystyre and talk with like normal bystyre and politician and talk for seminars. I would say the exact same and that's part of the point of not giving up. I did it a lot of times. I did it because, I felt good finally being like being heard in a way. I wasn't heard, I was listened to in a way.*

Lila: *Hmm... I feel like people listen and people are like good job I agree with you. But that is not the right people that I need to listen. I need to make an influence in the higher ... But they probably won't. Because that is how the political system is built.*

During our interview, Lila voiced herself several times about how she feels that adults are listening to her, but she does not feel heard. Part of the problem is that adults are praising her civic engagement activities and agree with her standpoints. According to Lila, she is not influencing the political sphere with her voice, and her actions are rather consultative than change making. Other children and youth have expressed similar experiences where children want their contribution to be seen as 'real' participation and not just as 'an exercise in the political socialization' (Gordon & Taft, 2011, p. 1514). This consultative participation is often addressed in previous research, and several researchers have highlighted this type of token listening to children and youth within the political sphere (McMellon & Tisdall, 2020; Nylund, 2020; Thomas, 2007). According to Nylund (2020) children's participation in Norway mirrors the instrumental perspective in White's theory of participation (Nylund, 2020; White, 1996). Instrumental participation includes acknowledging children as information holders, but it is the adult who makes the decision in the best interest of the child. One could argue that instrumental participation reinforces ageism by reverting power towards adults and not the children and youth. This is clearly exemplified in the conversation with Lila.

The participants feel like they are not being taken seriously by adults, and several of them have expressed mixed feelings about adults' attitudes:

Kit: *I see adults being like 'Woah, these kids are so brave'. It's like 'yeah...' (awkwardly). Again, such a weird thing to say... Yeah, we are (laughs). I think the way adults react to children is like copied and pasted a lot of times. Well... I am so proud of my kid for wanting to not die. It's like they are surprised ... like what do you expect. And there are adults who are genuinely... like who genuinely, actually you know... everyone is proud but they are proud, proud. Because maybe these adults have been saying this a long time ago. And then the adults who actually raise our voice more. I think they are the most supportive. The ones who actually take what we say and just like put it out there.*

Kit is well-aware of adult's attitudes towards her civic engagement. She feels like adult's reactions are repetitive and very 'typical'. It seems like she is looking for deeper conversations and wants to make adults actually think about the reasons behind her participation. She does not want adults to just be proud of her, but she wants them to act upon her perspective and to have a meaningful conversation with her. Subsequently, it reflects the idea that children in general are not capable to be political engaged, and when they do adults take it as an act of bravery. The idea that adults see kids who are engaged in political activism as 'brave' creates this idea that youth activism is an exclusive act (Gordon & Taft, 2011). Kit wants her political participation to be seen as normal and equally important. Furthermore, comments such as 'brave' and acting surprised are perceived as more condescending than praise (Gordon & Taft, 2011). This point of view may be interpreted as 'exceptionalism' (Gordon & Taft, 2011, p. 1506). These forms of patronizing reactions on youth's civic engagement and seeing it as an 'exception' problematizes children's political participation. It jeopardizes children's recognition within the political sphere and as meaningful social actors. Kit seems like she wants to be treated as someone being knowledgeable and capable of discussing political matters, and not just being praised for raising her voice as a child. At the same, she also mentions how some adults are supportive and care about her voice. For Kit, a supportive adult means someone who does not only praise her but promote and nurture her voice. Trying to create a meaningful conversation is evident in the following dialogue with Kit:

Kit: but for me I think that when adults look at my work, which is like all my mom's Facebook friends (laughs). Uhm... there is just something them like not understanding in a way like I see them comment like 'Whoa' and like a thousand hearts, and these weird emojis I have never seen before. It's like 'Hello, I am trying to get a conversation.

Again, she expresses her dissatisfaction about how adults react to her civic engagement. Kit wants to be seen and to heard as an equally valuable social actor. For her, it's not enough to be praised. Subsequently, the praise she receives can be seen as empty praise in the form of emojis. What Kit describes could be in tune with how children are socially depicted as not competent enough' (Jans, 2004). While Kit is fighting hard to get a conversation with adults, the adults in this case are unwilling to engage. One could argue that adults might assume that they are 'better' than children and therefore show unwillingness to engage (Gordon & Taft, 2011). On the other hand, adults might not have the ability to engage and might feel a sense of discomfort of being depicted as the 'incompetent' one. For Kit, it's important to share her ideas and to have the opportunity to demonstrate her competency with adults, yet this seems very challenging. This is in also in line with previous literature on children's participation. Children's participation and interactions that are perceived as different are often overlooked and neglected by adults (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Just like Kit, Tessa feels like she is not being taken seriously. She wishes adults were more supportive and that children wouldn't be judged for their opinion. She continues:

Tessa: *I think that because of our age, we are not necessarily taken seriously on a lot of arenas. (...) municipality is really good at taking us seriously. But on a national basis, I don't think we are taken seriously.*

Interviewer: *You think that is because of your age.*

Tessa: *Yes, I mean you can look at Greta Thunberg. I mean she gets bullied by adults because they say that she has not been in school, she doesn't know what she is talking about. It's really mean.*

As reflected in this dialogue, Tessa seems to feel that she is not taken seriously on a national level. She feels like children in general are not taken seriously and uses Greta Thunberg as an example. Children who are civically engaged are prey to all sorts of age-related discrimination.

Children and youth who are politically active, especially in climate activism, are often depicted as incompetent in media coverage. Words like inferior, out of place, inexperienced and immature are often connected to youth's climate activism in the media (Bergmann & Ossewaarde, 2020). The participants show awareness of this ageism which seems to be an obstacle when being civically engaged. Some participants have expressed how they have received, or know peers who have received negative comments from adults:

Jane: *For many youths, it's about the age. When you raise your voice in the media or chronicles, uhm... could be many haters. That is what I understand is that you can't like everybody and everybody can't like you. That's like the thing, I think. Mainly I think people need to understand that... I haven't felt so much in it, but I know many of my friends... they have known it. So, I have been really lucky about that. I have a friend that they have sent a lot of messages like 'where are you', 'I see you right now'. But that didn't happen to me.*

Interviewer: *Are these comments coming from peers or adults?*

Jane: *From adults. It could be a man who is around 50 or 60. Or like many says that if you could see about the comments right below, you would see mainly older people.*

What Jane describes here is rather a sad reality about how some adults are mocking youth while they are just practicing their citizenship and are trying to be part of the community. Adults can often silence youth's voices as it is perceived as disrespectful to stand up and to speak up (Kosko, Dastin, Merrill, & Sheth, 2022). This was echoed in Lila's interview when she mentioned that civic engagement has made her more aware that she can be perceived as less respectful for having an opinion. This marginalization based on age is often one of the reasons why children and youth discontinue with civic engagement (Gordon, 2007). Childhood is often considered as a happy time for children and youth, and children who are civically engaged challenge this notion. Children who are politically engaged or show dissatisfaction towards adults in power are in some cases depicted as 'angry'. As seen as in the case of Greta Thunberg when Donald Trump mockingly twittered that she needs to work on her anger management (Murphy, 2021). Kit expressed similar ageism during the interview:

Kit: *It's kind of difficult because like... 'Oh you are child, why are you so angry'. It's kind of like that.*

Youth's political engagement is often met with paternalistic attitudes and their activism is discredited and seen as an act of truancy (Bergmann & Ossewaarde, 2020). As reflected in Kit's interview, some adults think that children shouldn't be angry and shouldn't bother themselves with political topics. As Lila mentioned, some even think involving yourself can cause 'bad mental kids'.

Lila: *My audience... well for my article it is often I respond to mostly what adults write and ask why did you do that? '*

Interviewer: *Can you give an example?*

Lila: *My first article I wrote was answering to someone who didn't believe that kids should believe in climate change. Cuz that was only causing bad mental kids.*

What Lila explains here is a form of paternalist attitude towards children. Children should not involve themselves and should be protected. This protective attitude towards children has been prominent and one of the main reasons why youth are still excluded within the political sphere (Wall, 2014), and battling with ageism. Ageism has all the traits to disempowers, silence and discredit youth's civic engagement. Furthermore, not acknowledging children's responsibilities and civic engagement denies children's right to citizenship (Lister, 2007).

6.4 Summary

The second chapter of the analysis revealed the multi-layered experiences of youth's participation in civic engagement. Social support has been a prominent driver for youth's civic engagement and a major agency 'thickener'. Social support has been gained during civic engagement, but also lost. Whilst the role of family and peers have been emphasized as important drivers for civic engagement among youth, Younes et al, (2002, p. 133) argue that there is an intrinsic motivation in place as well. They argue that: 'Political socialization is not something adults do to adolescents, it is something that youth do for themselves'. This was evident when children expressed themselves about the feeling of accomplishment and proudness when being civically engaged. The participants within this research project are often met with ample opportunities to enhance their social position and to acquire skills, but not without obstacles. Children are met with both praise and critique while being civically engaged. The obstacles involved stem from a paternalistic attitude that childhood should be a happy phase, which results in their voices not being taken seriously. Children and youth can only become politically relevant when their voices are recognized as equally important, and their civic engagement is acknowledged and valued. Hence, this chapter revealed that adults and peers can either reinforce and be allies in children's civic engagement, or it can hinder them and act as detractors.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to explore youth's experiences in civic engagement and the role it plays in their everyday life. It has aimed to create insight into the positive and challenging outcomes of children and youth's participation within the political sphere. By seeing childhood as socially constructed and children as social actors, the focus was on children's experiences. Since participation rights within decision-making processes are highly valued within the Norwegian society, this research has sought to understand how this right is experienced from below, thus from children and youth themselves. By doing so, it hopefully adds valuable lessons about children and youth's experience and how they respond to situational discourses on civic engagement within the Norwegian context. Qualitative data collection was used to create a nuanced and systematic research process. It involved a total of five participants from different geographical areas who all participate within the political sphere and civic engagement in different manners. The two main research questions have been explored and this chapter summarizes the empirical findings.

The first chapter examined the forms of civic engagement the participants are engaged with and the reasons behind it. The participants expressed interest in three particular areas, or rather topics that they feel strongly about when participating. These three topics are *environmental politics*, *direct community*, and *civil rights*. Looking at children's participation through a social constructionism lens, children's participation is characterized as situational, nurtured by several discourses. Firstly, the Greta Thunberg movement greatly impacted and mobilized children's participation and interest in environmental politics. Secondly, youth's strong attachment to the community can be tied to the Norwegian discourse on constructing a 'good Norwegian childhood' (Kjørholt, 2002, p. 71). Norwegian children are constructed as resources to sustain the local community and participatory projects aim at strengthening the community identity (Kjørholt, 2002). Lastly, civil rights that are currently a topic of discussion in the media are topics the participants voice themselves about. The *Black lives matter*, *Women rights movement in Iran* and the *LGTQB rights* are major areas of interest currently. Understanding children's participation as situational, as well as culturally and politically sensitive is important in understanding children's civic engagement. If children are to be recognized as citizens and seen as important members in the society, the situational discourses that influence and drive their civic engagement needs to be continuously scrutinized and made visible. Furthermore, children have 'position-specific beliefs' (Kulynych, 2001, p. 248) and have a unique perspective on the world around them. Children and youth are affected differently and experience the circulating discourses differently. Understanding forms of participation add value to our social knowledge about the changing nature of childhoods and thus their participation (Kulynych, 2001).

The current research project also revealed reasons for civic engagement and involvement in the political sphere. The participants have voiced themselves rather negatively about the current practices of democracy. They want to be represented within democratic practices since, according to them, the future belongs to them, and they know what is best for them. Furthermore, they feel a sense of responsibility and see themselves as citizens practicing their part of responsibility within the society. The participants want to be seen as citizens and therefore claim their right through civic

engagement to become equally represented within the democracy. This is in line with previous literature on children's participation (Lorgen & Ursin, 2021).

The participants within this research are involved in both traditional participation and cause-oriented participation. The sample is limited to draw extensive conclusions, but this analysis paints a different picture than previous research where a decline in traditional participation was evident (Ødegård & Berglund, 2008). Four participants were engaged in adult-led youth organization and spoke fondly about their participation. The participants see themselves as both being political actors as well as becoming political actors. They are aware that their participation is fueled with teaching participants to become a future citizen, or as one participant argued 'to be schooled'. However, they also seemed to not mind being 'schooled' and to create a better democratic attitude. Although, previous literature has shown concern about this socialization paradigm where children are portrayed as future citizens (Kjørholt, 2002), the participants portray themselves as future citizens but also citizens in the present.

Notions of being a political actor was also visible during the participant's cause-oriented participation. The analysis revealed how cause-oriented participation is embedded in their everyday practices. Besides participation in protests, the participants revealed certain civic engagement practices that are often overlooked and not categorized as political activism. Acts of civic engagement were visible when the participants were acquiring knowledge, creating art and participating in online games and forums. It is important to engage and to learn about these forms of civic engagement as these acts of civic engagement, often hidden from adult view, remain unrecognized (Larkins, 2014). As Larkin (2014) argues, it is pivotal to understand children's acts of civic engagement, wherever and however it is demonstrated. This makes their participation both an act of being a political actor as well as becoming a political actor and moves away from seeing these two terms as dichotomous.

The second analysis chapter revealed the complex interplay of factors that shape children and youth's experiences in civic engagement. The analysis reveals both positive and negative implications that children and youth face when being civically engaged. Firstly, civic engagement has led to ample opportunities for them and enhanced their social position within the society through the development of peer and adult relationships. Social support has been a major driver and agency thickener throughout the process (Abebe, 2019). However, it has also acted as thinners leading to obstacles. The participants' civic engagement is mostly influenced by family, peers, and teachers.

Children's experiences within the adult-sized democracy are multi-layered, complex, and experienced as a double-edged sword. On one hand, their acts of civic engagement have been praised and promoted through several legislation and projects, seeing them as valuable and knowledgeable meaning makers within the democracy. On the other hand, they are met with paternalistic attitudes and ageism that pushes them back into the notion of the 'incompetent' child. Children and youth are continuously fighting to be recognized within the political sphere and similarities can be drawn from gender studies (Lister, 2007). Just like feminists, children's capacity and citizenship are measured against a template, and in this case the adult-template. However, this research revealed how children and youth have adequate political knowledge and use skills and techniques to comply with democratic practices. As Jans (2004) argues, citizenship is a continuous learning process and not something to be given to people. The participants claim their

rights in different manners, regardless of challenges they might face. Overall, children and youth within this project seem to enjoy their participation rights within the Norwegian context yet feel that there is room for improvement and acknowledgment from adults. Engaging in political activities seem to have many obstacles that the participants are willing to overcome in order to represent themselves, their peers, and the future democracy in this adult-sized world.

7.1 Final thoughts

This thesis has shed light on children and youth's civic engagement and how it is experienced from their perspective. Although the sample can be argued as not representative for Norwegian children and youth in general, this research reveals the uniqueness of civic engagement for each participant. As argued within childhood studies, children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of studying in their own right. The aim of this thesis was indeed to study children's experience and to get an in-depth understanding of these unique cultures, and in this case their civic engagement. This project would have benefitted if children's feedback on the results were sought (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). Including children's opinion would have created more reliable research and would have empowered the participants as well. Especially, since the children within this research are eager and devoted to raise their voice in matters affecting them. Due to time limitations, some topics that were raised during the data collection phase could not be addressed yet seem to be relevant in relation to children's civic engagement. First of all, ethnicity and gender orientation have both been addressed during the interviews. Two of the participants identified themselves within the LGBTQ community and brought this up during our interview. As childhood is not entirely isolated from other variables, further research could be devoted to understanding the interplay between gender orientation and acts of citizenship. Subsequently, further research with children is needed to scrutinize children's participation in places hidden from adult's view to acknowledge all forms of civic engagement and not just those visible and 'acceptable'. Exploring children and youth's civic engagement is needed to create a better understanding of where and how children enact as citizens which is continuously changing and shaped by situational discourses.

References

- Abebe, T. (2009). Multiple methods, complex dilemmas: negotiating socio-ethical spaces in participatory research with disadvantaged children. *Children's geographies*, 7(4), 451-465.
- Abebe, T. (2019). Reconceptualising children's agency as continuum and interdependence. *Social Sciences*, 8(3), 81.
- Abebe, T., & Tefera, T. (2014). Earning rights: Discourses on children's rights and proper childhood in Ethiopia. In *Children's Lives in an Era of Children's Rights* (pp. 53-71): Routledge.
- Adler, R. P., & Goggin, J. (2005). What do we mean by "civic engagement"? *Journal of transformative education*, 3(3), 236-253.
- Ahsan, M. (2009). The potential and challenges of rights-based research with children and young people: Experiences from Bangladesh. *Children's geographies*, 7(4), 391-403.
- Alderson, P. (2007). Competent children? Minors' consent to health care treatment and research. *Social science & medicine*, 65(11), 2272-2283.
- Alderson, P., & Morrow, V. (2011). *The ethics of research with children and young people: A practical handbook*: Sage.
- Amnå, E. (2012). How is civic engagement developed over time? Emerging answers from a multidisciplinary field. *Journal of adolescence*, 35(3), 611-627.
- Ansell, N. (2016). Globalising models of childhood and youth. In *Children, youth and development* (pp. 33-74): Routledge.
- Archard, D. (2014). *Children: Rights and childhood*: Routledge.
- Bakke, I. B. (2021). Career and cultural context: collective individualism, egalitarianism and work-centrality in the career thinking of Norwegian teenagers. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 1-16.
- Bakker, T. P., & De Vreese, C. H. (2011). Good news for the future? Young people, Internet use, and political participation. *Communication research*, 38(4), 451-470.
- Balsano, A. B. (2005). Youth civic engagement in the United States: Understanding and addressing the impact of social impediments on positive youth and community development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 9(4), 188-201.
- Barker, J., & Smith, F. (2001). Power, positionality and practicality: Carrying out fieldwork with children. *Ethics, Place & Environment*, 4(2), 142-147.
- Barna, R. (2021). 69.604 barn har stemt! Slik hadde Norge sett ut om barna fikk velge! . Retrieved from <https://barnasvalg.reddbarna.no>
- Baumbusch, J. (2010). Semi-structured interviewing in practice-close research. *Journal for specialists in pediatric nursing*, 15(3), 255.
- Beazley, H., & Ennew, J. (2006). Participatory methods and approaches: Tackling the two tyrannies. *Doing development research*, 189-199.
- Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative research*, 15(2), 219-234.
- Bergmann, Z., & Ossewaarde, R. (2020). Youth climate activists meet environmental governance: Ageist depictions of the FFF movement and Greta Thunberg in German newspaper coverage. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 15(3), 267-290.
- Bessant, J. (2004). Mixed messages: Youth participation and democratic practice. *Australian journal of political science*, 39(2), 387-404.

- Bjerke, H. (2011). Children as 'differently equal' responsible beings: Norwegian children's views of responsibility. *Childhood, 18*(1), 67-80.
- Børhaug, K. (2007). Mission impossible? School level student democracy. *Citizenship, social and economics education, 7*(1), 26-41.
- Boyden, J. (1997). A Comparative Perspective on the. *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood, 190*.
- Boyden, J. (2013). 'We're not going to suffer like this in the mud': Educational aspirations, social mobility and independent child migration among populations living in poverty. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 43*(5), 580-600.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.
- Brennan, M. A. (2008). Conceptualizing resiliency: An interactional perspective for community and youth development. *Child Care in practice, 14*(1), 55-64.
- Burr, V. (2015). *Social constructionism*: Routledge.
- Child., U. C. o. t. R. o. t. (2008). *Concluding observations on the combined 5th and 6th periodic reports of Norway*. Retrieved from
- Christensen, P. H. (2004). Children's participation in ethnographic research: Issues of power and representation. *Children & society, 18*(2), 165-176.
- Cicognani, E., Mazzoni, D., Albanesi, C., & Zani, B. (2015). Sense of community and empowerment among young people: Understanding pathways from civic participation to social well-being. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 26*, 24-44.
- Clark, A. (2005). Ways of seeing: Using the Mosaic approach to listen to young children's perspectives. In *Beyond listening* (pp. 29-50): Policy Press.
- Cockburn, T. (2005). Children's participation in social policy: Inclusion, chimera or authenticity? *Social Policy and Society, 4*(2), 109-119.
- Cocks, A. J. (2006). The ethical maze: Finding an inclusive path towards gaining children's agreement to research participation. *Childhood, 13*(2), 247-266.
- Cohen, E. F. (2005). Neither seen nor heard: Children's citizenship in contemporary democracies. *Citizenship studies, 9*(2), 221-240.
- Cook, P. (2013). Against a minimum voting age. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy, 16*(3), 439-458.
- Corner, A., Roberts, O., Chiari, S., Völler, S., Mayrhuber, E. S., Mandl, S., & Monson, K. (2015). How do young people engage with climate change? The role of knowledge, values, message framing, and trusted communicators. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change, 6*(5), 523-534.
- Corsaro, W. A. (2003). *We're friends, right?: Inside kids' culture*: Joseph Henry Press.
- Corsaro, W. A. (2009). Peer culture. In *The Palgrave handbook of childhood studies* (pp. 301-315): Springer.
- Coyne, I. T. (1997). Sampling in qualitative research. Purposeful and theoretical sampling; merging or clear boundaries? *Journal of advanced nursing, 26*(3), 623-630.
- Crocetti, E., Jahromi, P., & Meeus, W. (2012). Identity and civic engagement in adolescence. *Journal of adolescence, 35*(3), 521-532.
- Delicath, J. W. (2004). Art and advocacy: Citizen participation through cultural activism. *Communication and public participation in environmental decision making, 255-266*.

- Ennew, J., Abebe, T., Bangyai, R., Karapituck, P., Kjørholt, A. T., & Noonsup, T. (2009). *The right to be properly researched. How to do rights-based, scientific research with children.* : Black on White Publications.
- Equality, N. M. o. C. a. (2016). *The Rights of the Child in Norway: Norway's fifth and sixth periodic reports to the UN Committee on the rights of the child - 2016.*
- Eriksen, T. H. (1993). Being Norwegian in a shrinking world: Reflections on Norwegian identity. *Continuity and change: Aspects of contemporary Norway*, 11, 37.
- EVELAND, J., WILLIAM P. (2004). The effect of political discussion in producing informed citizens: The roles of information, motivation, and elaboration. *Political Communication*, 21(2), 177-193.
- Fasting, M., & Sorensen, O. (2021). *The Norwegian Exception?: Norway's Liberal Democracy Since 1814*: C. Hurst (Publishers) Limited.
- Fredriksen, K., & Rhodes, J. (2004). The role of teacher relationships in the lives of students. *New directions for youth development*, 2004(103), 45-54.
- Freeman, M. (2007). Why it remains important to take children's rights seriously. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 15(1), 5-23.
- Friberg, J. H. (2021). Who wants to be Norwegian—who gets to be Norwegian? Identificational assimilation and non-recognition among immigrant origin youth in Norway. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 44(16), 21-43.
- Gallacher, & Kehily, M., J. (2013). Childhood: A social-cultural approach.
- Gallacher, L.-A., & Gallagher, M. (2008). Methodological immaturity in childhood research? Thinking through participatory methods'. *Childhood*, 15(4), 499-516.
- Gallagher, M. (2008). 'Power is not an evil': rethinking power in participatory methods. *Children's geographies*, 6(2), 137-150.
- Gallagher, M., Hinton, R., Tisdall, K. M., & Elsley, S. (2008). Children's and young people's participation in public decision-making. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 16(3), 281-284.
- Gee, J. P. (2000). Chapter 3: Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of research in education*, 25(1), 99-125.
- Gordon, H. R. (2007). Allies within and without: How adolescent activists conceptualize ageism and navigate adult power in youth social movements. *Journal of contemporary ethnography*, 36(6), 631-668.
- Gordon, H. R., & Taft, J. K. (2011). Rethinking youth political socialization: Teenage activists talk back. *Youth & Society*, 43(4), 1499-1527.
- Grant, T. (2017). Participatory research with children and young people: Using visual, creative, diagram, and written techniques. *Methodological Approaches*, 2, 261.
- Greer, M. (2021). Civic Engagement and Inclusion Through Art. *National Civic Review*, 109(4), 30-34.
- Gregorius, S. (2015). Combining multiple qualitative methods in research on young disabled people in the global south.
- Gullestad, M. (1997). A passion for boundaries: Reflections on connections between the everyday lives of children and discourses on the nation in contemporary Norway. *Childhood*, 4(1), 19-42.
- Gullestad, M. (2002). Invisible fences: Egalitarianism, nationalism and racism. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 8(1), 45-63.
- Hanson, K. (2012). Schools of thought in children's rights. In *Children's rights from below* (pp. 63-79): Springer.

- Hanson, K., & Nieuwenhuys, O. (2013). *Reconceptualizing children's rights in international development: living rights, social justice, translations*: Cambridge University Press.
- Hart, S. N. (1991). From property to person status: Historical perspective on children's rights. *American Psychologist*, 46(1), 53.
- Haugseth, J. F., & Smeplass, E. (2022). The Greta Thunberg Effect: A Study of Norwegian Youth's Reflexivity on Climate Change. *Sociology*, 00380385221122416.
- Hill, M., Davis, J., Prout, A., & Tisdall, K. (2004). Moving the participation agenda forward. *Children & society*, 18(2), 77-96.
- Holmberg, A., & Alvinus, A. (2020). Children's protest in relation to the climate emergency: A qualitative study on a new form of resistance promoting political and social change. *Childhood*, 27(1), 78-92.
- Ivarsflaten, E., & Strømsnes, K. (2013). Inequality, Diversity and Social Trust in Norwegian Communities. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 23(3), 322-342. doi:10.1080/17457289.2013.808643
- James, A. (2007). Giving voice to children's voices: Practices and problems, pitfalls and potentials. *American anthropologist*, 109(2), 261-272.
- Jans, M. (2004). Children as citizens: Towards a contemporary notion of child participation. *Childhood*, 11(1), 27-44.
- Jenks, C. (1982). Introduction: constituting the child. In *The sociology of childhood: Essential readings* (pp. 9-24).
- Jenks, C. (2004a). Constructing childhood sociologically. In M. Kehily (Ed.), *An introduction to childhood studies* (pp. 77-95): McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Jenks, C. (2004b). Constructing childhood sociologically. *An introduction to childhood studies*, 77-95.
- Jung, J., Petkanic, P., Nan, D., & Kim, J. H. (2020). When a girl awakened the world: A user and social message analysis of Greta Thunberg. *Sustainability*, 12(7), 2707.
- Kelly, D. C. (2006). Parents' influence on youths' civic behaviors: The civic context of the caregiving environment. *Families in Society*, 87(3), 447-455.
- Kjørholt, A., T. (2002). Small is powerful: Discourses on children and participation in Norway. *Childhood*, 9(1), 63-82.
- Kjørholt, A., T. (2008). Children as new citizens: In the best interests of the child? *European childhoods: Cultures, politics and childhoods in Europe*, 14-37.
- Klocker, N. (2007). An example of 'thin' agency: Child domestic workers in Tanzania. In *Global perspectives on rural childhood and youth* (pp. 100-111): Routledge.
- Kosko, S. J., Dastin, A., Merrill, M., & Sheth, R. (2022). Marginalised Youth Activism: Peer-Engaged Research and Epistemic Justice. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 23(1), 136-156.
- Kulynych, J. (2001). No playing in the public sphere: Democratic theory and the exclusion of children. *Social theory and practice*, 27(2), 231-264.
- Kuper, A., Reeves, S., & Levinson, W. (2008). An introduction to reading and appraising qualitative research. *Bmj*, 337.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkman, S. (2009). Interview quality. *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*, 161-175.
- Kyllingstad, J. R. (2017). The absence of race in Norway. *Journal of Anthropological Sciences*, 95(1), 1-9.
- Lange, A., & Mierendorff, J. (2009a). Method and methodology in childhood research. *The Palgrave handbook of childhood studies*, 78-95.

- Lange, A., & Mierendorff, J. (2009b). Method and methodology in childhood research. In *The Palgrave handbook of childhood studies* (pp. 78-95): Springer.
- Lansdown, G. (2009). The realisation of children's participation rights: Critical reflections. In *A handbook of children and young people's participation* (pp. 33-45): Routledge.
- Larkins, C. (2014). Enacting children's citizenship: Developing understandings of how children enact themselves as citizens through actions and acts of citizenship. *Childhood*, 21(1), 7-21.
- Lawy, R., & Biesta, G. (2006). Citizenship-as-practice: The educational implications of an inclusive and relational understanding of citizenship. *British journal of educational studies*, 54(1), 34-50.
- Liebel, M. (2012a). Children's rights contextualized. In *Children's Rights from Below* (pp. 43-59): Springer.
- Liebel, M. (2012b). Hidden Aspects of Children's Rights History. In *Children's Rights from Below* (pp. 29-42): Springer.
- Liebel, M., & Saadi, I. (2012). Cultural variations in constructions of children's participation. In *Children's rights from below* (pp. 162-182): Springer.
- Lieberkind, J., & Bruun, J. (2021). The reserved young citizens of the Nordic countries. *Northern Lights on Civic and Citizenship Education: A Cross-National Comparison of Nordic Data from ICCS*, 19-41.
- Lister, R. (2007). Why citizenship: Where, when and how children? *Theoretical inquiries in Law*, 8(2), 693-718.
- Lister, R. (2008). Unpacking children's citizenship. *Children and citizenship*, 9-19.
- Lloyd-Evans, S. (2017). Focus groups, community engagement, and researching with young people.
- LNU. (n.d.). Norges barne- og ungdomsorganisasjoner. Retrieved from <https://www.lnu.no>
- Loader, B. D., Vromen, A., & Xenos, M. A. (2014). The networked young citizen: social media, political participation and civic engagement. In (Vol. 17, pp. 143-150): Taylor & Francis.
- Lochocki, T. (2010). Trends, causes and patterns of young people's civic engagement in western democracies: a review of literature.
- Long, N. (2003). *Development sociology: actor perspectives*: Routledge.
- Lorgen, L. C., & Ursin, M. (2021). A children's election—Dilemmas of children's political participation. *Children & society*, 35(3), 333-347.
- Maagerø, E., & Simonsen, B. (2008). *Norway: Society and Culture*: Portal Books.
- Martin Woodhead, & Faulkner, D. (2000). Subjects, Objects or Participants? Dilemmas of psychological research with children. . In P. Christensen & A. James (Eds.), *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* (pp. 10-39). London: Taylor & Francis.
- Mason, M. (2010). *Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews*. Paper presented at the Forum qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: qualitative social research.
- Mayall, B. (2009). Generational relations at family level. In *The Palgrave handbook of childhood studies* (pp. 175-187): Springer.
- McGarry, O. (2016). Repositioning the research encounter: Exploring power dynamics and positionality in youth research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 19(3), 339-354.

- McMellon, C., & Tisdall, E. K. M. (2020). Children and young people's participation rights: Looking backwards and moving forwards. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 28(1), 157-182.
- Montgomery, H. (2003). Childhood in time and place.
- Moosa-Mitha, M. (2005). A difference-centred alternative to theorization of children's citizenship rights. *Citizenship studies*, 9(4), 369-388.
- Morrow, V. (2001). Young people's explanations and experiences of social exclusion: retrieving Bourdieu's concept of social capital. *International journal of sociology and social policy*.
- Murphy, P. D. (2021). Speaking for the youth, speaking for the planet: Greta Thunberg and the representational politics of eco-celebrity. *Popular communication*, 19(3), 193-206.
- Nairn, K. (2019). Learning from young people engaged in climate activism: The potential of collectivizing despair and hope. *Young*, 27(5), 435-450.
- Nilsen, R. D. (2008). Children in nature: Cultural ideas and social practices in Norway. In *European childhoods* (pp. 38-60): Springer.
- Nordstrom, S. N. (2015). Not so innocent anymore: Making recording devices matter in qualitative interviews. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(4), 388-401.
- Norris, P. (2004). Young people & political activism. *Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government*.(32p).
- Nylund, A. (2020). Children's right to participate in decision-making in Norway: Paternalism and autonomy. *Children's Constitutional Rights in the Nordic Countries*. Leiden: Brill Nijhoff, 201-224.
- O'Brien, K., Selboe, E., & Hayward, B. M. (2018). Exploring youth activism on climate change. *Ecology and Society*, 23(3).
- Ødegård, G., & Berglund, F. (2008). Political participation in late modernity among Norwegian youth: an individual choice or a statement of social class? *Journal of Youth Studies*, 11(6), 593-610.
- OECD. (2022). *Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in Norway* Retrieved from
- Prout, A., & James, A. (2015). A new paradigm for the sociology of childhood?: Provenance, promise and problems. In *Constructing and reconstructing childhood* (pp. 6-28): Routledge.
- Punch, S. (2002). Research with children: The same or different from research with adults? *Childhood*, 9(3), 321-341.
- Punch, S. (2016). Exploring children's agency across majority and minority world contexts. *Reconceptualising agency and childhood: New perspectives in childhood studies*, 183-196.
- Quéniart, A. (2008). The form and meaning of young people's involvement in community and political work. *Youth & Society*, 40(2), 203-223.
- Quennerstedt, A., Robinson, C., & l'Anson, J. (2018). The UNCRC: The voice of global consensus on children's rights? *Nordic Journal of Human Rights*, 36(1), 38-54.
- Qvortrup, J. (2017). Macro-analysis of childhood. In *Research with children* (pp. 43-65): Routledge.
- Regjeringen. (2021). *Children and young people's participation and influence* Retrieved from <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/families-and-children/barn-og-unges-deltakelse-og-innflytelse/id670176/>

- Robson, E., Bell, S., & Klocker, N. (2007). Conceptualizing agency in the lives and actions of rural young people. In *Global perspectives on rural childhood and youth* (pp. 152-165): Routledge.
- Rothstein, B., & Uslaner, E. M. (2005). All for All: Equality, Corruption, and Social Trust. *World Politics*, 58(1), 41-72. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40060124>
- Rutakumwa, R., Mugisha, J. O., Bernays, S., Kabunga, E., Tumwekwase, G., Mbonye, M., & Seeley, J. (2020). Conducting in-depth interviews with and without voice recorders: a comparative analysis. *Qualitative research*, 20(5), 565-581.
- Sandberg, K. (2015). The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Vulnerability of Children. *Nordic Journal of International Law*, 84(2), 221-247.
- Shaw, A., Brady, B., McGrath, B., Brennan, M. A., & Dolan, P. (2014). Understanding youth civic engagement: debates, discourses, and lessons from practice. *Community Development*, 45(4), 300-316.
- Shier, H. (2001). Pathways to participation: Openings, opportunities and obligations. *Children & society*, 15(2), 107-117.
- Sinclair, R. (2004). Participation in practice: Making it meaningful, effective and sustainable. *Children & society*, 18(2), 106-118.
- Skelton, T. (2008). Research with children and young people: exploring the tensions between ethics, competence and participation. *Children's geographies*, 6(1), 21-36.
- Skivenes, M., & Strandbu, A. (2006). A child perspective and children's participation. *Children Youth and Environments*, 16(2), 10-27.
- Smith, A. B. (2010). Children as citizens and partners in strengthening communities. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 80(1), 103.
- Smith, A. B. (2012). Recognizing children as citizens: Can this enhance solidarity. *Spaces for Solidarity and Individualism in Educational Contexts*, 15.
- Smith, N., Lister, R., Middleton, S., & Cox, L. (2005). Young people as real citizens: Towards an inclusionary understanding of citizenship. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8(4), 425-443.
- Solberg, A. (1996). The challenge in child research: from 'being' to 'doing' in J. Brannen, and M. O'Brien.(eds) *Children in Families: Research and Policy*. Basingstoke: Falmer.
- Søvig, K. H. (2019). Incorporating the Convention in Norwegian law.
- Spyrou, S. (2011). The limits of children's voices: From authenticity to critical, reflexive representation. *Childhood*, 18(2), 151-165.
- SSB. (2022). *Immigrants and Norwegian-born to Immigrant parents* Retrieved from <https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/innvandrere/statistikk/innvandrere-og-norskfodte-med-innvandrerforeldre>
- Strandbu, Å., & Skogen, K. (2000). Environmentalism among Norwegian youth: different paths to attitudes and action? *Journal of Youth Studies*, 3(2), 189-209.
- Telhaug, A. O., Mediås, O. A., & Aasen, P. (2004). From collectivism to individualism? Education as nation building in a Scandinavian perspective. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 48(2), 141-158.
- Theis, J. (2009). Children as active citizens: An agenda for children's civil rights and civic engagement. In *A handbook of children and young people's participation* (pp. 365-377): Routledge.
- Thomas, N. (2007). Towards a theory of children's participation. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 15(2), 199-218.
- Ting, T.-y. (2017). Struggling for tomorrow: The future orientations of youth activism in a democratic crisis. *Contemporary Social Science*, 12(3-4), 242-257.

- Tisdall, M., E. Kay , & Punch, S. (2016). Not so 'new'? Looking critically at childhood studies. In *Children and Young People's Relationships* (pp. 9-24): Routledge.
- UNCRC. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Retrieved from
- Ursin, M., Lorgen, L. C., Alvarado, I. A. O., Smalsundmo, A.-L., Nordgård, R. C., Bern, M. R., & Bjørnevik, K. (2021). Promoting Intergenerational Justice Through Participatory Practices: Climate Workshops as an Arena for Young People's Political Participation. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 727227.
- Vassenden, A. (2010). Untangling the different components of Norwegianness. *Nations and nationalism, 16*(4), 734-752.
- Walker, C. (2017). Embodying 'the next generation': Children's everyday environmental activism in India and England. *Contemporary Social Science, 12*(1-2), 13-26.
- Wall, J. (2014). Why children and youth should have the right to vote: an argument for proxy-claim suffrage. *Children Youth and Environments, 24*(1), 108-123.
- Warin, J. (2011). Ethical mindfulness and reflexivity: Managing a research relationship with children and young people in a 14-year qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) study. *Qualitative Inquiry, 17*(9), 805-814.
- Westcott, H., & Littleton, K. (2005). Exploring meaning through interviews with children.
- White, S. C. (1996). Depoliticising development: the uses and abuses of participation. *Development in practice, 6*(1), 6-15.
- Woodhead, M., & Faulkner, D. (2008). Subjects, objects or participants? Dilemmas of psychological research with children. In *Research with children* (pp. 26-55): Routledge.
- Wyness, M., Harrison, L., & Buchanan, I. (2004). Childhood, politics and ambiguity: Towards an agenda for children's political inclusion. *Sociology, 38*(1), 81-99.
- Youniss, J., Bales, S., Christmas-Best, V., Diversi, M., McLaughlin, M., & Silbereisen, R. (2002). Youth civic engagement in the twenty-first century. *Journal of research on adolescence, 12*(1), 121-148.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Confirmation NSD

Appendix 2: Information and consent booklet

Appendix 3: Interview guide

Appendix 4: Research bag



[Meldeskjema](#) / [Youth experiences and participation in the political sphere in Norway](#) / Vurdering

Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

Referansenummer

772399

Vurderingstype

Standard

Dato

13.09.2022

Prosjekttittel

Youth experiences and participation in the political sphere in Norway

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet / Fakultet for samfunns- og utdanningsvitenskap (SU) / Institutt for pedagogikk og livslang læring

Prosjektansvarlig

Linn C. Lorgen

Student

Sabine Fatima Dorani

Prosjektperiode

26.08.2022 - 01.08.2023

Kategorier personopplysninger

Alminnelige

Særlige

Lovlig grunnlag

Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Uttrykkelig samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 01.08.2023.

[Meldeskjema](#) 

Kommentar

Data Protection Services has assessed the change registered on 09.08.2022.

The period for processing personal data has been extended until 01.08.2023.

We will follow up the progress of the project at the new planned end date to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the rest of the project!

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Norwegian University of Science and Technology via Linn C. Lorgen (linn.c.lorgen@ntnu.no)
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Contact me

Sabine Dorani

Phone: +4746543506

Email: Sabined@stud.ntnu.no



Kunnskap for en bedre verden

Information Booklet



“Youth’s Experiences and Participation in Civic Engagement”



RESEARCH PROJECT

Sabine Dorani

Table of Content

Information letter	2
Informed consent youth.....	3
Informed consent parent(s)	4

Aim

This is the information booklet about the research project ‘Youth’s Experiences and Participation in Civic Engagement’. The main purpose is to find out how youth experience civic engagement. In this booklet you can find all the information about the project and what participation will involve. Once you have decided to voluntarily participate in this research, you can use the additional forms to give informed consent.

Purpose of the project

This is a master’s thesis project and the purpose of the project is to find out how youth experience civic engagement and its effect on their everyday lives. I am interested in finding out how you use your voice to make a change in the society. Moreover, I am interested to find out when you encounter difficulties to raise your voice and why?



Information letter

Why are you being asked to participate?

Since you are involved in civic engagement, you can best describe how it is to be involved within the political sphere. I have therefore selected you to participate in this research project.

What does participation involve for you?

If you choose to take part in the project, you will take part in two data collection sessions and activities that you can do at home. The activities won't take too long. During the first sessions, you will have an interview. The second session will be around March. You will then have the opportunity to change or add things if you want to. The two sessions together will take approx. 3 hours. All the activities include questions about how you experience your participation and how it effects your everyday life. Your answers will be recorded on a tape recorder or on paper. The recordings will only be used for analyzing the data and will be fully anonymized. The people who are reading the project will not be able to identify you.

Who is responsible for the research project?

Norwegian University of Science and Technology is the institution responsible for the project. The results will be published but in an anonymized manner.

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. 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

I will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) 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).

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.

Based on an agreement with Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 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.

Yours sincerely,

Sabine Dorani

.....



Consent form (youth)

I have received and understood information about the project and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that:

- I will participate in questionnaires, writing activities and a group discussion;
- My voice will be recorded for the purpose of analyzing the data;
- My personal data will be processed until the end of the project, approx. August 2023.
- That I can withdraw from this research project anytime I want.

.....

(Signed by participant, date)

Consent form (parents)

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. I have also read a copy of my child's information sheet and consent form. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. My child's participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw my child from the project at any time without any disadvantage to my child;
3. I understand that my child will be part of a group discussion with other children. The group will be asked to discuss the following questions: How my child use his/her voice to participate in civic engagement;
4. I understand that only Sabine Dorani will have access to the personal information of my child;
5. I understand that the results of the project may be published but my anonymity and my child's anonymity will be preserved.

I give consent for my child to take part in this project

.....

(Signed by parents or guardian, date)



Interview guide

Opening questions

- How were the activities inside the research bag?
- Was there an activity you liked in particular?
- Which activity was a bit challenging?
- Is there something you learned from the activities?

Introductory questions

- When was the first time that you wanted to do something within the community?
- What does it mean to you to be actively involved within the community?

Theme questions 'forms of civic engagement'

- How has civic engagement changed you as a person?
- Who is your role model when it comes to raising your voice? How has this person influenced you?
- What qualities do you think youth have that are involved in civic engagement?
- What are some things you have gained from it. What have you learned from it? What are the challenges?

- (Add more specific questions based on the answers given in the research bag)

Theme questions 'Everyday life'

- Why is it important in your opinion that youth are involved in civic engagement?
- When and where do you feel most comfortable raising your voice?
- How is raising your voice influencing your day-to-day life? Does it take a lot of time?
- What do you enjoy the most when raising your voice and being involved in civic engagement?
- Do you feel like you need to do things differently because of your age?
- Can you tell me about a project that you are really proud of?

- (Add more specific questions based on the answers given in the research bag)

Ending questions

- If you could change one thing about your involvement, what would it be?
- Tell me one thing you are very proud of when you raise your voice?



Instructions

Thank you for participating in this research project!

- Inside this envelope, you can find three activities (1) Puzzle My Identity (2) Actions I have taken (3) Flashcards. Make sure you start with the first one 'Puzzle My Identity' as they have a specific order. Make sure you explain images or pictures - write one or two sentences. Avoid taking pictures of other people. Use powerpoint slides for activity 2 and send it to me. Ask questions if you have any

GOOD LUCK!!

Actions I Have Taken

This activity is about what actions you have taken.

1. You are going to create a collage (powerpoint, carva, physical etc.)
2. This collage will be about the actions you have taken within the community.
3. Use pictures, drawings, images, text etc.
4. Describe each action in 2/3 sentences.
5. You can do this activity in Norwegian or English.

GOOD LUCK!

Puzzle My Identity

This activity is about who you are.

1. You will find 9 puzzle pieces inside this envelope.
2. Use the puzzle pieces to write down your answers (questions on the back side).
3. You can draw on your puzzle pieces, but make sure your answers are clear and visible.
4. Glue to puzzle pieces together on the coloured paper (inside the envelope).
5. You can do this activity in Norwegian or English.

GOOD LUCK!



Flashcards

This activity is about identity.

1. This is the last activity inside this envelope.
2. You will find 5 flashcards inside this envelope.
3. Complete the sentences and write them on the flashcards.
4. You can do this activity in Norwegian or English.

GOOD LUCK!



Take a Snap

This activity is about how you use your voice.

1. Think about moments when you have used your voice.
2. Use your mobile phone to take pictures of something that reminded you of that moment. This could be a place, person, object etc..
3. Take minimum 3 or maximum 6 pictures.
4. Write down in 2/3 sentences why you chose this moment and how you used your voice.
5. You can use powerpoint slides.

#3. Avoid people on your pictures, or make them unrecognizable.

GOOD LUCK!

IT All Starts With Me

A responsible citizen looks out for the well being of others and understands we all have a part to play in making the world a better place

What are your responsibilities in the community? Rank them from most important to least important.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10

It All Starts With Me

This activity is about responsibilities.

1. Make a list with what you consider your responsibilities within the community.
2. Rank it from most important to least important.
3. Write down your answers on the worksheet that you can find inside the envelope
4. You can do this activity in Norwegian or English.

GOOD LUCK!