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GEORG BOLDT

Citizens in Training

How institutional youth participation produces bystanders and active citizens in Finland

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How institutional youth participation produces bystanders and active citizens in Finland

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For Isabel and Konstantin

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ABSTRACT

As a response to challenges faced by representative forms of democracy, public authorities increasingly offer young citizens opportunities for democratic participation. These youth participation policies are supported by research findings on political socialization, linking citizenship skills and habits learnt at a young age with an increased likelihood of political engagement later in life.

Studies of institutional youth participation practices have mostly been conducted through surveys and interviews. However, little is known about patterns of interaction and situated culture in institutional youth participation practices. Moreover, while a main concern when organizing and evaluating democratic participation has been the legitimacy of the process, less attention has been paid to studying why some people commit themselves to these forms of political participation while others fail to be engaged.

For this study, multi-sited ethnographic participant observation was carried out in the Helsinki metropolitan area in 2015–2018. The fieldwork was conducted in a municipal youth council and in several neighbourhoods doing participatory budgeting. These observations were complemented by interviews with the 13–20-year-old participants.

The study identified four outcomes of engagement in institutional youth participation: transformation, accumulation, externality, and exit. Where some participants found a safe haven for their burgeoning interest in civic action, transforming them into engaged citizens or strengthening their privileged social position, others found these scenes and the corresponding styles of engagement less useful, opting to leave the participatory process, either with a strengthened sense of externality or in search of a more resonant scene of engagement. These outcomes were contingent on the 'style of interaction' on one hand and the 'resonance of the scene of participation' on the other. Although participatory opportunities in this research were designed by public authorities to be easily accessible spaces for the political participation of young people, it emerged that participation was curtailed by barriers affecting whose voices were heard and which ideas were put forward. Two corresponding scene styles, empowerment and individualism, were recognized, highlighting the limited utility of implementing a specific style of participation on a

citywide scale without accounting for differences in the desires and needs of the target group.

The overall structure of the study takes the form of eight chapters. The first four include the introduction, a review of the state of research related to the subject at hand, and the main theoretical references and research methods used. The fifth and sixth chapters are empirical descriptions of the two research cases, a municipal youth council in the capital region and participatory budgeting in Helsinki. These chapters are followed by a discussion and a presentation of conclusions in view of youth participation and democratic evolution.

Keywords: citizenship, political participation, democracy, youth policy, ethnography, cultural sociology, political sociology

TIIVISTELMÄ

Edustuksellisen demokratian haasteita on pyritty ratkaisemaan muun muassa tarjoamalla nuorille kansalaisille yhä enemmän mahdollisuuksia osallistua demokraattiseen päätöksentekoon. Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että nuorella iällä opitut kansalaistaidot ja käytännöt lisäävät poliittisen osallisuuden todennäköisyyttä vanhempana.

Nuorten osallisuushankkeita on tutkittu pitkälti kysely- ja haastattelututkimusten keinoin, mutta näiden kulttuurista ja vuorovaikutuksesta on huomattavan vähän tutkimustietoa. Lisäksi, osallisuushankkeita arvioidessa keskeinen huomion kohde on ollut prosessin demokraattinen legitimiteetti, vähemmälle huomiolle on jäänyt miksi jotkut sitoutuvat näihin rakenteisiin mutta toiset eivät.

Tämä väitöskirja on toteutettu monikenttäisenä etnografisena tutkimuksena, jossa seurataan nuorten osallisuutta pääkaupunkiseudulla vuosina 2015-2018. Tutkimusaineisto koostuu etnografisista havainnoista yhdestä nuorisovaltuustosta, sekä Helsingissä kaupunginosatasolla järjestettävistä RuutiBudjetti tapahtumista. Havaintojen lisäksi tutkimusaineistoa on kerätty haastattelemalla 13-20 vuotiaita osallistujia näillä tutkimuskentillä.

Tämä tutkimus on tunnistanut neljä seurausta nuorten osallisuusrakenteisiin osallistumiselle: muutos, kasaantuminen, ulkopuolisuus ja poistuminen. Jotkut osallistujista löysivät turvasataman versovalle kansalaistoiminnan kiinnostukselleen ja kokivat syvän henkilökohtaisen muutoksen tai vahvistivat sosiaalista positiotaan. Toiset käsittivät osallistumisen vähemmän hyödylliseksi ja päättivät jättää prosessin, joko niin, että heidän ulkopuolisuuden tunteensa oli vahvistunut tai niin, että he jatkoivat heille sopivamman osallisuusmuodon etsimistä. Nämä seuraukset olivat riippuvaisia osallistumistilanteen vuorovaikutustyylistä sekä osallistumismahdollisuuden koetusta hyödyllisyydestä. Vaikka tutkimuksen kohteena olleet osallisuuskäytännöt on suunniteltu nuorille helposti lähestyttäviksi, nuorten äänen kuuluvuutta ja aloitteiden näkyvyyttä rajoittivat erilaiset portinvartijat. Lisäksi, tämä tutkimus tunnisti kaksi keskeistä tyyliä osallistumiselle, voimaannuttaminen ja yksilökeskeisyys. Koska on olemassa monenlaisia osallistumistyylejä, yhdenlaisen tyylin painottuminen nuorten osallisuusrakenteissa ei huomioi nuorten eriäviä haaveita ja tarpeita.

Tämä väitöskirja koostuu kahdeksasta luvusta. Neljä ensimmäistä lukua johdattaa lukijan tutkimuksen aihepiiriin ja menetelmiin. Näitä seuraa kaksi empiiristä lukua, jotka kuvaavat vuorostaan nuorisovaltuustoa sekä osallistuvaa budjetointia. Kirjan päättää keskustelu- ja yhteenvetoluvut, joissa käsitellään tutkimuksen tuloksia demokraattisen kehityksen ja nuorten osallisuuden tulevaisuuden kannalta.

Asiasanat: kansalaisuus, osallisuus, demokratia, nuorisopolitiikka, etnografia, kulttuurisosiologia, poliittinen sosiologia

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1 INTRODUCTION

Participation is everywhere these days. From day care and schools to zoning and healthcare, citizens are offered opportunities to bring their insights and experiences for consideration when decisions are being made. Once a shibboleth of radical social movements, participatory democracy and the practices associated with it have entered the lexicon of public governance practices. Today participatory democracy is promoted by institutions as diverse as the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the United Nations (UN) in order to strengthen the democratic character of our societies (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2017).

This dissertation describes how this change of governance practices affects those who participate, and how different contexts and circumstances influence the outcome of citizen participation.

Developments over the last 50 years have cast an increasingly long shadow of doubt over whether the currently dominant model of representative liberal democracy can be sustained (Ferree et al. 2002; Fung & Wright 2003), and current research points towards an erosion of democratic ideals worldwide (Ziblatt & Lewitsky 2017; Mounk 2018). Nevertheless, while voter turnouts have generally been in decline for decades, new forms of political activism suggest that citizens are not politically indifferent. This seems to indicate that representative democracy itself might be the reason why citizens increasingly feel removed from political decision-making (Bang 2004; Busse et al. 2015). Consequently, public authorities have made efforts to counter this sense of detachment by inviting citizens, civil society organizations and other advocacy groups to influence planning, decision-making and policies that affect them or their constituents. Increasingly, many have also turned their gaze towards participatory democracy and its promises to strengthen democracy by including marginalized groups, increase the vitality of democracy by giving participants the skills and means to influence political decision-making, and give citizens a sense of ownership over political decision-making processes (e.g. Baiocchi & Ganuza 2017; Barber 2009; Fung 2006; Habermas 1984; Irvin & Stansbury 2004; Pateman 1970, 2012; Talpin 2011).

A parallel and interconnected development has been the change in the perception of children and young people, from a group that must be protected from harm, to a group with a legitimate claim to political influence. Youth participation has become increasingly prominent on the policy agendas of intergovernmental institutions and national governments since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989; Hart 1992), giving children the right to be involved in decisions that affect them. In Europe, youth participation has been visibly on the institutional agenda since the EU white paper on youth was adopted in 2001 (European Commission 2001) and the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life was passed in 2003 (Council of Europe 2015).

In light of these developments, this thesis sets out to examine contemporary practices for institutional youth participation. Drawing from the literature on participatory democracy, youth participation, and cultural and political sociology, this dissertation presents an ethnographic account of institutional practices through which municipal authorities in the greater Helsinki region offer youth participation. In order to describe and interpret the events that unfold when citizens engage in participatory democracy, this study sets out to show the situated attitudes, behaviours, personal strategies and collective boundary work that constitute interaction in these scenes.

This introduction proceeds by briefly locating the phenomena of institutional youth participation in the context of Finnish politics and contemporary academic research before turning to the specific research questions of this monograph.

In Finland, citizen participation was spearheaded by an initiative to increase local democracy, that was coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior from 1998 to 2002, during the first government led by social-democratic prime minister Paavo Lipponen. Intensive attention to participatory democracy and popular inclusion continued in Finland throughout the early 2000s both on the local and national levels. Notably, zoning legislation was renewed, giving inhabitants and other actors a chance to get information about, and comment on, zoning decisions affecting them (Maankäyttö- ja rakennuslaki 132/1999; Eranti 2014). These changes also marked the start of the institutionalization of child and youth participation projects in Finland. Nonetheless, these policies were not universally acclaimed. Foreshadowing a central criticism of youth participation initiatives that would follow, Gretschel (2002:19-20) describes how the initial local democracy project led to negative experiences of participation among some youth participants, in spite of the objective to improve local democracy.

More recently, a significant change in terms of political youth participation in Finland occurred with the 2015 revision of the Local Governance Law. The revised law explicitly requires that municipalities institutionalize opportunities for young people to have a say in any issues that concern them (Kuntalaki 410/2015 §26). This requirement is reinforced by policy objectives in the youth law, expressing a commitment to advance the participation of young people in all public decision-making, and to improve their means to affect these processes by offering the conditions necessary to learn and exercise civic skills with respect of cultural diversity, internationalism, sustainable development, and respect for life (Nuorisolaki 1285/2016 §2-4). This mirrors a common two-pronged strategy for increasing youth participation. First, young[1] people are given a chance to raise their concerns and affect public decision-making. Second, they receive non-formal training in citizen skills, empowering them to enter the public sphere, and transforming them from disengaged individuals into young citizens.

As citizen participation is becoming increasingly commonplace, how are young people introduced to publicly mediated civic engagement? The local governance law does not define how young people should be included in decision-making. Nevertheless, most Finnish municipalities have chosen to create local youth councils for the political participation of young people. Youth councils are a form of civic engagement that approaches participation through formal political and governmental institutions (Checkoway and Aldana 2013: 1896). The first youth councils in Finland were founded in the late 1990s. By 2010, youth councils or similar groups were established in 70% of all municipalities in Finland (Eskelinen et al. 2015:59) and by now they exist in virtually all Finnish municipalities (Suomen Nuorisovaltuustojen Liitto 2020). They are also becoming increasingly common elsewhere with thousands of examples across Europe. In Finland, youth councils typically consist of representatives who are elected by popular vote in schools. The councils are situated within the municipal administration, and participation is organized in a style similar to city councils, with monthly meetings at which representatives discuss consultations, motions and resolutions, and elect representatives to the meetings of other political bodies.

Youth participation through youth councils has been criticized for targeting a select audience of active youth, reproducing social inequality, and failing to offer an adequate participatory platform for the vast majority of young people (Gretchsel &

[1] In this text, institutional youth participation generally refers to the methods used to include minors in public decision-making processes. The Finnish youth law defines youth as those under 29 years of age.

Killakoski 2015; Ødegård 2007; Matthews & Limb 2003; Augsberger et al. 2018; Taft & Gordon 2013). Partly due to this, the city of Helsinki's youth department decided to search for an alternative model for institutional youth participation (Siurala & Turkia 2012:82–83). As a result, participatory budgeting was introduced in 2013 (HS 2013; Nuorisoasiainkeskus 2013). In brief, the Helsinki youth department participatory budget provides youth in lower-secondary schools (13–15-year-olds) the chance to deliberate on local needs and develop proposals regarding how to use youth department funds in their own neighbourhood. Proposals that gather enough support are then variously prepared for execution.

Participatory budgeting is a process that enables non-elected citizens to take part in allocating public funds. The method was conceived in Porto Alegre, Brazil in the late 1980's. Since then the method has spread across the world and its popularity has increased massively. In Europe participatory budgets could be counted on the fingers of one hand in 1999 but by 2012 there were well over a thousand examples, the largest of them involving the 700 000 inhabitants of Seville, Spain (Sintomer et al. 2016: 20). Much like youth councils are youth friendly adaptations of civic practices in formal political and governmental institutions, participatory budgeting has also been adapted for the participation of minors (Cabannes 2004:38). To date, the Helsinki youth department participatory budget is probably the longest uninterrupted process of participatory budgeting in Finland. Moreover, it has inspired a citywide implementation of participatory budgeting, since 2018, for all inhabitants of Helsinki aged 12 or older.

These two means of democratic participation, youth councils and participatory budgets, are representative of another ongoing change in democratic culture and practices. Youth councils are organized according to the parliamentary procedures of liberal representative democracy and build their legitimacy on the Finnish social-corporate tradition of stakeholders championing organized interest groups. In marked contrast, participatory budgets were originally developed in societies struggling with clientelist politics and corruption. By involving laypeople in deliberating on their own everyday needs, experiences of participatory budgeting in Brazil led to a reversal of spending priorities in favour of the poor and disadvantaged (Gret & Sintomer 2005). Now this method introduces a new approach to political participation by offering a low-threshold opportunity for civic engagement without the need for the formality, communicative competence and burden of preconceptions associated with formal representative structures. Accordingly, youth councils and participatory budgets are representative of the cross-pressure between representative and participatory conceptions of democracy on one hand, and

between established political culture and the call for popular inclusion on the other. This contention over how to organise civic participation, in combination with the legal requirement to give minors political influence, makes the Finnish case interesting and enlightening in the wider international context.

When the first participatory budgets were introduced by the Helsinki city youth department in 2013, I jumped at the chance to study this experiment in participatory democracy for my master's dissertation (Boldt 2014; 2018). Following more than 10 years of personal involvement in youth politics, I was enthusiastic about observing this method of including young people in political decisions. Convinced that focusing on the democratic qualities of the procedure would be key to answering whether participants found their participation to be meaningful or not, I came to realize participants were more sensitive to the substantive aspects of the process, such as the misrecognition of their skills and capacities, than they were to underlying democratic inadequacies such as the absence of publicity, the arbitrary selection of participants, the lack of accountability, and limited decision-making power. As such, the experience of participation, especially the interaction between adults and young people, turned out to be a more significant source of contention, than breaches of normative democratic procedures, such as the non-transparent selection of participants and unclear authority of the participants (Boldt 2018). This is not to say that democratic procedure was or is not important. However, while the parameters defining the procedural legitimacy of a democratic process have largely been defined academically (e.g. Fung 2008; Smith 2009), the question of how to achieve substantively democratic participation requires us to turn attention towards the ways in which participants experience and make sense of opportunities to participate. Competences, commitment and cultural factors interact to shape individual experiences. These experiences have consequences for the policy outcomes with regard to how citizens will engage in the public sphere.

Hitherto, youth participation has mostly been a research field for youth researchers, while democratic theory, participation and civic action have been central topics for political scientists. This thesis attempts to bridge this gap by utilizing approaches developed within political and cultural sociology. It is the intention of this study to interpret and understand situated interaction in institutional youth participation. While any attempt at normative explanations would defeat the purpose of giving a detailed description of culturally mediated agency, interpretation benefits from the ability to compare the circumstances of participation with theoretical and utopian ideals (Reed 2011).

In this thesis, I approach the policy objectives of youth participation in formal politics – power-sharing and the transformation of civic skills through participation – by posing the research question *what are participants doing and learning through their engagement in institutional youth participation?* Examining this research question through the lens of political and cultural sociology, leads to the second research question of this thesis. *How does culture inform the ways in which young people make sense of institutional youth participation opportunities?* I approach these questions by means of longitudinal multi-sited ethnographic participant observation, allowing a cross-case comparison of the ways in which participation was conducted and the styles through which the participants engaged.

In other words, this thesis focuses on situated political cultures and the ways in which participants understand them, justify their commitments and choices in them, and decide to act in response to them. As Clifford Geertz put it (1973:312):

> *Culture, here, is not cults and customs, but the structures of meaning through which men give shape to their experience; and politics is not coups and constitutions, but one of the principal arenas in which such structures publicly unfold. The two being thus re-framed, determining the connection between them becomes a practicable enterprise, though hardly a modest one.*

In this thesis, these structures of meaning and arenas of public interaction are analysed through a combination of theoretical approaches. I propose a conceptual framework which tackles institutional youth participation from two directions. Forming the backdrop, the arena or scene of participation, is examined through frame analysis (Goffman 1986). This level of inquiry also situates the scene of participation in terms of its democratic character and organisation. The interaction that plays out in front of these backdrops is organized and analysed chiefly through the notions of scene style (Lichterman & Eliasoph 2014) and civic imagination (Baiocchi et al. 2016). Finally, this synthesis of approaches is used to discuss the potential of institutional youth participation in producing life-changing experiences (Paul 2014; Goffman 2018). These concepts are further elaborated in the conceptual framework of this thesis.

A common argument in favour of participatory democracy is that the experience of participation transforms individuals into engaged citizens (Ferree et al. 2002:296–297; Barber 2009:151–152; Mansbridge 1999; Pateman 1970:22–44). The flip side is that when participation fails to engage and empower, participants will likely experience apathy, growing cynicism and disenchantment (Berger 2015; Fung & Wright 2003:33–39; Talpin 2012). This thesis proceeds to show that the observed processes do not fit comfortably into this dichotomy. Engaged participants do not necessarily show adherence to democratic values. Likewise, the choice to stop

participating is not always coupled with estrangement from the spirit of democracy and civic engagement. Transformative experiences of empowerment do occur, but sometimes institutional youth participation strengthens the role of a spectator even in committed individuals.

In his article 'The emancipated spectator', Rancière (2007:271–272), writing about theatre, notes that being a spectator implies passivity. A spectator is separated from the capacity for knowing, just as they are separated from the possibility of acting. According to Rancière, a setting should be pursued in which spectators will no longer be passive viewers, where they will learn and become active participants in a collective performance. Drawing from Debord (1967), Rancière (2007:274) argues that the essence of spectatorship – watching a spectacle – is its externality: *'What man gazes at in this scheme is the activity that has been stolen from him; it is his own experience torn away from him, turned foreign to him, hostile to him, making for a collective world whose reality is nothing but man's own dispossession'.*

Unlike participatory democracy's common entailment – that is, the participation of as many as possible – formal youth participation in Finland often means that limited groups of young people are selected to act as representatives, much as adult city council members are. Consequently, most young people are literally spectators rather than participants. Paradoxically, many of the problems associated with representative democracy – such as the exclusion of marginalized voices, and the perception that decisions are not rooted in local realities – are intrinsically linked to this practice.

As previously alluded to, institutional youth participation in Finland is situated in the cleavage between the political traditions of the social-corporate model, characterized by the deeply integrated relationship between civil society and the state (Alapuro 2005; Jepperson 2002; Luhtakallio 2012), and the growing global paradigm within public governance that emphasizes popular inclusion rather than the inclusion of organized stakeholders (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2017). The cases of formal youth participation in Finland that are presented here show two competing conceptions of state mediated organization of the public sphere: the consultative participation of lay stakeholders who express their preferences in the youth council, and the open invitation to deliberate and negotiate in a structure of co-governance with civil servants and decision makers in the participatory budget. Inevitably, there are cases of youth participation in Finland that differ greatly from the cases in this study. Nevertheless, the cases presented give a wide perspective on the variety of approaches to inclusion, discursive style and power-sharing within Finnish institutional youth participation.

The next chapter presents a literature review on the political socialization of youth, institutional youth participation and participatory budgeting. Following this, the conceptual framework for this thesis is described, including a review of the central theoretical tools used to analyse the empirical data. The fourth chapter of this thesis explains the methodology and research methods used, and the rationale behind the case selection. After this, an overview of the fieldwork is given, including descriptions of the cases studied and the way this data was organized and analysed to produce the results of the thesis. The fifth and sixth chapters present the empirical data, followed by a discussion of the results and the conclusion of the thesis.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents past research on the political socialization of youth and institutional political participation with a particular focus on youth councils and participatory budgeting. Since youth councils have been the de facto approach to institutional youth participation for a number of years, the literature on youth councils also offers a more general reflection on the institutional approaches to political youth participation. In contrast, youth specific participatory budgeting is still relatively less studied and as such the literature review accounts for the approach at large rather than presenting only youth specific adaptations. The chapter starts by describing how young people have become recognized as citizens in their own right and how youth policies increasingly deal with the political socialization of young people. It then tackles some of the approaches to institutional youth participation that have been implemented over the last 30 years, presenting research done on these topics as well as identifying the gaps and shortcomings in these previous studies.

2.1 The emergence of minors as political agents

Since 2019 unprecedented numbers of school students, inspired by the young Swedish climate activist and Nobel prize nominee Greta Thunberg, have been organizing school strikes all over Europe, demonstrating in the streets and outside national parliaments. Contrary to alarmist claims that millennials are a politically apathetic generation, these demonstrations prove that shared concerns still mobilize young people. This is reinforced by the Finnish Youth Barometer, an annual interview-based survey measuring attitudes of young people in Finland, which has been carried out since 1994 in a cooperation between the state youth council and the Finnish Youth Research Network. A comparison of answers to the question 'how interested are you in politics?' from 1996 to 2018 shows that the proportion of respondents expressing an interest in politics has grown steadily, from less than half (44%) to two thirds (65%). Moreover, in the latest survey the proportion of those who were entirely indifferent was less than one in 10, the smallest number since the survey started (Pekkarinen & Myllyniemi 2018:23).

From having often been referred to as the leaders of tomorrow, children and young people are now increasingly understood as citizens; but this shift in the public perception of youth is not taking place without friction. It challenges a deeply rooted notion of childhood dependence by acknowledging the freedom of minors to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship (Larkins 2014:18). To understand this change, it is useful to consider the definition of minorities given by Louis Wirth (1945): a minority is a group of people with certain physical or cultural characteristics that are given differential and unequal treatment. While youth does not constitute a minority in the typical sense of the word, Wirth's definition chimes with the framing of youth that has been used by institutions advocating more opportunities for minors and young people to participate in public decision-making ever since the convention on the rights of the child (1989 §12) established that children have the right to freely express their views in all matters affecting them.

In particular, since the EU White Paper on youth was adopted in 2001, most European countries have created opportunities for young people to hone their citizenship skills by participating in decision-making on some level. Some countries, such as Austria, Estonia, Greece, Malta and parts of the UK, Germany and Switzerland have chosen to lower the age of voting to 16 in local and/or general elections. However, more commonly, young people are offered opportunities to participate through specific institutional youth participation procedures. These tailored youth participation instruments have been created with the objective of ensuring that the political freedoms of young people are respected, and to give them the capacities to lead a public life (Council of Europe 2015). Nevertheless, these practices have been met with criticism, pointing out their reliance on representative modes of democracy, their restriction of viable political repertoires, and their exclusion of voices. Nevertheless, the inclusion of young people in decision-making and politics is strongly supported by research into the political socialization of youth.

Research findings highlight how formative the years of adolescence are for the development of civic skills, political repertoires and modes of engagement in the public sphere (Neundorf & Smets 2017). While political socialization typically takes place through informal learning *'of social patterns corresponding to [one's] societal position as mediated through various agencies of society'* (Hyman 1959:25), methods of formal and non-formal civic education are common tools in the youth policy repertoires of European governments. Nevertheless, while research has shown that *'civics training in schools indeed compensates for inequalities in family socialization with respect to political engagement'* (Neundorf & Smets 2017:8), results are still inconclusive as to whether the causality is linked to the instruction itself or the experiences participants have of expressing

themselves and having their opinions respected and discussed (ibid.). Recently, Cammaerts and colleagues (2016), conducting a European-wide survey, found that if a person voted in the first few polls after coming of age, they are more likely to do so throughout their life than someone who did not. They argue that the low turnout of young voters, one of the troubling trends of contemporary liberal democracies, is not caused by a generational effect but by an effect defined by cohort (ibid.) – that is, a group of people with a shared characteristic, in this case correlated with not going to vote. If early experiences of civic engagement are consequential for future civic action, one might argue that our repertoires of civic engagement – the ways we do citizenship – are shaped by the experiences we have during our teens and adolescence. The following section describes some of the institutional approaches to political youth participation and presents research findings on how these methods have managed to fulfil the policy objectives of giving young people a voice and the capacities to use it.

2.2 Youth councils in Europe

Youth councils are the most common form of local youth participation in the sphere of formal politics in Finland (Gretschel & Kiilakoski 2015; Paakkunainen 2004) and elsewhere in Europe (Arensmeier 2010; Ødegård 2007; Vromen & Collin 2010; Cammaerts et al. 2016; Gaiser et al. 2010; Matthews 2001; Matthews & Limb 2003), and in the United States (Augsberger et al. 2018; Checkoway & Aldana 2013; Taft & Gordon 2013). They are also one of the practices of conventional youth participation endorsed by the Council of Europe (2015), which states that the effective participation of young people in local and regional affairs requires a permanent representative structure such as a youth council. Youth councils, youth parliaments or youth forums are structures provided by local and regional authorities for the participation of young people. They allow young people, whether or not they belong to organisations or associations, to express their opinions and present proposals on the formulation and implementation of policies affecting them. There are youth councils that are composed by election, by appointment from within organisations of young people, or by open participation. Ideally, young people assume direct responsibility for projects and play an active part in the related policies. This way, youth councils are thought to support the aims of empowering young people, developing their capacities, making policies better informed and efficient to

implement, and last but not least, guarantee the right of young people to participate in matters that affect them (ibid.).

Nearly 20 years have passed since the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life was adopted in 2003. Since then, local youth councils have become increasingly widespread with approximately 400 youth councils in the United Kingdom (Matthews 2001), 4000 in France (Siurala & Turkia 2012), and hundreds of examples in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden (Arensmeier 2010; Gretschel & Kiilakoski 2015; Paakkunainen 2004; Ødegård 2007).

The establishment of local and regional youth councils is an important signal from public authorities, showing their commitment to include young people in decision making. Considering the high average age of elected officials in Europe, and the limited voice and influence of young people in the public sphere, all opportunities for increased youth participation are laudable. However, research into these structures point at some common problems.

Junttila-Vitikka et al. (2015:187) point out that in Finland the local participation of minors is usually organized by local youth services, and these are often one of the few departments within local governance structures with clear procedures to follow when it comes to citizen participation. When groups of youth representatives are invited to address issues that are important to the young, their initiatives are not necessarily within the jurisdiction of local youth departments; consequently, the initiative might be handled by a civil servant in a municipal department without any experience of citizen interaction. As Matthews (2001:316) argues, changing local decision-making structures without changing social and political values will achieve little; indeed, values need to change on all levels of an institution before children's participation becomes a matter of routine practice.

The first youth councils in Finland were established in the mid-1990s (Sundback 2004:145; Siurala & Turkia 2012), and today 290 Finnish cities and municipalities (Suomen Nuorisovaltuustojen Liitto 2020) offer under-18-year-olds forums for participation. Nevertheless, the changes necessary for power-sharing are still largely missing. Consequently, young people are often heard but rarely listened to (Eskelinen et al. 2015:68). As an example, although youth councils exist in most Finnish municipalities, research testifies that they are often forgotten within the governance structures (Feldman-Wojtachnia et al. 2010:38). Members rarely receive any training, and municipalities fail to hear youth councils even in decisions that are relevant to the interests of youth (ibid.). Matthews & Limb (2003:175) point out in regard to youth councils in the United Kingdom that poor participatory mechanisms

are effective means in training young people to become future non-participants. If they know that no one is listening and that their views do not count, their interest is thwarted, and they enter adulthood with low expectations of meaningful involvement (ibid.). Similarly, the 2018 Finnish Youth Barometer (Myllyniemi & Kiilakoski 2019:13) found that interest in politics was coupled with a strong trust in political institutions, while respondents who thought that politicians did not care about the people were also not interested in politics. However, trust is not necessarily enough to engage young people politically.

Taft and Gordon (2013:93–97) studied why some politically active youth chose to leave youth councils, or not to join them in the first place, because of their *'distrust of youth councils as potential spaces for meaningful engagement'*. According to Taft and Gordon (ibid.), these youth criticize the fact that youth councils only offer one *'interpretation of democratic citizenship: participation as a voice, as an elite practice, and as managed by the state'*. These young activists have ideas about participation that align with those put forward by feminist and anarchist social movements and other critical perspectives, which advocate a much broader form of participatory democracy that emphasizes impact, collective engagement and contentious politics. Also, Harinen (2000) and Tomperi and Piattoeva (2005) describe how young people can find it demotivating to participate in societal development in what they perceive as a static and ready-made society. Likewise, Laine (2012:46) describes a plurality of political repertoires used by youth in political participation, making a distinction between everyday makers and expert citizens. Everyday makers are engaged in performative acts that contest power relations, while expert citizens use their positions to influence the political system. An important lesson emerges from these observations: reaching out to young people in traditional 'political' ways may forestall other, more imaginative ways of doing politics. In order to engage all kinds of young people through venues of participatory democracy in formal political institutions, a full repertoire of participatory forms that challenge the conventions of adult political structures needs to be developed (Matthews & Limb 2003:190).

Moreover, methods and time frames tend to cause problems when they are adapted to suit public officials and decision makers rather than participants. To boot, these processes and methods often require participants to have certain skills in expressing themselves, understanding institutional languages, and reading cultural codes of interaction (Hill et al. 2004:86). This automatically excludes many of the people that have the most to gain from participating in these processes, such as migrants, young people, or those who are functionally impaired (ibid.:91). This was also obvious while I was conducting this study. During my fieldwork, a school for

special-needs students decided not to offer their students a possibility to participate in the youth council elections, even though they were required by the municipality to do so. On another occasion, a participatory budgeting workshop in a multicultural neighbourhood coincided with madrasa, and therefore none of the Muslim youth that had previously participated, showed up to elaborate on the common initiatives.

Junttila-Vitikka et al. (2015:190) point out that youth work in support of active citizenship, in the spirit of the law, does not reach all young people, but is targeted at a minority of active young people. Ødegård (2007) echoes this in her finding that youth councils appear to have a positive effect on the political socialization of those that do participate, but since this opportunity is open only to a select few, any larger social effect is left out. A similar finding from the United States (Augsberger et al. 2018) indicates that caution is needed to avoid the reproduction of social inequality: regardless of proportional representation, youth council members had mixed understandings of whether they were supposed to represent their neighbourhood, with some feeling out of touch with the diverse needs of youth.

Some other obstacles to the popular inclusion of young people are the low level of knowledge about participatory opportunities, and the perception that decision-making on the local level is not relevant to the interests of the young. A survey among Finnish youth (Sundback 2004:150) showed that less than half of the respondents knew whether their city offered an opportunity for young people (under the legal voting age) to participate in decision-making. Moreover, only 2% of the young Finnish respondents to the International Civic and Citizenship Study in 2009 were 'very interested' in local political issues, and 79% answered they were either 'not very' or 'not at all' interested in these issues (Suoninen et al. 2010:49). Contesting this result, the latest Finnish Youth Barometer survey on political participation (Pekkarinen & Myllyniemi 2018) reports a relatively high interest in politics among Finnish youth, in contrast with other recent surveys. The authors suggest that the disparity is due to how informants interpret the intention behind the word 'politics'. Responses to the Finnish Youth Barometer indicate that what young people perceive to be political has broadened beyond political parties and government (ibid.). Respondents considered voting, consumer choices, signing initiatives and giving feedback on services to be the top forms of civic participation. This seems to confirm that there is an increasing demand for participatory, rather than, representative democracy. Still, most channels for civic participation that are available to the young are shaped by the pathways of traditional representative structures. This might explain why only 15% of young Finnish people say they have

been involved in a political activity, even though much higher shares of youth express an interest in politics (Myllyniemi & Kiilakoski 2019).

In her research on the Norwegian Porsgrunn model of institutional youth participation, touted as a model of best practice in the Nordic countries, Ødegård (2007) notes that the participation structures occupy an unclear position in the democratic process, since they lack executive power. She states that most councils are initiated by local authorities, not by young people, and that they are commonly administered by secretaries employed by the municipality, who act as intermediaries in communications between the youth councils and the administrative and political authorities (ibid.:274). Consequently, the youth councils are practically speaking controlled by the city councils, and whatever political power is available, is limited to representatives who are fluent in the repertoires of political rules, norms and communication expected by the political elite. Matthews & Limb (2003) echo these sentiments in their study of British youth councils. According to them, youth councils are often established by adults *'because they are perceived to provide tangible opportunities to enable ongoing participation rather than because of demand from young people. New evidence suggests, however, that many youth forums are flawed and inappropriate participatory devices, often obfuscating the voices of those whom they are meant to empower'* (ibid.:175). Further, Matthews (2001:307) points out that to be truly inclusive, forums for youth participation need to be found outside of existing organizations such as schools and youth centres, so that they can draw from several sources without being based on any single one. This limiting factor is also iterated by Junttila-Vitikka et al. (2015:192–193) in their description of how many youth centres in Finland have become exclusive and unsafe places for young people from outside the youth centre community.

Kiilakoski et al. (2015:9–33) emphasize three factors to consider in order to avoid these pitfalls in youth participation. First, participants should have a clear, recognized role. Second, something has to happen as a consequence of participation, i.e. participants must be able to initiate change. Third, participation must be meaningful to the participants in a way that preserves their self-respect. However, none of these factors matter very much as long as youth participation opportunities remain limited to a chosen few.

The slightly oxymoronic term 'representative form of participatory democracy' (Kiilakoski 2020) has been used to describe youth councils, youth parliaments, youth forums and other such means of participation through formal political and governmental institutions where participants are selected to play the role of lay experts or stakeholders. Such structures allow participants to develop their practical

skills in doing politics, but a pre-requisite to access these opportunities tends to be a certain capacity for public functioning (Bohman 1997). In other words, participants in these types of democratic environments, whether they are members of the local youth council at 15 or attend meetings in Brussels at 22, have the necessary combination of knowledge, attitudes, skills and resources to reach these positions. Consequently, youth participation through representative structures tends to favour the accumulation of social, cultural and political capital among privileged groups instead of deepening democracy by empowering groups that have previously been excluded for one reason or the other.

I argue that most of the common approaches to youth participation have little in common with participatory democracy. On the contrary, they are normatively more reminiscent of representative democratic structures and procedures. As I have shown, research into them, both in Finland and internationally, criticizes these practices for creating an illusion of youth participation when in fact they are often exclusive in membership, steering members towards limited repertoires of political action with slim political and economic influence. Nevertheless, the nascent practices of youth participatory budgeting speak of a willingness within municipal governance to initiate changes in favour of a different, more inclusive conception of democracy.

2.3 Participatory budgeting

As the thesis introduction mentioned, the city of Helsinki has chosen to institutionalize a selection of youth participation mechanisms. In addition to electing a group of representatives, that over time morphed into a youth council[2], the city has chosen to implement participatory budgeting, a democratic innovation based on the premise that citizens should get to influence public spending (Gret & Sintomer 2005).

Participatory budgeting was introduced in Porto Alegre, Brazil in the late 1980s to curb clientelism in local politics, and to channel public funds in a more egalitarian way. The Brazilian case exemplifies a spectacular reversal in public spending priorities as a result of citizens deciding locally what is best for their surroundings (Baiocchi 2005; Cabannes 2004; Gret & Sintomer 2005). Since then, participatory budgeting has become globalized, as hundreds of municipalities around the world have implemented the method, often significantly adapting the process according to their needs. This global spread and diversification of participatory budgeting has

[2] The youth council was called the Ruuti Core Group until a name change in 2018.

been driven by a somewhat surprising combination of actors. Much of the initial attention for participatory budgeting came from activists attending the World Social Forum. However, much less subversive international organisations such as the World Bank and UN agencies have also been central in promoting participatory budgeting as an example of best practice (Sintomer et al. 2008; Baiocchi & Ganuza 2014, 2017). This can partly be explained by the adaptability of participatory budgeting to suit a multitude of political inclinations since it can be argued to achieve local empowerment; constitute a step towards decentralisation; be a way to foster innovation and social entrepreneurship; or restore trust in the government (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2014:31).

The diversification of participatory budgeting since it left the shores of Brazil has prompted Sintomer et al. (2018:19) to propose a definition of the central characteristics of the process. In addition to enabling non-elected citizens to take part in allocating or prioritizing public funds they underline five factors.

- Participatory budgeting deals with financial and/or budgetary issues.
- The city level, or a (decentralized) district with an elected body and some power over administration, has to be involved.
- It has to be a repeated process.
- It must include some form of public deliberation within the framework of specific meetings / forums.
- There needs to be some accountability on the output.

They (Sintomer et al. 2008:167) also recount three particularly important principles for establishing a countervailing power to the traditional branches of government and consequently achieving empowered participatory governance. The first of these is establishing a grassroots democracy through open citizens' assemblies that follow the principle of 'one man one vote'. These assemblies determine priorities, elect representatives, and discuss political guidelines for various issues. The second principle, social justice, is achieved through an allocation formula that ensures that districts with a deficient infrastructure receive more funds than areas with a high quality of life. The third principle, citizen control, is intended to guarantee that the priorities of the districts are reflected in the budget to the largest extent possible. These were the principles that made the Porto Alegre experiment successful in overcoming clientelism by replacing negotiations behind closed doors with democratic and transparent procedures. Moreover, since the process was built on

the idea of popular inclusion, public investments were reoriented towards the most disadvantaged districts (ibid.).

Sintomer et al. (2018), describe how once participatory budgeting spread outside Brazil, various local adaptations were developed in order to suit local situations and objectives – such as bringing together private and public interests, and consulting citizens on public finances – that do not support the emergence of empowered participatory governance or the addition of citizen power to the traditional trias politica in the spirit of the Porto Alegre model of participatory budgeting. They (ibid.) argue that participatory budgeting as an institutional innovation needs to be coupled with a social mobilization of the working class and the development of a plebeian public sphere in order for empowered public governance to evolve. Other models may exhibit participatory governance, but they can hardly be empowered.

Similarly, Baiocchi (2006:53-54) points out that the original participants of the participatory budgets were entirely different from the participants of the salons Habermas (1989) describes as instrumental for the emergence of the public sphere. And unlike the Habermasian public sphere that is distinct from government, participatory budgets in Porto Alegre, in spite of being government sponsored settings, managed to foster the engagement of poor, uneducated people, that had lived under authoritarian rule. This was achieved by opening political institutions to the direct involvement of citizens and by offering individuals the necessary space, tools, and methodologies to express their needs and interests in connection with other citizens (Baiocchi 2006: 45). This is the way participatory budgeting holds the potential to include those that would otherwise remain without influence (ibid.: 69).

Accordingly, participatory budgeting in its original shape constituted a space for both the communication of needs and the empowerment of people to engage in the public sphere. Many of the later adaptations of participatory budgeting have given less attention to the learning experience and empowerment, choosing instead to emphasize the communicative aspects. Criticising the turn participatory budgeting has taken, Pateman (2012:13–14) calls attention to the fact that much of what is called participatory budgeting today is merely a consultative provision of information. She insists on a distinction between this and genuine participatory budgeting, which demands a significant democratization of municipal budgeting. She adds that much of the participation that is being offered today is closer to the Schumpeterian conception of citizens as consumers evaluating services, rather than to the ideal of participatory democracy in which 'citizens have the right to public provision, the right to participate in decision-making about their collective lives and to live within authority structures that make such participation possible' (ibid.:15).

Baiocchi & Ganuza (2014: 42-43) have also drawn attention to how participatory budgeting is at risk of being turned into a mechanism for revealing individual preferences without any connection to questions of social justice. The way participatory budgeting has been implemented around the world has often had very little to do with its empowerment dimension, instead focusing on good governance and citizen apathy. They (ibid.) stress that if participatory budgeting becomes connected to discretionary budgets, and its agenda is dictated by administrative possibilities rather than autonomous conversations about needs, it risks becoming de-politicized and irrelevant from the viewpoint of transforming society.

In a recent study confirming this concern, Shybalkina and Bifulco (2018) measured the effects of participatory budgeting on the allocation of capital funding among areas of different income levels within New York City council districts. Their results called into question the view that participation promotes pro-poor allocations by showing that participatory budgeting did not increase funding to the lowest income tracts and that PB failed to change the tendency that the lowest income groups participate less frequently, have the least say, and are the least equipped to be effective participants. Suggesting that district officials may not have implemented the recommended practices intended to ensure that resources go to the neediest (ibid., 20).

Participatory budgeting was not originally conceived as a method for institutional youth participation, but in the 1990s several Brazilian cities started introducing the perspective for children and young people too, along with other changes such as equal gender representation, in order to include groups previously excluded from political processes (Cabannes 2004:38). Since 2014 participatory budgeting has become a central feature of the European Youth Capital, a title awarded by the European Youth Forum to a European municipality for a period of one year. Several of the former youth capitals have chosen not only to keep doing the participatory budgeting, but to develop and enlarge these processes. Where local youth councils engage tens or sometimes hundreds of young people, 50 000 young voted in the participatory budget when Cluj Napoca, in Romania, was European Youth Capital in 2015 (Pasic 2018).

Youth-specific participatory budgeting is not yet widely explored in Finland, but since the process was launched in Helsinki, other Finnish municipalities have followed suit by either including young people in newly established participatory budgets or by creating youth specific approaches. Consequently, this thesis is to some extent breaking new ground in its analysis of participatory budgeting conducted with young people but also in terms of studying political youth

participation that is closer to a participatory rather than a representative notion of democracy. With this in mind, I turn to the central theoretical underpinnings of this text and the heuristic framework used for the analysis of the empirical data.

3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis builds on a cross-case comparison of two approaches to institutional youth participation in the Helsinki metropolitan area. This chapter presents the heuristic framework and theoretical approach chosen for the comparison and analysis of the empirical data. It proceeds by presenting a two-tiered framework for the analysis of institutional youth participation. This is followed by a description of the theoretical tools used in order to interpret the contexts of participation.

Kriesi (2007:69-90) proposes a general framework for studying political processes, combining micro- and macrolevel elements in order to enable the analysis of political contexts. This heuristic framework distinguishes between three variables – structures of political institutions, the configuration of political actors, and the interaction context – in order to come to terms with the complexity that characterises the fields in which political processes play out. The basic idea is that each combination of these variables influences the strategies, repertoires and claims-making in that specific context.

While this approach has mainly been applied to national political contexts of Western liberal democracies and to historical analysis of social revolutions, Kriesi (ibid.: 85) proposes that the approach is especially well suited for public policy analysis and to the integration of fields of study that have been leading separate academic lives.

Jasper (2015:17) suggests a similar focus on the dynamic nature of interaction in political contexts through the language of players and arenas. Echoing Charles Tilly's notion of regimes and repertoires, Jasper (ibid.) suggests moving away from the dichotomy of structure and agency by shifting attention to engagements rather than environments, and interaction instead of relationships.

This study takes a comparable approach in its two-tiered analysis of institutional youth participation policies. First, the analysis benefits from established normative standards for various modes of democratic decision-making. Normative criteria in deliberative and participatory democratic theory highlight the ways in which different approaches to popular inclusion affect whose voices are heard and how closure is reached in a debate. They are also central for understanding which players the participatory arena mobilizes, what the incentives for participation are, and what

repertoires of action are available to the players. Second, the analysis uses a selection of theoretical tools to interpret the situated cultures in each context of participation, namely the framing of the participatory scene, the styles that emerge in these, and the civic imaginations these scene styles produce. This interpretation of the interactional context accounts for the cultural models that affect political institutions, how actors analyse the logic of the situation, and correspondingly how interaction is shaped through the strategies they choose.

3.1 Benefits and challenges of popular democracy

This subchapter presents some central discussions pertaining to democratic participation that form the basis for understanding the benefits and challenges of participatory democracy in this thesis. Because of this I proceed to present them before the principal analytical concepts chosen for this dissertation.

In colloquial speech, participatory democracy is often understood as any form of citizen engagement in a public decision-making process, ranging from consultative gatherings to avenues of direct democracy. However, participatory democracy can also be understood as a theoretical model for a democratic public sphere which is normatively distinct from representative modes of democracy. To generalize, the objective of participatory democracy is to include as many as possible in deciding on things concerning them. This idea builds on the criticism of representative democracy formulated by Rousseau in *The Social Contract*. He argued that the actions of a state need to be guided by the general will of its citizens in order for the state to retain democratic legitimacy. Therefore, the role of democratic procedures is to discover the public interest through the convergence of free and equal citizens (Bertram 2018; Rousseau 1998). A central understanding, rooted in the likes of Rousseau, Tocqueville and Mill (Crittenden & Levine 2018), is that participation is an empowering experience that transforms individuals into active citizens (Ferree et al. 2002:295–297).

The discursive ideal of democracy ushered in by Jürgen Habermas (1984) retains the objectives described above but differs from participatory democracy by highlighting deliberation – a process of justifying opinions, and reasoning about benefits and drawbacks – as an important part of democratic decision-making (Cohen 1997). Naturally, these categories represent ideal types, and most democratic spheres of decision making are combinations of the above.

A central aspect of popular inclusion is whether the participation has democratic legitimacy or not. Participatory structures without democratic legitimacy are called tokenistic. Sherry Arnstein (1969) introduced the ladder of citizen participation in order to distinguish various degrees of participation, from tokenistic whitewashing to citizen control. Since then, the urge to define what is real and appropriate participation has led to decades of theorizing on the proper ways to structure public participation, much of which revolves around the questions of who the participants are, what they are participating in, how they do so, and what the outcomes of their participation are (e.g. Fung 2006; Hart 1992; Irvin & Stansbury 2004). Meanwhile, advocates of a more substantive approach underline that democratic procedures can lead to undemocratic decisions, and that the deliberation preceding a democratic decision is crucially important in order to legitimize decisions for those affected by them. While the concept of democratically legitimate procedure is definable in quite an exact manner by looking at the who and how of participation, it is more challenging to define substantive qualities of deliberation precisely (Ercan 2014; Boldt 2018).

Hand in hand with the increased interest in participatory democracy, the discursive tradition has contributed ideas, conceptual models and examples of best practice, with the aim of reaching legitimate decisions through deliberation (Ferree et al. 2002:316). Discursive democracy suggests the use of democratic reasoning, rather than voting or the aggregation of preferences, as an alternative political process (Ercan 2014). In deliberative processes, participants offer reasons for their positions, listen to the views of others, and consider their preferences in light of new information and arguments as a means for achieving a refined public opinion (Fishkin 1997). Ideally, deliberating individuals make informed decisions based on facts, rather than answering at random or ignoring competing opinions or issues that do not affect them personally. This theoretical tradition builds on the Rawlsian notion of public reason (Quong 2018) and the ideal of communicative action presented by Jürgen Habermas's (1984) deliberation theory. It raises a central dichotomy of thought: whether deliberation has only instrumental merit, or if there is also an expressive benefit in publicly deliberating decisions (Ercan 2014).

This thesis is written with the latter in mind. As Tocqueville famously observed, local political engagement is a form of civic education. Nevertheless, civic education is not always beneficial; sometimes it disempowers or imparts harmful values and goals (Crittenden & Levin 2018). On the other hand, participation can establish what James Bohman (1997:324) calls adequate public functioning by giving citizens access to and use of political opportunities and civic liberties, such as making their concerns

known and initiating public debate about them (ibid.:325). Also, Pateman (1970:42) argues that the major function of participatory democracy is an educative one. Participating individuals gain practice in democratic skills and procedures, and develop a democratic personality involving autonomy and resistance to hierarchy (ibid.:64). In this way, she asserts, participatory democracy develops political efficacy, a sense of cooperation, commitment to collective decisions, and a democratic character.

These opposites – engaging in quality deliberation with visible results, which leads individuals along a path of active citizenship and loyalty to the democratic ideal, versus the tokenistic exploitation that results in cynicism and disillusionment – are tangled in a veritable Gordian knot. Previously, I set out to study (Boldt 2018) participatory budgeting for young people in Helsinki through the deductive testing of a heuristic model of democratically legitimate participation. The model was derived from theoretical definitions highlighting access to information about the opportunity to participate, the selection of participants, and their power over the decisions made (Beierle 1999; Hart 1992; Irvin & Stansbury 2004; Fung 2006). What I found was procedures far from ideal. However, I also came to understand that these concerns were not shared or even reflected upon by the participants. Rather, the quality of the deliberation and by extension the substantive qualities of participation were the fundamentally decisive factors in terms of achieving a positive, empowered experience of participation. This realization persuaded my turn away from normative explanations in favour of an approach with a greater depth of field.

Most of the criticism of citizen participation today is not directed towards the idea of participation, but towards the way it is implemented. Central to this discussion is the question of legitimacy and the dichotomy of empowerment versus domination. Meriluoto (2018b:4) summarizes this by suggesting that empowerment denotes the ability of participants to act on their own terms, set agendas, gain recognition for their experiences, and affect the outcome of the process. Conversely, domination signifies co-optation by an administration that steers the conversation, deciding what kinds of participation are acceptable, who is eligible to participate, what can be achieved, and what can be discussed. She points out that this dichotomy of power relations is starting to be questioned, shifting the analytical gaze towards the everyday practices where governing and resistance take shape. This change of focus, from legal rights and procedural legitimacy to *'routines, rituals, norms and habits of the everyday through which subjects become citizens'* (Isin 2008:17), makes us better equipped to study contemporary democratic practices, and to understand how participation affects participants.

The idea that participation makes better citizens is a central argument behind participatory policies. Although most people that have had the experience of participating in democratic decisions tend to agree that the experience has affected them in some way, there is no empirical proof of the validity of this claim (Mansbridge 1999:291). Nevertheless, recent research into transformative experiences does give some clues to understanding what these turning points are like and when they are likely to occur. The following section describes the tools and concepts used in this thesis for analysing the empirical data.

3.2 Analysing cultures of interaction

By studying the contextually bound ways in which people give meaning to their selves and the wider social world in which they exist, this thesis attempts to determine patterns of social life that have received little attention in the literature on institutional youth participation. While the previous section summarized some of the central normative standards and ideal outcomes of participatory democracy, this section describes the tools used in this thesis to study the ways in which meanings emerge through interaction. This framework, and the conceptual tools it relies on, is intended to shine a light at how situated cultures are born, perpetuated and modified. It is based on the understanding, quoting Bellah et al. (1986:27), that *'cultures are dramatic conversations about things that matter to their participants'*.

These tools can be roughly divided into two categories. I first proceed to present those parts of the present conceptual framework dealing with the scene of participation, namely Jonathan Wynn's (2016) suggestion to consider occasions as a basic unit of analysis in sociology and Erving Goffmans frame analysis (1986 [1974]). Subsequently, I turn to the analysis of group culture and interaction through the use of scene style as developed by Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003; Lichterman & Eliasoph 2014), and civic imagination (Baiocchi et al. 2016).

The observations that constitute the empirical part of this study were all carried out at various occasions or events. In order to establish a consistent approach to how the studied scenes of engagement differ, I turn to Jonathan Wynn's (2016:283) proposal that a loose coupling between micro-level phenomena and structural forces becomes practicable if we acknowledge the variance in resources, patterns and properties of social occasions. This is followed by an interconnected discussion of frame analysis (Goffman 1986), in particular how keying and resonance inform

participant agency on the occasions that constitute the youth participation practices under study.

In his article 'On the sociology of occasions' (2016), Jonathan Wynn responds to Erving Goffman's call in *Interaction Ritual* (1967) for a framework for analysing events and occasions. This framework allows a comparison of occasions by looking at the components that structure the social context of the occasion (Wynn 2016:279). It underlines that different occasions have differing outcomes, not because everything happens at random, but because the combination of variables that define the occasion are different. According to Wynn (ibid.:282) all social occasions are temporally limited constructs of actors mobilizing resources in a particular social geography:

> *[On one hand they] hold a shape and activate its planners' intentions and on the other hand cannot possibly dictate each participant's actions, motivations, and interpretations of such events, and might include uninvited and unwelcome participants. A variety of properties shape and inform participants' experiences in these collective events, from inclusion and exclusion, and from 'buying into' versus challenging the occasion itself.*

The framework proposed by Wynn consists of three components: resources, patterns and properties. Resources are economic, physical, human, social and symbolic assets that can be operationalized through an occasion. Patterns describe the social geography of an event. Citadels are tightly controlled and confined events with limited access and strictly defined roles. In core patterns, some activities are more accessible than others; they might consist of a mix of official and unofficial gatherings and situations, all part of the larger occasion. Lastly, a confetti pattern brings together the widest array of actors with the least amount of control over encounters, situations and gatherings. Properties track how resources flow through patterned activities. Longevity and repetition are temporal properties; porosity denotes access; density is the degree of attention afforded to an engagement; and turbulence marks the range of scripted and unscripted activity occurring in connection with the occasion (ibid.:279–282).

Wynn's framework, coupled with an understanding of how an occasion of youth participation relates to democratic traditions and their normative features, constitutes part of the landscape of meaning drawn by the analysis that follows. These tools describe the arena, or field of engagement, and I return to them in the discussion on the empirical findings.

Framing links the scene of participation to situated cultures of meaning. This concept is derived primarily from the work of Goffman (1986:21), which describes frames as *'schemata of interpretation'* enabling individuals *'to locate, perceive, identify, and*

label' events and occurrences as meaningful and to locate them in the world at large. These frames help in organizing experience and guiding individual and collective action (Benford & Snow 2000:614). The framing concept has been used extensively within sociological research on social movements and collective action, as a central tool for understanding and interpreting how ideas and meanings are generated, diffused and mobilized for different purposes. In this line of thought, social movements are not seen simply as carriers of ideas; instead, movement actors are considered to actively maintain and construct meaning (Benford & Snow 2000:612). In her study on local activism and politics in France and Finland, Luhtakallio (2012:13) uses framing to analyse *'the habitual processes of structuring experiences, in which meanings are produced in communication with a given situation',* treating frames *'both as meaningful structures necessary for "navigating" in the world, and as active processes of producing and reproducing social reality'*.

In this thesis frame analysis is used to understand the relationship between the ways in which authorities communicate opportunities for youth participation and the ways in which young people interpret this communication. Furthermore, keying and resonance, two concepts related to how frames inform interaction, require a brief introduction. In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman (1986:43–44, 78–79) describes how frames are transformed through the use of keying when two similar scenes are generated from a common model but differ from each other in certain systematic ways. Although both scenes are keying a common model, they may omit certain elements of the original. Examples of this include screen adaptations of a book, or a rehearsal versus an actual performance. When a common model is keyed, *'activities, events, and biographies that are already meaningful from the standpoint of some primary framework transpose in terms of another framework'* (Snow et al. 1986:474). Keying is used in this thesis to describe local variance in participatory budgeting. Although the model for participatory budgeting was common to all neighbourhoods, significant variations were observed in the meanings it carried for the target audience.

Resonance describes the mobilizing potential of a frame, or why some frames seem to be more effective than others (Benford & Snow 2000:619). To quote Schudson (1989:169): *'What is "resonant" is not a matter of how "culture" connects to individual "interests" but a matter of how culture connects to interests that are themselves constituted in a cultural frame'*. Simply put, frames resonate when they are relevant to their audience. McDonnell et al. (2017) ground the concept of resonance in a pragmatist understanding of how humans are shaped by and shape normative social practices, underlining that cultural objects become relevant only once they are used to solve problems. They propose that the concept of resonance has the potential to explain

individual-level transformation. In other words, the resonance of a scene is an indication of its transformative potential.

Many life-changing decisions involve choices to have experiences that teach us things we cannot learn without having that experience. Paul (2014) argues that a transformative experience is a kind of experience that is both radically new to the agent and changes them in a deep and fundamental way. Transformative experiences teach something one could not have learnt without having that kind of experience, and as a consequence change one's core preferences or self-image.

By combing Paul's perspective on transformation and Wynn's sociology of occasions, Alice Goffman infers that social occasions bringing together people who do not usually meet are more likely to introduce events that unexpectedly shift people's bonds, habits and plans (2018:62). Analysing the prerequisites for life-changing experiences, Goffman (2018:52) argues:

> *They [social occasions] do this by thrusting people into a special world, building collective effervescence and emotional energy, gathering usually dispersed people together, requiring that participants publicly rank their relations, and demanding complex choreography, carried out while others watch and judge. The more social occasions do these five things, the more likely they are to become unexpectedly consequential, opening people to changes in their bonds, habits, thinking, and plans.*

Assuming that institutional youth participation could have a life-changing result, Goffmans research raises several questions of interest for this study. Specifically, if transformative experiences come about as conclusions to sequences of earlier turning points, what are the background variables that give people access to these occasions, how do different kinds of people fare when they attend them, and how can we understand patterns in their consequences (Goffman 2018:69)?

While the concepts discussed above are largely aimed at understanding the circumstances, the context and background variables that affect participation, the final aspect of this framework – interaction or agency in the field of engagement – is analysed through the use scene styles and civic imaginations. Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003; Lichterman & Eliasoph 2014) define scene styles as recurrent patterns of interaction that arise from shared assumptions about what constitutes good or adequate participation in the group setting. Styles are relatively durable elements of culture that filter collective representations, consequently generating what Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003:736) refer to as culture in interaction. They define three non-exclusive attributes of scene style: boundaries, bonds and speech norms. Boundaries denote a collective's implicitly shared map of reference points in the wider world. Bonds are shared assumptions about obligations between participants in the setting. Finally, speech norms are shared assumptions about what

speech genres and emotional tones are appropriate in the setting. Here, I follow the precedent set by Luhtakallio (2012:27; 2019) in expanding the above definition to encompass assumptions about the normative repertoires of action available in a scene.

Scene and group styles have been used in a multitude of applications to describe how situationally bound cultures are born out of interaction. These tools help us understand how groups of people form their perceptions of what is desirable and possible as exemplified in Luhtakallio's (2012; 2019) studies of Finnish activists highlights a culture of, and adherence to, non-conflictual, technical styles and a reluctance to politicize issues. Like Luhtakallio's comparative analysis of activists in Lyon and Helsinki (2012), Eliasoph and Clément (2019) compare American and Russian activist styles and how they channel action in different ways. Moreover, in a recent study Carlsen, Toubøl and Ralund (2020) showed how group styles observed in activist groups online influence differential participation in political activism by bringing about habits and new perspectives among participants. In this thesis, scene style is utilized as a conceptual grid, that organizes observed interaction in order to understand how the cases studied differ in terms of style, and consequently, how participants come to either identify with and commit to a particular style of participation, or decide not to.

A final concept used in this dissertation for the analysis of interaction is civic imagination, which connects the interpretation of how interaction shapes situational cultures with an analysis of the outcomes, on the level of motions and proposals. This concept, introduced by Baiocchi et al. (2016), describes the way groups define what kind of collective action they want to pursue: *'Civic imagination consists of the ways in which people individually and collectively envision better political, social and civic environments. Civic imaginations are people's theories of civic life. They are the cognitive roadmaps, moral compasses and guides that shape participation and motivate action'* and that *'help make sense of their place in the political world'* (ibid.:55, 3). The authors introduce a typology based on recurrent patterns found through ethnographic participant observation of activism and social movements in the United States. This typology describes three types of civic imaginations: those that deal with (1) redistributing power and privilege, (2) building community solidarity, and (3) solving problems (ibid.:59–65). The civic imagination dealing with power and privilege aims to remedy structural inequality. Building community solidarity is based on the idea that strong communities are improving society and thus strengthening communities leads to positive externalities. Finally, a civic imagination focused on solving problems sees politics and societal life as a series of problems in need of innovative solutions. The notion of civic

imaginations is used here to categorize the initiatives proposed through the youth council and the participatory budgets. This makes it practicable to understand the types of repertoires and causes that are brought into play at these scenes of participation.

In summary, the central analytical concepts used in this thesis build on Erving Goffmans dramaturgical analysis of interaction (1961; 1967) and his understanding of the social organisation of experience (1986). This is coupled with the more recently developed concepts of scene style, as suggested by Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003; Lichterman & Eliasoph 2014) and civic imagination (Baiocchi et al. 2016). Arenas or scenes of institutional youth participation are interpreted through the use of frame analysis, with an emphasis on how the resonance of these scenes affect engagement. Moreover, styles of engagement are illuminated through the use of scene styles and civic engagements. The analysis is augmented by recent discussions on the social contexts of occasions, and life-changing experiences. In order to gather the necessary data to answer the questions posed in this thesis, I embarked on three years of ethnographic participant observation in a youth council and followed several processes of participatory budgeting across Helsinki. The next chapter reviews the research method, selection of field sites and analytic process.

4 DATA AND METHODS

Ethnography was chosen as the primary research method for this dissertation because of its capacity to produce thick descriptions (Geertz 1973:3–30) of human interaction. It can document inclusion and exclusion, movements and physical spaces (Pink 2009:63–81), enabling readers to understand phenomena on a level theory cannot reach (O'Reilly 2005:226). As exemplified by Gordon et al. (2005), ethnographic participant observation coupled with reflexive practice (Pillow 2003) allows the researcher to tune their gaze to include non-events and register silence in addition to the visible and audible.

While many methods offer tools for the interpretation of factors and trends shaping civic action, they are not sensitive enough to record the *'barely visible signs, habits and practices hidden from news headlines, and the counter trends that may be bubbling underneath them'* (Luhtakallio & Eliasoph 2014:2). Political ethnography has the capacity to slow down the tape in order to reveal how political communication takes shape and what consequences this has (ibid.:6). This capacity for showing the link between 'how' and 'why' in a political process, and for immersing the researcher in the quintessential practices that constitute political participation, arguably situates the researcher in a position to form a deep and nuanced understanding of the observed phenomena.

Research on youth participation in formal politics in Finland has mainly been conducted through interview or survey methods (Paakkunainen 2004; Gretschel & Kiilakoski 2015; Myllyniemi 2008; 2013; Pekkarinen & Myllyniemi 2018), while ethnography has been more common in the study of youth cultures, such as girls' communities in riding stables (Ojanen 2012), street racing (Vaaranen & Wieloch 2002), squatting (Jokela 2017) and transnational activism (Laine 2012). This thesis attempts to fill this void by presenting a longitudinal, multi-sited ethnography of institutional youth participation practices in the greater Helsinki region. Following the unfolding of events, meeting by meeting, from one term to the next, learning to know the actors in a field, and observing their interaction as they participate gives the empirical data qualities that other methods have difficulties capturing. More than any other research method, ethnography is *'picking up on the everyday meanings that organize group life'* (Lichterman 2002:138). In order to do this, I recorded quotes,

names, the unfolding of events, and other things I thought would be useful in a notebook while making observations in the field. As soon as practical, fieldnotes, voice recordings, photos, messages, agendas and other documentation were reconstructed into ethnographic descriptions on my computer. As the fieldwork progressed, certain themes started to emerge from my observations. As I dug into these themes, sometimes I would uncover aspects that had previously been invisible to me. When I initially started fieldwork for this project, I had some theoretical ideas and working hypotheses based on them. As the fieldwork progressed, I realized that some of these ideas were not so interesting, while other topics I could not have imagined beforehand appeared more and more relevant for my research. This process of zooming in on recurring events, and occurrences that attracted my interest, was coupled with reading theory and trying to find reasonable explanations for what I was observing.

4.1 Criteria for case selection and a few words on epistemology

The observations in this thesis are based on long-term ethnographic participant observation at multiple sites in the Helsinki metropolitan area from November 2015 to November 2018. The fieldwork sites were chosen with the aim of studying the democratic merits of institutional youth participation by focusing on methods of participation, patterns of interaction and the use of political power. A multi-sited research design was developed because it was thought to best enable an interpretation of how local variations affect a translocal policy (Marcus 1995; Hannerz 2015).

Bent Flyvbjerg (2011:302–303) argues that much of the empirical knowledge about the world has been gained through case studies, underlining that knowledge in the social sciences is always situational and case-specific. Case studies do not necessarily verify assumptions, but can offer new insights and a more detailed understanding of the complexities of human interaction. Such knowledge cannot always be generalized through hypotheses or theory, but can be transferred to similar cases or used as examples. Accordingly, a strategically well-chosen case is one which can be generalized based on the assumption that whatever is found in this specific case should apply to all others (ibid.:305).

For this reason, a well-established 'textbook' example of a youth council was chosen. The same logic was followed in the case selection for the participatory budget. Participatory budgeting is a relatively novel method of public management

in Finland, and the city of Helsinki has been at the forefront of developing and implementing the method. Since the budgeting process is carried out separately in each municipal youth work district in the city, an opportunity to study demographic and cultural factors by selecting contrasting districts presented itself.

A political context is a combination of structures and interaction, and every context is shaped by this combination in a unique way (Kriesi 2007). Empirical research and theory construction in youth studies, political sociology and political science informed the research questions and led the case selection in my research. Nevertheless, the deductive approach (Burawoy 1998; Eliasoph & Lichterman 1999) can only go so far in interpreting human interaction before it starts to limit analytical practice to the recognition of unique and singular comments or differences in the stories of informants. Moreover, to analyse material based only on hierarchical codes derived from theory can give a false feeling of total overview and control in a situation of social interaction, distancing the researcher from the diversity in the empirical material (MacLure 2013). To avoid this rigidity, the data collection, hypothesizing and interpretation that occurred throughout the fieldwork period was grounded (Glaser & Strauss 1967) in the empirical research. Accordingly, this study moves between inductive and deductive levels of reasoning, leveraging previous research without letting it limit the explanatory potential and interpretations available in the data, and drawing inferences from abductive reasoning (i.e. the best possible explanation). Here, abductive analysis (Tavory & Timmermans 2014) refers to a process where research findings that were unexpected in light of the research literature are subjected to theoretical speculation and then developed through a systematic analysis of variation across the cases.

This comparative setting, between youth work districts doing participatory budgeting on one hand, and the youth council on the other, does not attempt to rank one form of citizen participation over the other. Rather, it attempts to offer an interpretation of specific phenomena across cases in order to identify general patterns or causal mechanisms (Becker 2013; Gross 2009). This is achieved through the evidentiary strengths offered by the combination of ethnographic method and analytic induction. To quote Katz (2014:31):

> *One starts with an explicit explanation, then searches solely for negative or disconfirming cases, then strives for 'perfect' explanations by redefining explicans or explicandum so that what had been a negative case becomes confirming or irrelevant to the theory's scope. The reformulation then redirects the search for contradictory evidence and so on.*

A study spanning several years makes a continuous back-and-forth between theory and observations in the field feasible, allowing the researcher to focus, compose,

capture, and shift their gaze multiple times. Before turning to the descriptions of the field sites I proceed by discussing how I gained access to do fieldwork and the ethical considerations related to this.

4.2 Ethical considerations

This study was designed following the directions given in the ethics codes of the American Anthropological Association and the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK 2012). Ethnographic research that includes young people, some of whom are in vulnerable and marginal positions, imposes high ethical demands regarding how the research is conducted.

In September 2015, the city of Helsinki's youth department accepted my application for a three-year research permit to study its participatory budgeting process. This was a great relief, since it gave me access to budgeting events arranged in schools and youth centres across the city. The research permit also gave the research institutional anchoring in the youth department. Consequently, I was not obliged to request signed consent forms from the parents of those attending the events.

Access to the youth council required less bureaucracy, since its monthly assemblies are open to the public. Nevertheless, before attending my first youth council meeting, I interviewed a former chairperson of the youth council. On his recommendation, I reached out to the incumbent chairperson and secretary-general of the youth council. They invited me to their next meeting, and from then on, I was granted permission to talk at the meetings. I was also invited to attend board meetings and other events, and to help me stay updated, the youth council leadership added me to their instant messaging groups.

Throughout the fieldwork period, the process of seeking informed consent was continuous and reflexive (Hoong Sing 2005). I would send messages to the instant messaging groups at regular intervals, reminding members I was there. I also declined to be included in the off-topic messaging group: I wanted to leave the youth council members some space that I was not privy to. A positive externality of the roll call at the start of each monthly assembly was that the youth council chairperson stated my name and reason for being present, along with those of other guests attending the meeting. In this way everyone was reminded of who I was and why I was there. At participatory budgeting events, I introduced myself at the beginning of the events I attended. I also offered handouts providing more information about my research

project, and contact details for my thesis supervisor and me. Over the years I had discussions about my research interest and interpretations with participants in the field sites. I also presented some early findings to youth council members and youth department officials before finishing the fieldwork. When I had finished the fieldwork, all the data was anonymized, and identifiers including voice recordings were destroyed. All the remaining data was stored on two encrypted hard drives – one on my laptop, and a backup stored in a safe location. Data that did not end up in this thesis was securely erased, and the remaining field notes, pictures and other related files will be destroyed after the thesis defence.

Throughout the research process, possible consequences for participants and other informants were considered. One of the neighbourhoods described in this thesis has a reputation that is a burden to the locals, and some of the characters in the ethnographic descriptions might take up careers in politics and public life. Hence, the anonymity of the neighbourhoods, informants and all other actors in the field was a priority during the conduct of this research. Consequently, all informants and fieldwork locations have been given pseudonyms, and in some cases exact dates and other identifying data have been redacted. Informant pseudonyms are a mix of names representative of the actual names of informants. For individuals appearing in the ethnographic descriptions, I have attempted to use pseudonyms that reflect the ethnic diversity encountered in the field sites. Most adults are only referred to by their position. This is partly in order to have fewer names in the text, thus hopefully reducing confusion, but also because the adults in these descriptions were institutional representatives, and their voice is most often that of an organizer rather an individual. Although public officials mostly spoke on the record, publishing their names would jeopardize the anonymity of the fieldwork locations. Unless there is a specific reason, the ages of informants have been omitted throughout the text. The participatory budgeting primarily engages those aged 13–15, while youth council members were aged anywhere from 13 to 20. Regular characters were observed over several years, making it impractical to indicate their age in each ethnographic account. Unlike the youth council, the participatory budgeting was attended by hundreds of students in every school, again making the task of logging age data impractical.

In addition to participant observation, the data collection phase included individual and group interviews. These were done in separate areas in order for the informants not to be disturbed by others during the discussions. These interviews were recorded, except when I was asked not to do so. I have chosen not to quote the material published in the instant messaging groups. Since these groups were not

public but internal channels for coordination and communication, individuals sending messages would not always keep my presence in mind. Consequently, the question of whether or not the messages could be considered fair use under the aegis of informed consent bothered me, and I ultimately decided to destroy the log files.

The number of young people I met during fieldwork was enormous. All in all, thousands of young people attended the events I observed, and hundreds interacted in some way with me. To present all these individuals as characters in the story that unfolds would have been a herculean task, and probably one without much merit in terms of shedding light on the research interest.

During fieldwork I participated in games, energizers and activities, but I refrained from participating in political discussions or influencing decisions. In this way I hoped to show that I was not participating as a youth worker or official, and I thought it might make things easier for me as a researcher to get to know the young participants. Moreover, retaining political neutrality allowed me to interview people who might otherwise have been shy about revealing their political positions. In the participatory budgeting process, participants changed from one year to the next, and many people would show up only for one or a few events in every cycle. For this reason, my rapport with participants was stronger on the youth council, of which some of the very first people I met were still members by the end of the fieldwork. At my last youth council assembly in 2017, I gave a small presentation on my impressions of the youth council up to that point. It was followed by speeches from several members recounting their experiences and personal growth throughout their time on the youth council. During her farewell speech as outgoing chair of the youth council, Nina turned to me and said:

> *Like everyone else here has said, thank you Georg. It felt really exciting to listen to your presentation because it's the thing that pulls together these four years. Although there were many things that we could improve upon, I think it's good to hear the criticism and it's a good place of departure for those that stay.*

Along with other comments on my presentation, I took this as a sign from the members that at the very least I had represented them fairly and accurately. I also left with the feeling that my presentation had driven home some of the problematic aspects of the internal dynamics of the youth council.

While deontological and consequentialist ethical considerations are fairly standard fare (Kuula 2006:22–25), some other reflections relating to the methodology and specificity of the case are necessary here. The ethnographic method has been criticized for hiding the subjective position of the researcher. However, while it is true that the method evolved under strong colonialist influences, a 'reflexive turn' in

the 1980s brought new standards of transparency to ethnography. Reflexivity allows researchers to share, among other things, the subjective positions they occupy and the basis for the interpretations they make (O'Reilly 2015). Thus, reflexivity in ethnography celebrates the subjective position of the researcher as an asset rather than an obstacle to scientific relevance. In this specific case, my subjective position as a researcher was also shaped by my past involvement in youth politics. This was the basis not only for my interest in the research topic, but also for my understanding that participatory structures often fail. This makes me a critical advocate of participation, motivated not only to understand why institutional youth participation works or does not work, but also to improve it by showing how cases differ from each other and what the various participatory methods and settings achieve. This emancipatory, embodied and critical stance is necessary, in my opinion, since institutional youth participation tends to be planned, implemented and reported by local authorities. Accordingly, in order to understand the limitations of participatory vehicles, one has to study them from the standpoint of their participants (Rolin 1999).

Another issue relating to the topic of scientific objectivity or transparent subjectivity is the fairness of analysis. Critically analysing institutional youth participation from the perspective of the participants might not always be flattering for those organizing the participation. Discussing the potential for accusations of bias following these situations, Becker (1967) proposes using the theoretical and technical resources we have available as scientists to avoid distortions (from our sympathizing with informants in subordinate positions), and including a clear sociological disclaimer stating the vantage point of the study. This seems to me to be the sensible approach, and the least straining in terms of personal relations in the field. It is also one of the strengths of the abductive approach used to establish inferences in this thesis, since the conclusions lean on a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning.

A researcher can never have a panoptic overview of the field, and my participation surely influenced the data I collected. My perspective has shaped the analysis and conclusions, and the only means I have to argue for the validity of my case is to give the reader the best possible insight into the research process. To achieve this, I have striven for a triangular interaction between subject, reader and researcher by offering the reader the necessary insight into the fieldwork by way of quotes and field notes, identifying context-constrained behaviour and showing local competency so as to allow the empirical validation of the analysis (Katz 2014:15–25). All the quotes have been translated into English from Finnish and Swedish by

me. I have attempted to retain the vernacular, while taking the liberty to clean the quotes of tangential comments, interruptions and broken trains of thought, in order to make them as clear, concise and approachable for the reader as possible without distorting the intentions of those quoted.

Things often become clearer when they are formulated in text, read and reread. Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I kept running into situations where I would ask myself 'why did I not ask someone about this?', wistfully hoping I might return for half an hour of fieldwork every time this happened. Twice I had to leave a field site before an event was finished to attend the thesis defences of close colleagues. I also missed a couple of assemblies of the youth council over the course of the years, due to conference presentations abroad. I rescheduled classes I was teaching in order to be in the field when I needed to be there, but it sometimes happened that two events were arranged at the same time. Fortunately, my research assistant Roosa Tuukkanen was able to attend and take notes for me at one of these events. The empirical data that she collected is presented and discussed in the section on gatekeeping and claim-making in the executive committee. Ms Tuukkanen also accompanied me to a few youth council meetings, and her fresh gaze and insightful reflections reanimated a (by then) slightly jaded ethnographer.

4.3 Case descriptions

Finland has a tradition of organized civil society stakeholders advocating their members' interests to the state through formalized structures. The most common structures for formal youth participation in Finland, municipal youth councils, are more reminiscent of this arrangement than of what is commonly referred to as participatory democracy. Youth council members are usually elected for a term of one or two years at a time. They meet monthly for general assemblies, and members represent the council on municipal committees, on the board of the council, and at external events. This liberal representative conception of the democratic public sphere is participatory only in the sense that it extends an offer to participate to minors from the year they turn 13. Commonly, youth councils are described as breeding grounds for future politicians, and indeed many among the younger generation of politicians are former members of youth councils.

In 2013, as one of the last cities in Finland without institutional youth participation, the city of Helsinki decided to initiate neighbourhood-level participatory budgeting for school students in years seven to nine. This was

introduced as a counter-reaction to the (at the time) unchallenged idea that municipal youth councils were de rigueur for institutionalized municipal youth participation. What started as a pilot project in two neighbourhoods expanded incrementally into citywide implementation by 2017. Mass participation events were conceived in addition to more traditional workshops, to allow a large variety of participants, and to anchor the legitimacy of the decisions made in a wider population.

The next sections describe each field site in greater detail. Youth councils follow a political process that is familiar in general terms to most readers, whereas participatory budgets are commonly adapted to different institutional contexts (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2017; Sintomer et al. 2008), making a closer description of them necessary. Additionally, since this thesis presents observations of participatory budgeting from two different neighbourhoods, each bringing its own attributes to the mix, more pace has been devoted here to describe the participatory budget than the youth council.

4.3.1 Neartown youth council

Neartown is situated in the south of Finland, close to Helsinki, the capital of the country. It is one of the most populous municipalities in Finland, and it has one of the country's oldest and biggest youth councils, with an institutional history of 20 years; multiple alumni have gone on to become well-known politicians. The youth council has 40 seats, and anyone aged 13 through 18 – about 20,000 people in Neartown – is eligible to vote and run for election. Representatives for the youth council are chosen through elections in schools every two years, and council members can run for re-election as long as they are qualified in terms of age and place of residence. In the last three terms the number of candidates has varied from 42 to just shy of 100. To be elected to the youth council, candidates must gain the votes of friends, classmates and others. Having big social circles, exhibiting prowess at participating in public debates, and being known in one's school all helps. Sixty votes were enough to be elected in 2016, and the overall winner had more than 500 votes that year.

Procedurally speaking, the council and its 40 members enjoy the same standards and democratic procedures as any other part of the city's public administration. The youth council elect a chairperson, two vice-chairpersons, and three to five board members annually among themselves. Additionally, primary and substitute representatives are selected to represent the youth council on nine committees

appointed by the city council. These are the committees for culture; youth and sports; environment; social care and healthcare; tuition and early childhood education; city planning; infrastructure; Swedish-language service; and construction. Their membership consists of elected (adult) party representatives, and they deal with day-to-day political decisions within the municipal administration. Positions on these committees are sought after by members of the youth council because of the increased influence they offer, and for the monetary remuneration.

Within the city bureaucracy, the youth council is formally convoked by the city board but is administered by Neartown youth services, who also provide a secretary-general for the youth council. This staff resource and the access to the city council meetings and its subcommittees are conditions that are by no means granted to every youth council; taken together, this is much more than most municipalities do to fulfil their legal obligation to offer young people an opportunity to participate in decision-making that concerns them.

The youth council meet once a month for their general assembly, except for a two-month break during summer. Most of these general assemblies are organized on the same weekday from 17:00 to 20:30. Many of the members arrive directly from school, and most take the bus or train home after the meeting finishes, although some older members arrive by car. The meetings have similar procedures to any official meeting within the city administration, and their agendas and minutes are made publicly available on the youth council website by the secretary-general. Apart from representing the youth department, offering clarifications, and acting as an intermediary in communications between the youth council and the city's governance structures, the secretary-general does not take an active role in the meetings.

The monthly assemblies are held in the city hall, a large room with about 100 seats, most of them bearing the names of city council members. The youth council representatives sometimes make jokes about whose seat they are in, but they tend to sit close to and facing the chairmanship, which is on a raised podium at the front of the room. This makes it easier to communicate and hear each other, eliminating the need to use microphones.

A typical agenda starts with a roll call, announcement of quorum and reports on notifiable matters, followed by guest presentations. After that, the youth council discusses any requests for comments on various issues that concern youth in the municipality, followed by potential elections for internal positions and the selection of representatives for meetings to which the youth council has been invited. Sometimes the youth council decides to make a declaration and works on it during

the meeting; otherwise the meeting ends with reports from committees and any other business.

When I commenced fieldwork in the youth council, council members had a few months left of their mandate, and the elections for the next mandate were about to take place in local schools. I followed four meetings of these youth council veterans, some of whom had been members for six years! The next mandate took over in March 2016, and my fieldwork data extends through this term up until the election of the 2018–2019 youth council. I carried out participant observation on 30 occasions, mostly at general assemblies but also at some smaller meetings and events hosted by the youth council. All in all, I spent roughly 90 hours with youth council members, excluding interviews. I took notes during the meetings and elaborated on them during transcription, turning them into a fieldwork diary. Questions and discussions in breaks were common during the fieldwork, in addition seven semi-structured interviews were conducted during the fieldwork period with individual representatives of the youth council. Some of these interviews were done after the informant had left the youth council, as I was curious to know how former members felt about the youth council in retrospect. Three interviews were with representatives that had stopped showing up at meetings. This was a particularly interesting but difficult category in which to find respondents. Typically, I got in touch with members by instant messenger, asking them for an interview, and we agreed to meet at a café. One interview was done backstage at an event organized by the youth council. Moreover, one group interview/discussion was arranged with five members of the youth council board. I also gave presentations on my findings on separate occasions to the youth council and a selection of civil servants, and I naturally considered the feedback I received. The interviews (with two exceptions) and some speeches were recorded for transcription purposes.

The general assemblies of the youth council are public. Anyone can follow the meetings from the gallery. But from my first meeting onwards, the council decided to give me the right to attend meetings from the floor (I tended to sit close to the front, to one side or the other of the councillors that gathered in the middle rows). This permission was renewed regularly by the announcement of the chairperson. I regularly gave short speeches to remind council members of why I was present and of their rights as informants. I also distributed leaflets with my contact details and information about the research. Several members added me as a friend in social media, and the youth council added me to their instant messenger groups in the winter of 2016–2017. These discussions were logged and form a part of the background data, along with protocols and other documents from the meetings. No

direct quotes have been used from this data (see ethics section). Nevertheless, I regularly sent messages to the instant messenger groups as a reminder to members that I was reading the chats.

I established rapport with many of the youth council members within a few months of entering the field. Due to my own background in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and youth politics, I found it easy to understand the dynamics of the meetings and to approach the members of the youth council, although I was 20 years older than some of them. The style of doing things in the youth council situated them firmly in the sphere of formal politics. Their work involved drafting answers to consultations, writing motions and resolutions, selecting representatives for external functions, and reporting from these meetings. They also prepared their own meetings autonomously, with administrative support from an employee of the city youth department. Their discussions ranged from planning events for young people in Neartown or hosting visiting youth council delegations, to commenting on the proposal for new national social and healthcare legislation and drafting motions on the uneven geographical distribution of youth services and sports facilities. Adults attending these meetings, with the exception of the secretary-general, were most often guests from various branches of the city administration giving presentations on topics on which they wished to have the youth perspective. It was distinctive of the youth council that its members organized most of the details related to the meetings – from the agenda to the drafting of motions – autonomously, without much help or input from adults. While the secretary-general offered them some organizational and logistical support, she did not regularly do so pre-emptively, but rather in reaction to explicitly expressed needs.

In contrast, the participatory budgeting was a completely adult-led, top-down process carried out in schools and youth centres, with limited influence outside local budget allocations.

4.3.2 RuutiBudjetti participatory budgeting

RuutiBudjetti, the participatory budget for young people in Helsinki, has been ongoing since 2013 (HS 2013; Nuorisoasiainkeskus 2013). What started out as a small pilot project in a couple of schools and youth centres, gradually expanded to all lower-secondary schools in 2017.[3] RuutiBudjetti is loosely based on the Porto Alegre model of participatory budgeting (Sintomer et al. 2008). The process is about

[3] Participants were from 13 to 15 years old and attended years seven to nine in lower-secondary school.

six months long, coming to conclusion around November. It consists of an initial mass occasion at which participants define themes; based on these, smaller workshop gatherings develop proposals which are presented and ranked in school votes in each youth work district. Finally, a meeting of the executive committee – a situation consisting of young people and adults from the youth department and sometimes the local schools – discusses how to implement the most popular suggestions considering the budgetary constraints on the youth department and the administrative hurdles involved.

I initially studied this process of participatory budgeting for my master's dissertation in 2013 (see Boldt 2014; 2018), when the project was still in its pilot phase. Fieldwork for this study commenced in September 2015 after I received research permission from the youth department of Helsinki. I decided to follow a district in eastern Helsinki, knowing that by the end of the year the Helsinki youth department would reorganize and expand the process, necessitating a reselection of field sites. The initial idea for the field selection was to choose field sites that were at opposite ends of the socio-economic spectrum, which eventually led to the selection of Hilldale and Oceanview. In 2016, participatory budgeting was carried out in all youth work districts in Helsinki. The following year saw the districts expand participation to every school in each district. Thus, in 2016, during my first year of fieldwork in Hilldale and Oceanview, meetings for the participatory budgeting process were held at the youth centre, with participants from the local school only. In my second year the process was expanded to the district level, and consequently the introductory RuBufest event, the workshops and the executive committee were arranged with participants from several different schools. For the sake of easy comprehension, I have chosen to refer to these events by the name of the primary field sites, including events that took place in an adjacent neighbourhood.

Helsinki is a bilingual city, and fieldwork was also done in the Swedish-language district. Consequently, during the autumn and winter of 2015 I followed participatory budgeting in eastern Helsinki, and in 2016 and 2017 in the Hilldale, Oceanview and Swedish youth work districts. All in all, I took part in 33 consultations, workshops, school votes etc. at these field locations, for a total of approximately 100 hours. Over the course of the fieldwork, I visited schools and youth centres in four out of eight administrative districts in Helsinki. Eventually, I decided not to use quotes from the data on either the Swedish-language youth work district or the 2015 observations in eastern Helsinki for this thesis. I was worried that the multitude of cases would get in the way of clarity. As a matter of course, these observations have been utilized as background data in the analysis.

My fieldwork following the budgeting process consisted mainly of participant observation. Most of the time I took notes during the meetings, transcribing and elaborating them into a fieldwork diary later on. These notes were complemented by recordings of discussions and photos of notes scribbled on Post-its, flipcharts, posters and other similar items prepared by the participants. I also conducted some interviews, which were ethnographic in the sense that they were done during fieldwork sessions and were mostly unstructured. Since participants changed from one year to the next, and the number of gatherings per year was much smaller than for the youth council, establishing rapport with participants was more of a challenge in the participatory budget. Additionally, in consideration of the interviews I carried out during the pilot process in 2013, a focus on multi-sited participant observation and discussions with participants, rather than structured interviews, seemed more fruitful.

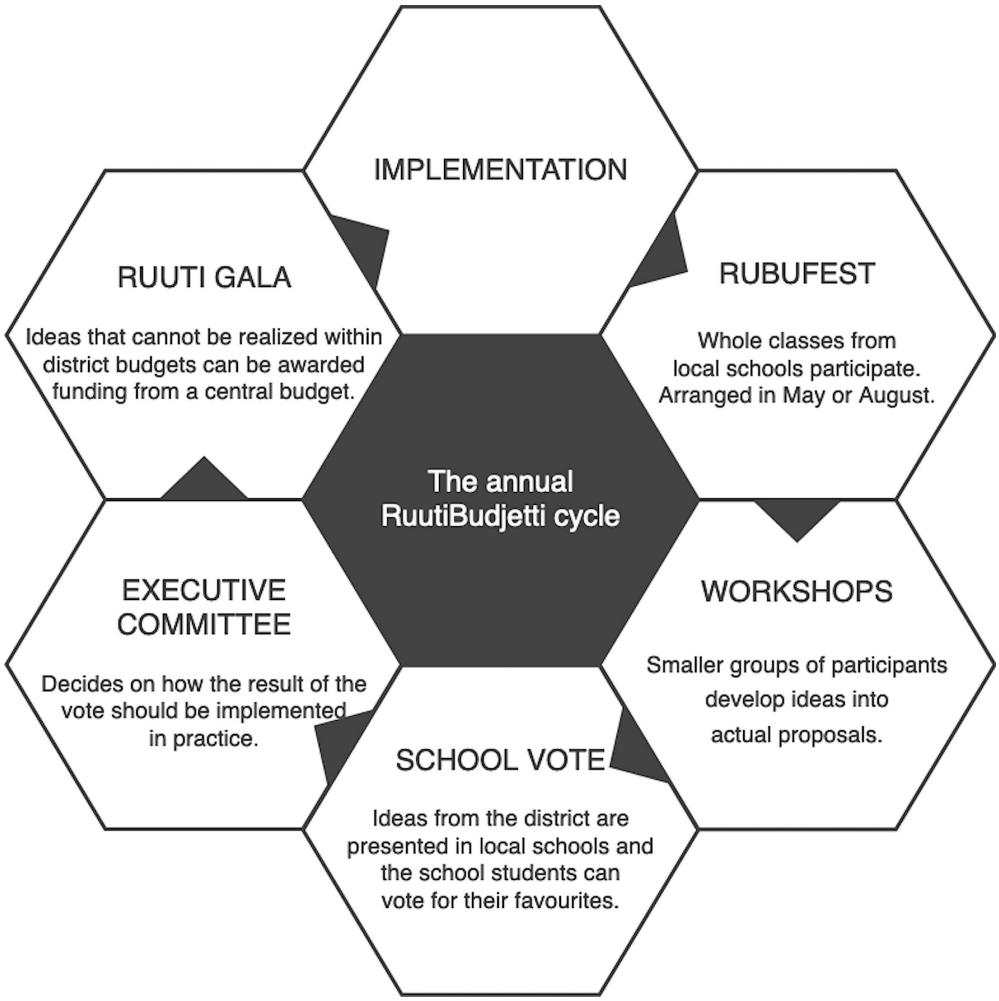
4.3.2.1 The budgeting processes

RuBufest is the annual launch for the participatory budgeting process. Local events are arranged all over the city. Some of the events, such as the one in Oceanview, are arranged outdoors in central squares, while others, such as the one in Hilldale, are held in youth centres. Hundreds of school students arrive at these events, typically just before or after the summer holidays, to comment on a range of topics.

The events are like scavenger hunts: participants receive a slip on which they collect a stamp for every task they complete. Once they have collected all the stamps, they get a reward, typically ice cream or sweets, and are allowed to leave. Participants walk from stand to stand, giving their views on a range of issues concerning young people. Common themes are sports activities, youth services and free-time opportunities. Apart from the youth workers, staff from the sports department, local libraries and partner NGOs are often involved. They use the occasion to collect information that is relevant to their own work, besides the suggestions that participants contribute to the RuutiBudjetti process. Following these events, all suggestions are compiled and presented at locally organized workshops. Workshop participants proceed to develop proposals based on popular themes from the initial event. When the proposals are ready, they are presented in local schools, and students can vote for their favourite proposals. An executive committee, consisting of civil servants, youth workers and young people, then meets to hash out how the result of the vote will be implemented. This meeting has two functions. First, it establishes whether the outcome of the vote was reasonable. If not, the committee

can decide to carry out an idea that did not receive many votes, or conversely that a popular idea will not be implemented. Second, discussions revolve around how proposals should be implemented, by whom, and what role young people should have in their implementation.

Figure 1. The RuutiBudjetti participatory budgeting process.



Participants are urged to propose things the youth department can affect, but they are free to suggest whatever they like. Examples of proposals that fall outside the responsibilities and capacities of the youth department range from the improvement of public sports facilities to reduced fares on public transport and subsidized entry fees for young people at cinemas and other cultural events. When such proposals

receive support in school votes, the youth department agrees to do something to advance the proposal. However, this procedure is much less clear than in cases where a proposal can be realized by a local youth worker by organizing an event at a youth centre or running a campaign in a local school.

The budgetary cap for local ideas is €3000. When a proposal is estimated to cost more than that – as has been the case with festivals, gaming events, youth cafés and training events – it is possible to apply for extra funding. The youth department annually distributes €200,000 to such projects. In order to be eligible for this, representatives must present their ideas at the annual Ruuti gala, followed by a peer evaluation and ranking of the suggestions. Later in the day, a closed meeting of city officials and selected youth representatives decides how to distribute the €200,000 for the proposed ideas.

4.3.2.2 Hilldale and Oceanview

The two fieldwork locations that appear in the descriptions of the participatory budget are as different as two neighbourhoods in Helsinki can be. Oceanview is centrally located, a well-to-do, upper-middle-class area; Hilldale is characterized by high unemployment, subsidized rental apartments and a multitude of social problems.

On my first visit to Hilldale I attended a meeting of the Hilldale team, a group consisting of city employees, a police officer, and NGO representatives coordinating preventive youth work, positive discrimination projects and other neighbourhood interests in Hilldale. They were discussing the possibility of organizing a Christmas fair. The proposed date coincided with autumn graduation for secondary school (baccalaureate) students, a day when many are rushing from one party to the other to celebrate their newly graduated friends' and family members' embarking on adult life. Someone at the meeting was worried this would affect attendance. The response of the tenants' association representative was a laconic *'that doesn't even twitch this village'*, and she was right. In Hilldale only four in 10 continue with a baccalaureate after lower-secondary school, while nine in 10 do so in Oceanview (Bernelius et al. 2018).

Fieldwork visits to youth centres and schools further exposed the contrasting realities. Hilldale was described by youth workers as villagelike.[4] An isolated island between suburban railways, Hilldale is a difficult place to leave unless you have a

[4] For more on the villagelike interaction in Finnish suburbs, see Junnilainen (2019).

ticket for the bus – unlike suburbs linked by underground or overground train, where one can travel without paying the fare, since most of the time no one is checking. Consequently, young people spend a lot of time at the local youth centre, and most are familiar with the youth workers, to the point that local youth workers get worried unless they see everyone every few days. Plenty of young people in Hilldale participated in the consultations, workshops, school votes and other meetings surrounding the participatory budgeting. The city of Helsinki even gave an award to the school in Hilldale for good cooperation with the youth department in advancing local youth participation.

Oceanview was different. Workshops were small, sometimes with only two participants, youth workers outnumbering them three to one. They claimed that young people in Oceanview have so many free-time activities that the incentive to go and hang out at the youth centre is low. In Hilldale, the youth centre was a natural spot for all the young people to meet and hang out after school, but in Oceanview going to the youth centre was popular among only a small group. Coincidentally, while I was visiting a workshop in Oceanview, a youth worker was there on exchange from his regular unit in Hilldale. He commented on the contrast between the two locations: *'If the centre is closed for a day, say for repairs, we see a dip in visitors. When someone doesn't come to the youth centre in Hilldale, something has happened to them'*. In Oceanview, small things such as the continuity of opening hours were crucial in order to keep visitors coming, while in Hilldale visits to the youth centre were habitual. Additionally, the local school in Oceanview was not engaged in the process in the same way as the school in Hilldale, with the turnout of participants at in-school events being remarkably low. Although, participatory budgeting is open to everyone attending lower-secondary school in Helsinki, the attitudes of teachers affect participation in a significant way, since many of the activities are arranged during school hours.

If we look at the proposals that made their way to school votes in these districts, some differences emerge. It was characteristic of Hilldale to focus on tangible, everyday local initiatives related to the youth centre or free-time activities. In contrast, young people in Oceanview were more prone to propose policy-related initiatives or suggest culturally and politically progressive ideas. None of the field sites leaned exclusively one way or the other, but the tendency towards focused local investments involving the youth centre in Hilldale, and proposals that strove for a better city and society without a strong connection to existing youth work facilities in Oceanview, was clear. In many ways the proposals reflected the lifeworlds present in Oceanview and Hilldale. Young people in Oceanview live in the bustle of the city.

They spend time in shopping centres and fast-food restaurants, and are immersed in cosmopolitan culture, from outdoor cinema screenings to urban festivals and marches for LGBTQ rights. In Hilldale, people tend to stay in their neighbourhood. This distinction is articulated well by Zygmunt Bauman (1996) in his description of the degrees of freedom we possess in choosing our life itineraries. Bauman exemplifies this through a description of how vagabonds of old were forced to be mobile in search of work, while landed gentry could afford to stay put, whereas mobility today has become a distinction of class and wealth. Residents of Hilldale are still waiting for many of the services and public investments that are mundane elsewhere in the city. Their suggestions read like a shortlist of things to get done in order to attain a similar material quality of life to other neighbourhoods, while initiatives from Oceanview were not geographically restricted to the neighbourhood.

The next two chapters comprise observations from the field sites. I first present the youth council, followed by the participatory budget. These sections take the form of ethnographic observations, quotes and descriptions, in dialogue with the concepts introduced in the theoretical framework.

5 THE YOUTH COUNCIL AS AN INITIATION INTO POLITICS

As my review of institutional youth participation practices has established, youth councils are the most common approach chosen by Finnish municipalities to ensure compliance with the legal requirement to offer minors opportunities to learn and exercise civic skills. Not all youth councils are equal in size, resources or procedures. Their form is not regulated by national legislation, so actual practices differ to some extent (Gretschel & Kiilakoski 2015; Paakkunainen 2004). Neartown youth council was among the first to be founded in Finland. It is also exceptionally big, electing 40 representatives every two years. Unlike most youth councils in Finland, Neartown youth council has a full-time secretary-general employed by the Neartown youth department. These traits make it better equipped than many other youth councils to live up to the policy objectives stated in the law.

This chapter starts with a description of the youth council as a scene of participation, followed by sections that explore its culture of interaction through the use of bonds, resonance, boundaries, norms of action and speech, as well as civic imaginations. The sections dealing with bonds, boundaries and norms of speech and action utilize the heuristic of scene styles proposed by Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003; Eliasoph 2011; Lichterman & Eliasoph 2014). The exploration of frame resonance or the usefulness of the scene is based on Goffman's (1986) concepts, and civic imaginations relate to Baiocchi et al. (2016). In spite of this disposition, the sections should not be thought of as silos pertaining to a single part of the theoretical framework. The empirical vignettes are often rich and spill over into related concepts. This chapter ends with a discussion that brings together the aforementioned attributes in a reflection on how this practice of institutional youth participation sustains a particular style of engagement.

5.1 Bottom-up and self-sufficient: elements of institutional framing and organizational style

The youth council are autonomous in deciding what they want to talk about, when they do so, and how they want to talk about those things. Their collective capacity to act is mainly restrained by their budget, the closedness of the municipal administration, and the ways in which they develop and reproduce organizational styles. Although the youth council is institutionally anchored in the Neartown youth department, much of its everyday business is dependent on the self-sufficiency and resourcefulness of its members. Youth workers are not involved in the youth council in any significant way, and the bottom-up organization of council members is more reminiscent of how a municipal committee or board arranges its work than of the practices schools and youth workers rely on to achieve participation.

As a method of democratic participation, the youth council is something of an anachronism, since it is more closely akin to the parliamentary style of representative democracy. Participatory budgeting and theoretical ideals relating to participatory and discursive concepts of democracy tend to favour methods that are more inclusive, avoid imposed closure in decision-making, and offer alternatives to the traditional liberal representative model of the public sphere, whose style of decision-making is no longer considered supportive of deep-rooted democratic vitality (Fung & Wright 2003:3).

In contrast to more commonplace forms of decision-making, in which professional politicians or expert administrators represent the interests of citizens, members of the youth council take the role of lay experts, speaking (mostly) on behalf of their peers. They raise concerns with city officials, and they are regularly consulted by various stakeholders and public officials. Since youth council representatives are elected by their peers, the youth council can be described as a hybrid of representative and participatory traditions of democracy. That being said, the participatory dimension of the youth council mainly lies in the inclusion of a demographic group that would otherwise be excluded from political representation.

The official Neartown website describes the youth council in the following way:

> *Neartown youth council has 40 active youth from Neartown as its members, with a shared ambition to influence issues that affect young people in decision-making in Neartown. The youth council promotes the needs of young people, makes their opinions on current issues known, and gives attention to their wishes.*
>
> *The youth council is not affiliated with any political party. It promotes the interests of Neartown youth; it is the voice of young people in the municipality.*
>
> *The youth council has the right to pass motions on to the city government, and the right to be present and speak at the meetings of the city council and its subcommittees. The youth council wields influence by producing statements, motions and consultations, and organizing events. The council meets once a month for a general assembly, where the most important decisions are made. […] The objective of the youth council is to increase awareness of civic action and how to participate in politics, inspiring young people to follow political processes and influence them actively.*

This institutional framing of the youth council turned out not to reflect the experiences that many youth council representatives shared with me, particularly in terms of their political influence. In fact, the most salient feature of the youth council that emerged as I was conducting fieldwork was how many of the representatives lost interest in it. When the empirical credibility of the collective action frame endorsed by the municipal officials (Benford & Snow 2000:619–622) turned out to be weak, a disengagement of representatives followed as the framing lost its resonance (ibid.:619). Interviews confirmed that the expectations of new representatives joining the youth council were largely in line with the Neartown authorities' framing of the youth council. Over time members realized how curtailed their political influence was, and many decided to leave. Those who committed themselves to the council work formed a group within which they honed their skills in the game. Vanessa described this insight in an interview response:

> *I don't really believe a youth council representative or even the chairperson has any power. I think it's more like you learn certain things that give you a certain air, that people perceive you as someone powerful. You don't get respect for being a youth council representative. It's the ways you learn to speak and act that lead people to respect you.*

Offering youth councils access to municipal committee meetings is becoming the standard of inclusion and a best practice of municipal youth participation in Finland. These positions are coveted by council members, but their political utility in terms of power and influence is questionable. The following extract from an interview with Risto gives a forthright description:

> *I've represented the youth council on several different municipal committees, attending these meetings has been totally useless. Most of the issues on the agenda have been decided beforehand by email, in discussions where youth representatives aren't included. Having a youth representative on the committees is just to fulfil the ninth paragraph of the Youth Law, to make it look nice, like they are listening to young people. What I don't get with the youth council is why create these specific contexts for youth if it's just going to be tokenistic? Playing politics, instead of decreasing the voting age and including young people directly in real decision-making.*

His four years on the council may have made him sardonic about institutional youth participation, but he had not abandoned politics. On the contrary, he was about to stand in the municipal elections for the first time in the spring when the interview was conducted. This is a central observation pertaining to the youth council as a field of engagement: its similarity to and integration with formal politics make it an ideal stepping stone for a career in politics, at least for those who manage to find a meaning in participation.

Frame resonance is one way to express why a specific frame works for some people, while for others they do not make sense. The following section on bonds in the youth council proceeds with a more detailed interpretation of what the youth council signified for its members, and the mechanisms behind the disengagement of council representatives.

5.2 Establishing bonds in homelike settings: on transformation and commitment

As pointed out by Taft and Gordon (2013:93–97), the political repertoires of youth councils are perceived to be elitist and conservative by some members, driving them elsewhere to enact their civic engagement. Consistent with their findings, attendance at the monthly youth council assemblies decreased to a third before stabilizing by the end of the first year of the term. By the end of this period, those who still made their way to the monthly assemblies and other meetings of the Neartown youth council had formed a tightly bonded group. The group were united by a shared sense of responsibility for the youth council, but otherwise rarely spent time together outside the meetings. Some members of this group were political party members; most of them were members of their school student council; but what they all had in common was choosing to align their actions to fit the dominant style of doing things on the youth council. Sharing a solid commitment to the youth council through their engagement in municipal committees, the youth council board, and

other central assignments, their interaction reinforced the understanding of how a youth council member in good standing should behave.

On my first visit to one of the monthly general assemblies of the Neartown youth council, late into the 2014–2015 mandate, 12 members showed up for the meeting. The youngest were still attending lower-secondary school, while some of the outgoing members had started university or entered military service. At the next few meetings, until the end of their incumbency, I would generally see the same handful of people – about a quarter of the members of the youth council – showing up at meeting after meeting, sometimes too few to be quorate. At the start of the following term, meetings were initially well attended, but after the first summer break only half of the members turned up for the monthly meetings, and attendance continued to decrease. Once more, a few committed members were taking care of running the youth council, lamenting that there were not more people around to share the workload. Antti, a new member in 2016, quickly advanced into the leadership of the council, making an impression with his eloquence and knowledge of local governance. He commented on the phenomenon in an interview: *'I think power is centred on a few, five to seven persons, and in a way I'm also a victim of this, since I am one of these people burdened with all the work, running from one place to the other'.*

The members who decided to stay on the youth council developed strong group bonds, realized through shared assumptions about obligations between group members (Eliasoph & Lichterman 2003:739). These bonds were characterized by a strong commitment to the work of the youth council. While the youth council is not a social movement by any definition, it does share some similarities with them by functioning as a collective that voices the concerns of young people and campaigns for the rights and well-being of youth by engaging in collective action (Snow et al. 2007:3). Hence, I turn to the literature on commitment, which largely exists within the realm of social movement studies, to further illuminate a central characteristic of the group bonds within the core group of youth council members.

Zurcher and Snow (1981:458) argue that the choice to leave or stay in a movement is dependent on whether individual interests, dispositions and world views align with movement goals, ideology and requirements. I assert that only a handful of the youth council members experienced these circumstances, causing a division in the youth council membership: there was a group of core representatives, with other members in marginal positions dispersed around it. A fitting description of this core group is Howard Becker's definition of commitment (1960), i.e. individuals pursuing a consistent line of activity even at the expense of other potential activities and interests. The core group of youth council members

developed strong interpersonal bonds based on trust and obligations towards the youth council. Often, they were motivated by a desire to gain influence and positions on the youth council, echoing Rosabeth Kanter's (1972) argument that commitment is related to the salience and centrality of a movement identity based on instrumental, affective and moral forms of rationality. These categories were reiterated in an evaluation of the internal work of the youth council board. The facilitator asked members to record their reasons for staying active in the youth council, and these answers fit squarely into the above categories. The most common response was the desire to influence decisions (instrumental), but nearly as common were various formulations of a sense of responsibility (moral) and that being on the youth council was a fun pastime (affective).

The following interview excerpt sheds additional light on the process of establishing these bonds. Antti and Hilja are responding to my question about whether the older, more experienced members of the council acted as gatekeepers or mentors.

> Antti: *There was a certain wariness towards the more experienced youth council members. The people that apply for a second term are the cream of the crop from the previous term. If you are younger and just starting on the youth council, it's not going to do you much good to tell a moustachioed 18-year-old that they are wrong.*
>
> Hilja: *They were helpful if you went to ask them, humbly revealing that you don't know. Nevertheless, it also became evident that it's not worth debating some things, because if you conformed and trusted in the experience of those that were more senior, and asked them to explain and show you how to do things, they would be more helpful and supportive of you. I don't think that support was available for someone that questioned everything.*

These excerpts highlight how playing along with the script or scene style perpetuated by the senior members of the youth council was necessary in order to establish a good working relationship with them. However, this still does not explain why some members were accepted in the core community of the council, while others were not. I asked the above informants why it was that the door remained closed to some regardless of how many times they ran for positions within the youth council, while others were elected on their first attempt.

> Hilja: *Those that get elected are usually people that are trusted to do what is agreed upon. People that do not start pulling things in the opposite direction just because they want to. It also has to be someone who speaks to everyone and gets along with everyone. Someone that takes this seriously, says they have the time. If someone dresses up, prepares a speech and shows that they have made an effort to be elected, it sends others a signal that this person is interested. Somehow you have to prove your suitability and readiness to take the responsibility that comes with the position.*

> Antti: *It's a bit comical, but I think the most important factors when choosing representatives for these positions are charisma and what others think about them. I would claim that it's not really about competence, but choosing the person among a group of candidates that you want to work together with. It is kind of a synthesis of what kind of person they are, whether they are tolerable, and how good they are at what they do. Because regardless of how much fun someone is, if they are completely useless, then you don't want to work with them. But on the other hand, if it is someone that is super-efficient and well informed, but they suck as a person, then you don't want to work with them either.*

One of the recurring phrases in speeches given by candidates for internal positions was that they were ready to miss school for the sake of the youth council. A readiness to wholeheartedly commit to the youth council, setting all other things aside, seemed to be what youth council members expected of members that sought central positions of influence. The above quotes also reveal the different perspectives of regular youth council members and the executive leadership in terms of what attributes were important in a prospective member of the leadership.

Lichterman and Eliasoph (2015:814) point out in light of Goffman (1986) that participants in a setting are generally quick to figure out how to act in relation to each other and the implicit wider world. This comprehension of dynamics of interaction offers members that decide to play along access to a safe haven or metaphorical home, while those that continue to break the preconceived script are shunned and find it hard to gain positions of influence.

The feminist literature on social movements has elaborated the metaphorical concept of home (Ackelsberg 1996; Reagon 2000), a useful analogy for understanding why some members make the youth council their number one hobby while others are just passing through. Reagon describes home as the nurturing space where you sift out what people are saying about you and decide who you really are. The home community is based on the idea of trying to include only those who are interested in working on certain subjects, in the ways in which we are interested in working on them. This makes home a precarious and exclusionary zone. The following pages describe the home community that was established in the youth council and the group bonds that characterize it. This is significant, because it shows that participation in itself is not enough to transform individuals into active citizens. Rather, cultures of interaction affect individual commitment, which in turn leads to a strengthened capacity for public functioning, increased social capital, and reinforced faith in the political system.

The first clue to the establishment of bonds that lurked behind the decreasing attendance of youth council members came from a chat with some veterans of the youth council at the last meeting of their term in 2015. Olli, Carl and Sue were discussing the upcoming constitutive meeting of the next youth council. At this

meeting the youth council were going elect among themselves the chairmanship and board, as well as representatives for the various committees that Neartown city council appoints on education, transport, infrastructure and so forth. They told me that I was going to get interesting data from the first few meetings of the new mandate, since there is fierce backstabbing when everybody is trying to be selected for positions on the board, committees and the like. *'But at the end of the day we're like one big family'*, said Olli. *'Yeah, everyone that still sticks around'*, I responded. To which they said, *'Yeah, that's the spirit of the game'*. These speakers were veterans of three consecutive mandates on the youth council. The reference to 'one big family' was not just rhetorical, but an actual reference to the home community described above, a group of people with a shared understanding of what being committed to the youth council means, including loyalty to a specific style of acting. These group bonds, which lead to familiarity, also restrain the possibilities of new members with different agendas from gaining any influence over the council, because they implicate a scene style where breaking the script or questioning established practices is not desirable.

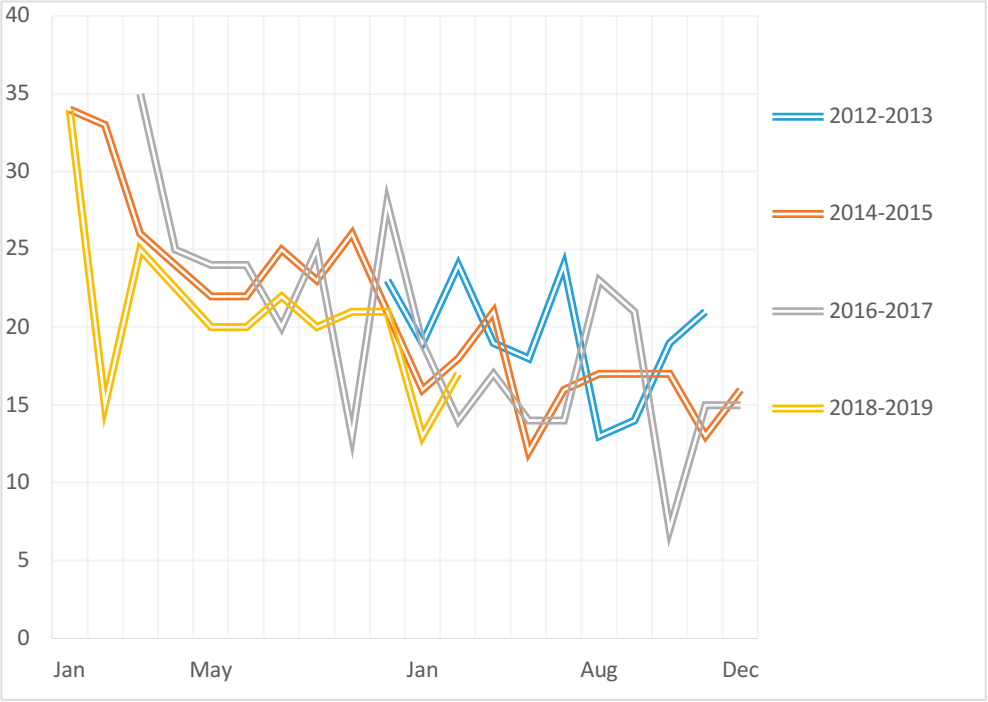
A foundation for the bonds in the youth council core was a sense of responsibility. During an interview, Vanessa and Antti commented on how this became the attribute separating the wheat from the chaff in the first few months of each youth council mandate.

> Antti: *When the initial enthusiasm wears off and people realize what it's like, I'm sure many get bored. Enthusiasm is replaced by a sense of responsibility. It lasts longer, but it's not equally strong with all members of the youth council.*
>
> Vanessa: *I agree with what Antti says about the feeling of responsibility. I'm not attending these meetings because I can't think of anything more fun to do or because this would be the high point of my life, but because I feel the need for our work to have an impact and turn our youth council into something better.*

If we review the attendance records from the minutes of the general assemblies, it is obvious that a third of the representatives stopped attending after just a couple of meetings, and about half of council members remained active after their first year on the council. Figure 2 illustrates the trend of decreasing attendance throughout each two-year term of the Neartown youth council from December 2012 to February 2019. Note that with the mid-term leadership elections halfway through the mandate, which perhaps are seen as a chance to change direction, attendance momentarily

increases (at the time of writing, data is unavailable for the first half of the 2012–2013 term).[5]

Figure 2. The relationship between attendance and time over four consecutive mandates of the Neartown youth council.



To better understand the mechanism behind the trend depicted in Figure 2, it is necessary to turn to the frame resonance of the youth council.

5.3 Frame resonance and the usefulness of the scene

Neartown youth council is a veritable institution. Several ministers, a party leader and multiple parliamentarians started their careers there, and current members spoke about its alumni with reverence. When a former youth council member and rising

[5] Participant observation was carried out at the general assemblies from November 2015 until January 2018. Attendance records were collected from the meeting minutes available through the Neartown website.

star of Finnish party politics was invited to speak to the youth council, he started his speech by stating:

> *I would never have become interested in politics unless I had been a youth council representative, and after a while I became involved in more things. I was in the union of secondary school students in Finland, I chaired the advocacy organization for conscripts, I worked in parliament, and now I am chair of the youth wing of the National Coalition Party.*[6]

This extract describes a traditional path through networks of advocacy organizations towards the political elite. His description is also a typical empowerment narrative of transformation through participation. Walter, a member of the youth council from 2016 to 2019, was going through a similar experience. During his first two-year term, Walter changed from being shy and quiet to becoming one of the central characters at the monthly assemblies. At the last meeting of his first term, he gave a speech in front of the council, commenting on his experience during the two years that had passed.

> *Before joining the youth council, I really didn't know anyone. Now I have so many friends […]. Because of the youth council, I decided to go to a secondary school with a focus on economy and politics. […] I have learnt so much, for instance speaking in public. A couple of years ago I would have been so nervous speaking in front of a group of people, I couldn't have spoken boldly like this.*

This experience of transformation is one of the intended objectives of democratic participation, and in the case of institutional youth participation it is considered particularly important in view of producing active citizens and regenerating democratic societies. Nevertheless, this kind of personal and epistemic transformation (Paul 2014) only became available to some members of the youth council. Considering that all members had experienced similar sequences of turning points that had brought them together on the youth council, the questions raised by Goffman (2018) become particularly acute: what are the background variables that give some people access to transformative occasions, how do different kinds of people fare when they attend them, and how can we understand patterns in their consequences? In the youth council, the transformative experience was reserved for members that chose to play along with the hegemonic style perpetuated by more senior members acting as gatekeepers (Koopmans & Olzak 2015).

For some members, the youth council was clearly a comfortable home nurturing their ambitions to learn and practise politics, while others described a loss of resonance as soon as they became familiar with the day-to-day of the youth council.

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[6] A liberal-conservative right-wing party.

Furthermore, interviews with members in central versus marginal positions of influence revealed different ways in which members made sense of the youth council. Core members formed a collegial community, met with politicians, learnt to give speeches, and enjoyed the activity enough to turn it into their main hobby, skipping school several days a week and devoting their free time to the youth council without hesitation. In an interview with Sam, a new member in the 2016–2017 term who was not doing very well in his earnest effort to fit in, I got a glimpse of the other side of the story:

> *They [information available from the city, school and former council members at the time of running for election] exaggerated the influence of the youth council. We don't have real influence, only a chance to rehearse political processes. No one spoke about the atmosphere; the impression was very jolly, and they downplayed how much time it takes. They [the city administration] keep us busy so that we don't have time to complain, so that we don't have time to actually do something.*

Sam's comment describes a dissonance with the official framing of the youth council shown at the beginning of this chapter. He also offers a diagnostic frame (Benford & Snow 2000) implying that the council does not have instrumental value for its members. If a council member does not manage to establish a positive emotional connection to the youth council as a home, they have a low threshold to leave. Drawing from Kanter's three forms of movement rationality (1972), establishing social bonds and feeling appreciated and successful are important motivators for most people. However, not all members of the youth council develop affective ties, moral imperatives and instrumental reasons to keep attending. This in turn causes a loss of resonance or outright dissonance with the explicit framing.

Another perspective on inclusiveness and the requirements for establishing bonds and a feeling of belonging to the youth council was offered by Peter, in an interview conducted a year after he had stopped attending youth council meetings halfway through his term. His reasons also demonstrate how closely group bonds are interrelated with boundaries of action and normative assumptions of acceptable repertoires.

> *I got interested in a kind of politics that youth council members don't care about. I joined the youth wing of the Finns Party.*[7] *Already before that my opinions were quite different. I might be prejudiced, but I expected that I wouldn't be welcome any longer. I was a slightly unusual youth councillor; I didn't do too great in school, and I used to get into fights. I feel someone like Antti, Olli, everyone on the board, they have perfect grades and so on. That's the kind of people that get involved.*

[7] This populist right-wing party was in government at the time. See Ylä-Anttila (2017) for a discussion of how this party positioned itself in relation to other political actors.

While he was not forced out, and other members sometimes openly displayed far-right views after Peter stopped attending meetings, his political positions were so distant from those of the established members that there were no good reasons for him to stay. He could hardly have aligned himself with the hegemonic scene style without a substantive self-transformation.

Other members experienced a pull towards the core group of the council, rather than a push away from it. Vanessa did not take up a lot of space in the meetings at first, but little by little, as members dropped out, and the remaining faces became more familiar and the meetings habitual, her participation started to change. At first, she spoke more at the monthly meetings and attended board meetings as an observer, then she incrementally took on more responsibility and commitments. She describes this path in the following interview extract.

> *I wasn't sure if I would even run for this term, because before the last few months there was, I think, a six-month period when our youth council didn't move at all. I think our meetings were really void of content, really unnecessary, and I really didn't want to keep doing this any longer. But then, somehow, by the end of the year I got renewed inspiration for this job. I used to just sit in the meetings, like a run-of-the-mill youth council member, expecting that someone else would take care of things. Now I've decided that I will do it myself, I will change the youth council in the direction that I think would be better, so that it doesn't feel any longer like we're staying still.*

As pointed out by McAdam and Sewell (2001), transformation has a temporal characteristic whereby change is not necessarily bound to a specific event. This position is echoed by Goffman (2018), who points out that unanticipated turning points in life are the conclusions to sequences of earlier turning points. Goffman suggests that these turning points are likely to take place during special occasions when usually dispersed people gather to publicly rank their relations, requiring complex choreographies to be carried out while others watch and judge – just like the elections for internal positions within the youth council. The quote from Vanessa goes to show that doggedness and commitment can forge a path from a marginal to an influential position; but as Vanessa says, this is the result of a conscious choice based on personal reflection, not an opportunity automatically available to anyone elected onto the council. Likewise, her comment makes it clear that the content of the meetings is not enough in itself to spark interest; rather, attending them changed her self-identification into someone who takes charge of things. This momentousness of attendance at youth council meetings – special occasions where usually dispersed people gather to publicly rank their relations – does echo Goffman's claim that such occasions open people up to changing their bonds, habits, thinking and plans (2018:52).

Different paths lead from the margins of the youth council towards the core. Some get there on the basis of their charisma, while others need a strong dose of luck and doggedness. When it was time to elect a new leadership for the youth council, I was surprised to see Adam at the meeting venue 40 minutes early, dressed to the nines in a suit and a tie. I asked him about it, and he told me he was going to run for vice-chair. A year before, at his first meeting, he had been wearing sweatpants and a T-shirt; he had been slightly slap-happy, with not a hint of the serious façade he later adopted. Adam was, in his own description, a 14-year-old blue-green libertarian.[8] Ever since his first meeting he had run for all the open positions on the council. The weakness in this strategy of always running for everything became most obvious when he lost the vote for a seat on the committee for gender equality. His opponent had a strong feminist agenda, while Adam's speech did not touch on the topic of equality in any way whatsoever, failing to establish the impression of competence and trustworthiness necessary to gather support for his bid.

His friends Max and Matt also arrived smartly dressed in blazers. Matt had printed a speech that he kept studying. These three guys were a unit, always seated together and hanging out during breaks, even proudly referring to themselves as 'the cartel'. They spoke openly and proudly about their membership of the National Coalition Party, often dismissing all other political groups and urging others to join their party. Waiting for the meeting to begin, they discussed the impending vote:

> *– Are you running for vice-chairperson if you're not elected chairperson?*
>
> *– No!*
>
> *– Why not? It's easier to be elected after you lose one election, they'll pity you! The board is easy to get into.*

Adam walked around the room saying hi to people, shaking their hands and asking if they were going to run for a position. Most of them laughed and told him no, smiling as he moved on to the next person. It was quite apparent to everyone in the room, from the way he was dressed to his unusual behaviour, that he was intent on running for a position, and that after failing to be elected in prior instances he had devised a new strategy. Ultimately there were only five candidates for the five board seats, and consequently Adam finally managed to get a position within the youth council leadership.

A year later in an interview, Walter commented on the interactional dynamic of dropping out or becoming a core member of the youth council:

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[8] That is, an ecologically conscious laissez-faire capitalist.

You know, maybe the people that give up are people who want to influence these things, but they don't feel welcome. But then we have people like Adam that apply for every position. Generally speaking, it might be that some just apply because they don't have anything else. There is a stereotype that all members of school student councils are losers. It's possible that people in these places don't have a lot of friends. They are trying to feel accepted through being elected for various positions, and when they get some power, they can build friendships around that.

Regardless of the youth council being bound to follow normative standards of representative democracy, council members were unequal in their capacity to participate effectively. A seat on a committee or the board offered more in terms of influence, insight, political power, networks, and even economic capital in the form of remuneration. From this perspective, the decrease in participation over time was a signal of the meaninglessness of participation for those without the privilege of committee or board membership. Even so, the question of non-attendance was one of the recurring topics at the meetings of the youth council. When a proposal to amend the internal regulations was discussed, Olli cracked a joke about how changes were only possible at the first meeting since it would be the only one with the majority required to make statutory changes.

Simply becoming a member of the youth council and attending its meetings did not lead to commitment or spark civic transformation in individual council members. For a transformation such as those described in the beginning of this subchapter to take place, several things had to work out. Some representatives managed to secure a place on a municipal committee. Others managed to sustain their engagement for anywhere between a few months and more than a year, waiting for an opportunity to access positions where participation was substantial rather than merely decorative. Since members in marginal positions of influence kept dropping out, the transformation of civic capacity seemed to be related to inclusion in the core group of the council. Group bonds within the youth council were established through the interaction of council members in influential positions and those attempting to reach those positions. These bonds were based on a shared understanding of the obligation to run the day-to-day business of the council. These group bonds strengthened commitment among group members and accelerated the division of representatives into two groups: those with obligations towards the council, and those without. This dichotomy affected the inclusion and exclusion of representatives in many ways, such as in the flow of information, collegiality, and political support when running for positions.

For about a quarter of its members, the youth council is a successful school in doing politics. These members find a gateway to a world of active citizenship, and an apprenticeship in the skills and courage needed to stake out a place of one's own

in the public sphere. For the rest it is a dead end on their path to someplace where they can express their immanent civic engagement.

Although the spirit of the law is that youth participation in formal politics should provide young people with experiences that strengthen their capacity to live a public life, it is worth noting that most of the individuals that engage in the youth council are not 'politically poor', to use James Bohman's (1997) expression for individuals with a low capacity for public functioning. In fact, as the next section goes on to show, being elected requires a great deal of the courage described by Arendt (1958:35–46) as an elemental virtue of political attitudes. If the virtue of courage is a necessity to enter any public sphere and accordingly to become elected, the youth council should also be considered a site for the accumulation and reproduction of privilege, rather than a youth work method producing empowerment and civic mindedness.

The next section shows how representatives are elected onto the youth council. It also goes into the democratic procedures for selection, and how these procedures affect the way the youth council relates to and is distinct from other groups.

5.4 Verbalizing boundaries with the world outside

The previous section established that not everyone that is elected to the youth council actually becomes engaged in it. This section gives a more in-depth description of how representatives are elected and what is needed to launch a successful bid to become a youth council representative. The circumstances surrounding such a bid and campaign are telling of the social identity shared by many youth council members, that is, how their group relates to, and is distinct from other groups (Eliasoph & Lichterman 2003). This shared map of references to other groups, individuals and social categories forms the group boundaries (Lichterman & Eliasoph 2014:739) within the youth council.

In order to understand the configuration of players in a larger sense – how young people in Neartown, youth council representatives, and civil servants working for the city contribute to the dynamics of the youth council – this section gives descriptions of the elections for the Neartown youth council in the years 2015 and 2017. The election process is a central component in how the youth council is framed for the general public and is one of the few moments during each two-year mandate when the public is in direct interaction with the youth council institution. How the elections define boundaries between those running for the youth council, their peers,

and adults with influence over the process affects the perception of the fairness and democratic qualities of the procedure, and the incentive to run for the youth council.

The elections are one of the biggest recurring undertakings in terms of cost and labour hours for the youth council. Candidates submit forms to the Neartown youth department stating their desire to run for election. The youth department staff then design and print election posters with the pictures, names and numbers of every candidate, in addition to other printed and online material advertising the elections. Election information is made available online, and school debates are arranged in the run-up. There is even an online voting advice application. All candidates are offered chances to participate in the debates, but this is more popular among the older leadership of the youth council, who feel obliged to visit schools to inform them about the elections. These debates allow candidates and voters to interact in a mediated situation and in specific roles that are different from their everyday meetings in school. They also take candidates into schools other than their own, potentially widening their outreach. These debates can be quite challenging and far from any discursive ideals, as described by Vanessa at a youth council board meeting after an election: *They [the school students in the audience] were shouting 'shut up bitch', and one of the candidates was mocked by the crowd throughout the debate. A teacher tried to intervene, but it didn't help.*

By running for the youth council, representatives become public figures in the schools of Neartown. Their names and faces are visible on election posters, and some of them appear in public debates. As the quote above shows, presenting oneself at these debates can be quite tough, and candidates are often dependent on teachers to handle difficult situations such as the one described in the quote. Running the risk of being tarred and feathered for standing for the youth council limits enthusiasm for participation to those that are particularly well equipped in terms of being popular, eloquent, courageous, or a combination of all three.

When waiting for the results, candidates also go out on a limb. Vanessa reported on the ways in which the presentation of the results differed from school to school: *'Last year they just whacked the result sheet on the wall in my school, and half of the people were like 'yeah!' and the other half really sad. Another school I heard of announced the results by central radio'.* While these ways of presenting the results are similar to the ways in which the results of any public vote are announced, they do not give much time for candidates to digest the news, in comparison with elections to public positions, where candidates can follow the count of votes almost in real time, together with their supporters and allies. Voting practices differ from school to school in other ways

too, since regulations on how the vote should be carried out are largely absent, and those rules that do exist are not always enforced.

Schools prepare for election day by receiving materials from the municipal youth services. Some schools arrange to have real election booths and ballot boxes from the central electoral board, while others offer a simple cardboard box for votes and put the posters showing the candidates on a classroom wall. Nevertheless, voting takes place in all schools on the same day. In lower-secondary schools, teachers bring their classes to vote during class hours, while upper-secondary school students can vote during any break in their day at school. Consequently, there is a higher turnout among younger voters and a slight over-representation of their age group on the council.

Nina, the chair of the youth council in 2017, responded to Vanessa's comments by bringing up another issue the youth council were struggling with:

> *When that's how debates are run, the incentive to join the youth council isn't particularly high. In lower-secondary school all students are brought to vote, but only 20 people showed up at the information event. How can they claim that this is training for active citizenship if the people voting don't know what they are influencing? I feel the city considers the youth council to be just a hobby, and when we try to influence something, they try to silence us. These elections are not democratic by any measure. Just compare electoral turnouts in lower-secondary schools, upper-secondary schools and schools for vocational training.*

Nina's response is descriptive of youth council members' perception that adults behave hypocritically in their treatment of the youth council. On one hand, lower-secondary school students are brought by their teachers to vote, but on the other, the substantively important information event is not attended, since there is no requirement to do so. In vocational training and upper-secondary schools, students are free to vote between classes at any time during election day, consequently less students in these schools vote and fewer candidates from these levels of education are elected. In representative democracies, a popular vote establishes the legitimacy of the representatives; by questioning the youth council elections, the chair of the youth council was worriedly bringing the democratic legitimacy of the elections for the institution she represented up for discussion with her colleagues in the board. Similar sentiments were regularly expressed by council members, since the composition of the youth council was far from representative of youth in Neartown, with an under-representation of students in vocational training and an over-representation of lower-secondary school students due to the electoral practices outlined above.

During an interview two years after her term had ended, Ellen, who had been chairperson in 2016, commented on the logic of the school votes in a similarly critical tone:

> *Many choose who to vote for just based on an unusual name or a funny picture. If you are the first candidate on the election list, you will get the most votes. Akbar Noueihed received 600 votes; 150 of those votes were from my school, and no one knows him there. The people that are serious about the youth council, those who actually visit schools and campaign for election, get the fewest votes. Some candidates promise that they are going to get sofas for school corridors and make school days shorter, and they get a lot of votes, but we can't influence things like that. I got 129 votes in total, 60 of them from my own school. Most of my votes were from schools I visited in the run-up to the election. Kids in years seven to nine are the most active voters. We only get about 10 council members elected from upper-secondary schools.*

There were 42 candidates for the 2015–2016 youth council, and by a decision of the former youth council everyone was elected, thus avoiding an election that would have eliminated only two candidates. When I entered the field almost two years later, the elections for the following term had just taken place, with 81 candidates running for the 40 seats.

At the start of my first youth council meeting in November 2015, the members gave reports on how the elections had been handled. One school had offered everyone who voted a cup of coffee; the strategy was a success, and the electoral turnout was among the highest. But not everyone agreed it was good to reward voting. The discussion was about principles on one hand and low turnouts on the other. In some schools the turnout was as low as 19%, far from the 50% that had been set as a policy target in Neartown.

The discussion suddenly took a sharp turn when Ellen, a young first-term representative who would soon become the next chairperson of the council, announced that there had been a serious problem with the election in her school. The electoral list had been missing names, some pictures and names had been mismatched, and some candidates' pictures had been missing from the posters. The same story was repeated a few times by other council members, and the mood changed: there was a sentiment of injustice in the air, and somebody shouted that the result should be invalidated. Only then did the secretary-general, an employee of the Neartown youth department, take the floor. She said that basically some of the schools had been sent draft election posters. The mistakes were being investigated, and the head of education would decide how to proceed and where the votes would be recast. This worried some youth councillors. The turnout had been low, and they were worried that a second round of voting might have an even smaller turnout, producing an even less representative composition in terms of the representation of

upper-secondary school students. A decision was made to write a memorandum on all the details that would need to be considered when organizing future elections. The reporting continued, with more descriptions of irregularities. A voting booth in a school with many migrant-background students had been plastered with posters of the populist right-wing Finns Party leader. Some schools had not had voting booths available at all. Additionally, information about the elections had been sparse and hard to find online. The variety of local practices for arranging the elections in schools could have been avoided by letting the election committee in Neartown arrange the vote, but throughout the duration of my fieldwork they declined all requests for assistance by the youth council.

The elections establish the boundary between the youth council members and their peers. By being elected in fair, democratic elections, they reach a position that does not become available in other ways. If the elections are botched, this boundary becomes opaque, and the legitimacy of their claims to be democratically legitimate representatives can be questioned. Since the elections are organized by the youth council in cooperation with Neartown youth services rather than an independent committee, such irregularities call into question the democratic qualities of the council in general. Additionally, when the civil servants who should be supporting the youth council in their endeavours do not act in what youth council members consider their best interests, another boundary emerges between the youth council and the adults employed by the city.

At the next meeting I learnt that all Neartown schools would recast their votes a month later. Consequently, the incumbent council members would continue for a few extra meetings until their successors were announced. After the meeting I got on the same train as the secretary-general. She told me that a draft list of candidates had been sent to some schools by mistake, and in addition two schools had not arranged votes at all. Since the city council in Neartown had decided it was compulsory for all schools to arrange votes, students in these two schools would now also get a chance to do so. One of these schools was for students with learning disabilities. According to the secretary-general, the teacher in charge of community relations there had said that their students failed to understand things like elections, and that it was therefore unnecessary to arrange a vote in their school. The secretary-general was upset about this, both personally and professionally, since the city of Neartown had made a clear policy decision that all schools should arrange a vote. Recent research into experiences of participation among disabled youth shows that they face higher risks of marginalization and feelings of exclusion from decisions regarding their own lives (Heini et al. 2019; Kivelä et al. 2019). Denying any group

full access to their democratic rights is a worrying tendency that seriously undermines the spirit of the law, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights instruments.

When the votes were recast, the fears among youth council members of low participation were confirmed: there were fewer votes cast, regardless of the fact that two more schools were voting. Four members applying for re-election fell short of the mark, a state of things deplored by their re-elected friends.

Two years later, in October 2017, the board of the youth council were meeting to discuss the upcoming youth council elections. By then, 52 candidates had signed up. Several members of the board, as well as the secretary-general, proposed that no vote should be arranged, and that instead all candidates should be elected by default. But there was no consensus on this. Adam was strongly against electing everyone: *'It would diminish our credibility if everybody got elected, we'd be as many as in a small village school'. 'Isn't that great?'* countered Antti, before Nina interrupted by telling everyone that *'we are already 30 minutes late in our schedule'*. But Antti was adamant – *'we need to talk about this'* – and the discussion continued.

> Mikael: *The 12 persons with the fewest votes are out, that would be democracy.*
>
> Nina: *Last time many active council members weren't re-elected because they weren't popular.*
>
> Walter: *And by the end of the term there are so few people attending.*
>
> Adam: *I think if you aren't elected you don't deserve to be here.*

The above quotes show the group to be undecided about the election's importance in terms of boundary-making between youth council members and their non-elected peers. This debate became one between those in favour of more inclusion and openness and those who wanted to retain an exclusive and meritocratic approach in which membership was earned and deserved.

The discussion continued at the next board meeting in November. The city government had decided to organize elections against the wish of the youth council. Once again, the elections had been mishandled. Some of the schools had counted the votes themselves and destroyed the ballots afterwards, making it impossible to do a recount.[9] On top of this, a local newspaper had covered this in a critical piece, stating that the bungled elections were turning the youth council's 20th jubilee into a farce. The youth council representatives at the meeting felt that it was unfair of the

[9] Later I found out that the schools in question had always done this; it was simply the first time anyone from the city administration had reacted to it. Nevertheless, the incident was described as an unprecedented mishap to members of the youth council and the public.

journalist to attack them, since they were not responsible for destroying the ballots and had actually opposed organizing an election in the first place.

> Nina: *What are we going to do about this? I'd like to publish a statement on behalf of the youth council.*
>
> Max: *It doesn't spoil the reputation of a 20-year-old youth council that the elections turned out this way.*
>
> Nina: *I don't want to offer [the local newspaper] a chance to write any more stories dissing us, it's really not our fault when they screw up our elections.*
>
> Max: *Yeah, they shouldn't denounce us like that. They are pulling the rug out from under us by proposing that the youth council should be terminated.*
>
> Walter: *The people in charge should learn from the Japanese. They should take responsibility for their actions and resign.*
>
> Nina: *We need to get the election committee on board.*

Once again, the youth council members were putting into words the boundaries between themselves and the adult world of journalists, teachers and civil servants. The board members were convinced they were acting in the best interests of the youth council but were repeatedly let down by the adult world. The antagonistic relationships with politicians and civil servants in the city administration, and with the journalists constructing the public image of the council, were important aspects of the scene style in the youth council. Boundaries between them and the youth council were reinforced whenever these adult authorities did things that affected the youth council without the consent or participation of its members. Although the antagonism towards the city administration was pronounced at times like this, youth council members maintained a good working relationship with their secretary-general. Sometimes the division of tasks between her and the youth council members became a source of disagreement, but in general she took the side of the youth council, rolling her eyes in disbelief while recounting the repeated refusal of the city to involve the electoral board in the youth council elections.

The discussion of the problems with the vote continued at the next meeting. The secretary-general, acting as a messenger between the youth council and the city administration, outlined the events that had transpired since the last meeting. Four schools had committed errors in the handling of the ballots, and due to the recent changes in the local governance law, which highlighted the necessity of institutionalized youth participation practices, the city of Neartown was not content with things being done in almost the right way. In addition to the destroyed ballots,

one school had a third of its students participating in a work practice programme on the day of the vote, and the school for students with special needs had once again decided not to arrange a vote. Because of this, the city administration decided that the votes would have to be recast in schools where errors had been committed, and voting would be arranged in the schools that had omitted to do so. Since the votes were ultimately coordinated by the youth department, there was no criticism of the youth council from the city. However, the youth council were once again left outside all decision-making concerning the process, and the city never bothered to correct the misunderstandings perpetuated in the local news about the responsibilities of the youth council in the voting fiasco.

> Walter: *Let's ask the election board once more to organize this vote. We also need election monitors. If we keep the polls open for a week, schools could decide which days are best for them. Maybe we could send a letter to everyone entitled to vote?*
>
> Hilja: *We need better-organized elections, and cooperation with the election board would make the vote more professional and reduce the risk of errors. Do we want to make a ruckus? If we do, we need to be very clear in our statement.*

Max was sceptical about the proposal to publish a statement criticizing the teachers and civil servants in the youth department who were responsible for carrying out the elections. He said, *'We don't have to do this'*, sparking a discussion about the right way to proceed. Some thought a motion to the city council would be a better way to deal with the elections; others were in favour of a public appeal.

> Vanessa: *Schools need to take these elections seriously.*
>
> Hilja: *The youth council need to propose concrete changes instead of making 'we want' claims.*

Again, the leadership of the youth council were negotiating their group style. Some members were in favour of a public naming and shaming, while others preferred a more constructive dialogue with decision makers in Neartown. Retaining a good relationship with local politicians was crucial for the youth council to have any real political influence and caring for this social capital meant they had to avoid being too confrontational.

The repeated mistakes in the electoral process eroded the legitimacy of the council and could easily have been avoided if the vote had been organized in a more professional way with strict guidelines and oversight. Instead, the election procedure reinforced the impression that the youth council was 'mock' politics – an amusing spectacle for politically inclined young people, not to be taken too seriously. This

portrayal was further strengthened by the local newspaper directing the blame for the mistakes at the youth council representatives rather than at the city administration. Apart from weakening the democratic legitimacy of the youth council, the election procedure served to establish boundaries between youth council members and their peers. On one hand, they perceived themselves as deserving to be there, since they had been elected rather than anyone else; on the other hand, it seemed that not many voted because of what a candidate was in favour of, instead using their votes to ridicule the concept of the youth council by refusing to vote for anyone that was making an effort to be elected. Moreover, becoming a youth council representative is a relatively exclusive thing, with only 0.2% of the age group having a chance to be elected every second year. This means that representatives were a kind of elite among their peers; even other council members such as Peter, who decided to leave the youth council in favour of the Finns Party youth section, perceived representatives to be successful students with perfect grades on one hand, and nerdy teens with an interest in politics on the other, making it hard for anyone who did not identify with those attributes to blend in. Besides, the selection of representatives is less representative of young people in Neartown than a random selection would achieve. This is because school students in lower years are escorted to vote, ensuring a high turnout, while older students vote voluntarily, with a much lower participation rate.

This section has described how the youth council leadership negotiated group style in matters concerning the interaction and relations with actors and the world at large outside the council. Elections to the youth council became a central and recurring topic in which boundaries were negotiated and established. This was one of the ways scene style was continuously imposed and reinforced in the youth council by its leadership.

The next section presents a recurring form of interaction in which council members quarrel over personal virtue and merit, and in doing so give expression to a shared understanding of normative standards for action and speech.

5.5 Speech norms and repertoires: imitation is a recipe for success

While discussions in the board meetings can be described as the backstage of the youth council, its monthly general assemblies were very much the front stages of interaction in the Goffmanian sense (Goffman 1967). This made these meetings

revelatory in the sense that accepted norms of interaction become most visible when they are breached (Goffman 1961; 1986:308–377). In the language of Engin Isin (2009:379), acts of citizenship are ruptures that call the script of interaction into question. Isin relates acts of citizenship closely to processes of social and political change in which actors bring offstage scripts into the light by refusing to play along. In the case of the youth council, the sanctions for breaking the script were often increased difficulties in attaining positions of influence because they would bring into question the reasoning of the board. This section attempts to describe how incentives to play along – following established norms of speech and action – consolidated bonds and boundaries within the youth council. Together with the aforementioned bonds and boundaries, norms of speech and action constitute the central attributes of the scene style in this analysis.

The first section of this chapter gives a description of an aestheticized approach to procedure that favoured embellished intricacy over practicality (Shelley 2017), that remained unchanged throughout my fieldwork – which spanned three different youth council compositions, two secretary-generals and a multitude of internal elections. Competency in this repertoire comprised an understanding of the appropriate registers of action and speech (Eliasoph & Lichterman 2003; Luhtakallio 2012:2; 2019). The second section details how a sense of merit and duty was intrinsic to the norms of speech and action that youth council members actively maintained.

5.5.1 The dance of procedure

In terms of normative repertoires, it is important to note that much of what goes on in meetings of the youth council has nothing to do with youth politics. Much like the young activists portrayed by Eliasoph in her book *Making Volunteers* (2011:231–235), youth council members learn to take their turns in the dance of procedure. Hours are spent debating the wording and grammar of motions, how to elect or discharge a representative, whether or not a ballot should be closed, or if the general debate on a proposal should be preceded or succeeded by a discussion of each paragraph. To take part in these discussions requires a mastery of the internal regulations as well as a working knowledge of standard parliamentary procedure. Although discussing such practices is common in any deliberative assembly, what makes it different in the context of the youth council is an approach that favours pedantic procedure and intricacy rather than practicality. These standards are effortlessly navigated by seasoned council members and echoed by those that wish

to gain influence. This unreservedly aesthetic approach to political agency resembles a role play with elaborate instructions to achieve authenticity rather than representativity. As one member commented at his first meeting of the youth council: *'[It's] terribly technical-official, much ado about nothing'*. Nevertheless, these procedures persist from one mandate to the next because they are used to establish the merit of individual council members, as well as to counter any status threat (Blumer 1958) from new representatives on the council. The following discussion excerpt from a group interview arranged for the youth council leadership in early 2018 describes this part of the youth council interaction.

> Hilja: *At the start it was hard for me to understand these procedures. I thought they were very complicated to understand. For a long time, I felt I wasn't competent and that members that had been active for longer already understood everything, although I knew about our motions and had attended the introductory training. Anyway, it felt hard, it was such a strange and new thing. I had a lot of respect for the older members, and you don't want to immediately debate with them, claiming to know better. My respect towards them remained until they started feeling tedious. I got tired of that shit and started arguing [laughter].*
>
> Vanessa: *They were definitely gatekeeping. In the beginning I felt that anything I said to any of the older members would be dismissed, so I didn't have the courage to say anything. I used to hope, coming to meetings, that the older members wouldn't be there.*
>
> Hilja*: Maybe the way they used the internal regulations was one thing that created a feeling of not being in the know and that I should learn, because there are quite a lot of these regulations. I still don't know them to the letter, I cannot quote them like that. […] But anyway, when it was time to make decisions, suddenly there were five regulations saying this and that. I don't really know, maybe they [more senior representatives] just hadn't told us about them, or perhaps they just chose the best bits and used them as an argument.*
>
> Vanessa: *I feel like they just pulled out regulations that I had never heard of, from like the law book or something. I felt like it didn't matter what someone said, there was always a comment from someone else that we cannot do that because of the rules. After that I didn't feel like continuing on the youth council, if the chair is going to be behaving like that all the time.*
>
> Antti: *I'll tell you a secret. Those boys didn't know the regulations any better than you. It's just a strategy of power, because they know that there is no one that knows those regulations so they can just make anything up.*

The internal regulations, and all the unwritten rules about how to conduct various procedures in the meetings, were a source of power for older youth council members that they used to ensure they would get their desires granted. Regulations and the legal-rational authority they offered were nonetheless not the sole source of power. The following excerpt from my fieldwork diary reveals how the leadership could assert their will even without referring to established rules of procedure.

The youth council is invited to attend events and seminars around the country from time to time, and some of these occasions have high prestige within the council. These assignments are usually taken care of by the leadership, but sometimes the call is opened up to all members of the council. In one such instance in October 2016, four members were invited to represent Neartown at the annual meeting of the national youth council association. Nine councillors expressed an interest, but instead of organizing a vote, Ellen, the chairperson, took the floor to explain why those with prior experience should be prioritized. Sam, one of the new members, asked her what she meant by that. How could new councillors become experienced unless they were allowed to join? Despite being a first-term member, Sam was not afraid to take the floor, questioning rules when they did not make sense to him and showing great interest in becoming an active member of the youth council. However, his script-breaking style, questioning the ways of older council members, was in opposition to the established norms of action, and I would see him sitting by himself at most meetings. Ellen did not give a straight answer. Instead, she nervously repeated herself, implicitly making it clear that she wanted to attend the meeting. Instead of referring to the internal regulations and the role of the leadership, she made up rules on the spot about how age, level of education or knowing the names of the members of the national association of youth councils should be factors in deciding who got to go. Some older members also tried to frighten the rookies with stories of how difficult the debates were: they said the meeting was like entering the lions' den, vicious and nasty. Three candidates finally withdrew, after what seemed to be a desperate and improvised operation by the senior leadership to discourage participation.

Later in the term, the board discussed the situation among themselves: they had become aware that as the elected leadership of the council, they had precedence to represent the council. After that, the selection of representatives for coveted assignments was only made available to ordinary members of the council when the leadership did not take all the available places. This change in praxis made youth council politics look prettier from the outside, but it did not change the exclusionary mechanisms: they were merely hidden from open view, visible only when they were challenged. As Sam told me during an interview: *'To succeed in the youth council is to gain social status, not to be politically competent'*. Since the political influence of the youth council is small, the attention of its members is turned inwards, towards achieving status within the council – a status that is reached primarily by being a member for a long time and learning to play along, following the norms of speech and repertoires that are imposed by more senior and influential members. This customary authority

is the most commonly wielded kind of power within the youth council, and it grants members a position from which to contest and dispute rational-legal authority (Weber 2009).[10] It is also regularly used by council members in what Goffman (1986:58) refers to as ceremonial keying. Ceremonies key events by providing a division between the officiators of the ceremony and the officiated. In these performative displays, council members use their authority to epitomize themselves as senior members of the council by aestheticizing mundane procedures, with the objective of generating awe among less experienced members. These performances establish connections and ramifications between the officiators and the officiated, in ways that strengthen individual ties to that particular style of action, or by weakening the resonance of the scene style, leading to individual feelings of indifference towards the council as a scene for one's civic engagement.

The next section describes how members use and contest rational-legal authority by using established speech and action norms to challenge the positions of council members.

5.5.2 On merit and duty

One of the standing agenda points at each general assembly was a review of municipal committee meetings. Elected representatives were expected to report any significant discussions to the general assembly of the youth council. At one of these presentations, Lilly gave a report from a committee meeting she had attended. Following her presentation, the chair demanded to know why Lilly had missed one of the previous committee meetings (based on a protocol). The question led to a heated debate that called Lilly's suitability as a representative into question. Someone referred to a rule in the internal regulations which said that a representative could be discharged if they failed to attend two consecutive meetings. However, it turned out Lilly had asked her substitute to go. Importantly, she had done what she was expected to do in such a situation and had every right to remain on the committee. Regardless, the discussion caused an almost tangible agitation in the room. There are fewer committee seats than there are members on the youth council, and they are popular not only because participation is reimbursed, but also because committees make real decisions about the renovation of schools, construction of roads and

[10] Attempts to utilize charismatic authority are relatively common. Nevertheless, they are generally unsuccessful unless used in combination with other sources of authority.

infrastructure, provision of health services and so forth.[11] Finally, the debate subsided after another representative was made to resign because *'he hasn't got anything done'*, or more formally because he had not convened a meeting of the group he was supposed to chair for the last three months. About six months later, at the constitutive meeting for the next mandate, former members spurred the newly elected youth council to make changes to the internal regulations so as to facilitate the discharge of board members that were absent from meetings.

A similar scene unfolded once more a year later, when the council chair had to choose which of her vice-chairpersons should attend the meeting of the city council in her stead. Ellen announced that Joe had not been present at the last few meetings, and he therefore *'doesn't deserve to attend the city council meeting'*. Later in the meeting a proposal was submitted during any other business, the last agenda point before the closing of the meeting. One of the new members suggested that a change should be made to the internal regulations to make it easier to replace a committee representative. The proposal was not carried, but the two episodes show an important aspect of political agency within the council. Since committee positions and positions in the leadership of the youth council are scarce, opportunities to question the merit of individuals in these positions and to open them for re-election are never passed over. Additionally, making changes to the internal regulations was a game move new council members knew from their constitutive meeting. Drawing his conclusions, Joe resigned from his position at the following meeting, and Antti was chosen to replace him as vice-chairperson.

Attending meetings and fulfilling one's commitments is one of the strongest norms of action in the youth council, visible through the way in which members develop repertoires for dealing with those that break this norm. This puts members in leadership positions – especially the chairperson of the council – in a delicate position. They are expected to work more than everyone else, but also to ensure that others on the board of the council are doing their share. This responsibility can leave them feeling unsupported and disparaged, especially in a situation where the group bonds are loose, as was the case when the leadership for the youth council was selected for the first part of the 2016–2017 mandate.

In an interview a year after her mandate had ended, Ellen reflected on her time as chairperson of the council:

[11] While the youth council can select one representative to attend each committee, those representatives lack the right to vote in them. However, this is rarely significant, since most politically contentious issues tend to be agreed upon by adult party representatives prior to the meetings.

The first few months were ok, but then board members started dropping out. I felt pretty much left alone; the others only did what they had to. We invited a visiting youth council for a get-together. A lot of council members showed up, since there was food. Afterwards everybody left, leaving me to do the cleaning up. By chance it was my birthday, it doesn't really matter, but they left me there alone to clean up their mess on my birthday. My school grades were getting worse, and the others would not do anything we had not agreed upon beforehand. I felt really lonely. Several of my board members decided to quit. They were pretty young and inexperienced but befriended people at the introductory training weekend and received votes from these new friends. But they were novices and didn't know what they had got themselves into. I got a lot of hate from the others because some people wanted to leave the board. It was their own choice, but I was considered a bad chairperson because of it.

Ellen had been the target of quite a lot of belittling from a few of the other older members of the youth council, and she reckoned it was due to what had happened at the constitutive meeting. Three candidates had run against her for the position of chairperson, two of them more experienced than she was. While one of them decided to move on following Ellen's election, only sporadically showing up at the youth council meetings, Olli remained active.

When the youth council met a month after the elections, Olli and his partner, the newly elected vice-chair Nina, clearly had it in for Ellen. At the start of the meeting Ellen forwarded greetings to the council from the spokesperson of the parliament of Finland. Seated right in front of the podium, Nina teased her from the floor and quipped about meeting a representative of the Finns Party. Later, when Ellen opened the discussion of the work plan for the next year, she was hesitant about the correct procedure, prompting Olli to deliver a remark dripping with vitriol: *'The general debate should be first'*. The symbolic effect of this act during the first meeting with Ellen as chairperson was strong. First, it put into question the proficiency of the chairperson, in front of the council. Second, as the most senior member of the youth council, Olli commanded the authority that follows experience. Catching the chair in a procedural error and using it against her demands skills that have been honed over time: the sledgehammer of technicalities and procedure only becomes available to members as they gather experience.

Norms do not exist in a vacuum; they are created and reimagined through interaction. The group norms of action and speech in the youth council were used mostly in reference to establishing the merit of individual council members, and as a shield against status threats from newcomers. These norms for procedures and ways of conducting oneself in meetings were often justified with rational-legal arguments and sometimes these expectations of proper conduct extended beyond the meetings.

One such occasion was during the run-up to the municipal elections of 2017, when a council member posted pictures of himself destroying Green Party candidates' advertisements on a bus on social media and the youth council's instant messaging group. While some members initially reacted with amusement, these actions were quickly rejected by older members, who referenced legislation and the potential implications of vandalizing election material. In this sense youth council members often took the high road, attempting to follow higher standards than others. They would amusedly recount stories of the city mayor watching ice hockey on his laptop during city council meetings, but they were shocked that some youth council representatives would play computer games and laugh at inopportune moments during representative functions.

A more delicate issue was the racist behaviour of Stefan and Adam. The secretary-general had been getting calls about this during their campaigns for re-election in the autumn of 2017. One of them had attacked the notion of a multicultural society at an election panel, and when the facilitator asked him to let others speak, he got upset and claimed that his views were being censored. The other boy had made his own flyers for the election with a slogan saying that his objective was to make the neighbourhood white, using language commonly associated with nationalist far-right and neo-fascist groups. Students and visitors at the local youth centre were scared and upset about this, and youth workers found it so disturbing that they got in touch with the youth department. Since the secretary-general was absent from the board meeting following the incident – as were Adam and Stefan – I mentioned what I had heard but withheld the names. It was immediately obvious that the board members knew who I was talking about, and the discussion that followed had a hilarious tone. Somebody proposed putting the boys in a *'rage box'* (the informant's expression), to which someone else replied: *'That would really be it, that's when they would get radicalized for real'*. The others agreed:

> Vanessa: *People expressing racist things like that should be cooled off [she used the hockey term jäähy, colloquially used to say that someone needs to take a timeout].*
>
> Anna: *If no one reacts by advocating a broader mindset, how are these people ever going to burst out of their bubble?*

These acts were much more extreme than anything that Peter had done before he stopped attending the meetings. Peter was active in a populist right-wing party's youth section, but these two youth council members – one of them a member of the board – were using racist, neo-fascist discourse in their election campaigns. The other youth council members mostly found the behaviour ridiculous, but no

sanctions were ever discussed, although the youth council later decided to become the first in Finland to make a commitment against hate speech. The humorous attitude with which the board discussed the case may have been due to the fact that it was I who had brought up the subject, rather than a city official. Nevertheless, it was quite surprising to realize that the destruction of election materials prompted a stronger backlash than the hate speech. The way members spoke about these events indicated that no one was particularly worried about the public impact of these two scrawny, offbeat characters voicing deranged calls for white power and the dangers of multiculturalism. Encouragement to destroy election materials, however, was considered very bad form, probably because it questioned the institutional logic of which the youth council was a part.

Norms of action and speech were used in these ways to enforce boundaries between council members and others, as well as to define group bonds and boundaries within the council. In his description of Jewish life in the Melrose-La Brea neighbourhood, Tavory (2016) draws attention to how inhabitants of the neighbourhood form a thick community through their continuous summoning to perform religious duties and responsibilities. The daily pattern of interaction enforces a shared identity and the obligations that go with it. Similarly, the committed and engaged youth council representatives formed a thick community that galvanized through shared norms of conduct and a perpetual summoning of the members of the core group to take responsibility, coupled with a range of sanctions that could be imposed when individuals lost the trust of the community. These sanctions, however, were only used in cases where council members failed to follow common rules about attending meetings and doing one's share of the work. In terms of regulations, the council lacked ways to deal with morally and ethically questionable deeds. In addition, the cultural homogeneity of the council entailed an insensitivity towards issues concerning racial exclusion.

In the following section I turn to the political outcomes of the interaction in the youth council.

5.6 Civic imaginations and the youth council

The central tool for political action available to the youth council is proposing a motion or a resolution. Adopted motions are passed on to the city government or some other relevant actor within the city governance apparatus. Resolutions are publicized online and circulated by email. In the years 2014–2016, the youth council

passed 15 motions. The youth council decided not to pass any motions in 2017, disenchanted by how inefficient they were. I requested the motions and the official responses for data collection purposes from the public records office. None had been registered there. The motions and all but five of the responses were eventually found in the youth department archives, with response times ranging from a few days to six months. In these responses, the city of Neartown gave two positive answers to motions, stating that they would be carried out, and two replies stating that the proposed change was already being implemented. The rest of the responses were negative or stated that the issue needed further investigation. Table 1 presents summaries of the motions and the replies given by Neartown officials. Specific locations have been redacted and marked with an X.

Table 1. Motions passed by Neartown youth council in the years 2014–2016, and the official responses to them.

Motion	Official Neartown response
2014	
Everybody should benefit from apprenticeship agreements	No response available
Neartown needs more disc golf courses	Already under way
Neartown needs walls for the painting of legal graffiti	Accepted
Roads in northern Neartown should be safer for pedestrians and cyclists	Forwarded to the centre for economic development, transport and environment; no response from them
Toilets in Neartown schools should all be gender-neutral	Will be done in all newly constructed schools
A youth space needs to be created in x	Already under way
There should be compulsory mock elections in all schools	No formal response, but city officials instructed schools to arrange them
There should be improved public transport between the administrative centre and an area known for its schools and cultural institutions	No response available
2015	
Vegan school lunches should be available, including for those without medical certificates	Not possible to guarantee nutritional content; students requesting vegan lunches will be referred to a nutritional therapist
A new school building should be built in x	No response available

2016	
There should be improved cycle and pedestrian paths in the administrative centre of Neartown	General principles for zoning of pedestrian and cycle paths, and a list of locations where this infrastructure will be improved in upcoming years
The school lunch budget should be increased	Calculation of the costs of school lunches in Neartown and a description of how this service is outsourced by the city, followed by an announcement that there is no money available in the budget
Procedures against bullying must be renewed	Accepted
There should be cheaper public transport for the young	Long reply explaining why it is not possible
Neartown should offer sports recreation for the young, including in the northern part of the municipality	No resources

None of the responses to the motions were from the city government: one of them was unsigned, one came from a traffic planner, and the rest were from civil servants with the words 'head of' or 'director of' written under their signatures. Alas, the youth council were not able to initiate a political process within the system, and their motions were little more than 'Dear Santa' letters. For all the trouble of composing these motions, the youth council typically received a multipage letter filled with jargon and bureaucratic detail, outlining why the request was impossible to fulfil.

The following quotes from a group interview with youth council board members summarize the frustration felt at the lack of power and authority.

> Antti: *For me the most frustrating thing is the extreme inefficiency that is everywhere. It's really inefficient to get anything from the youth council to civil servants, it's inefficient to get anything from the youth council to political representatives. Actually, it's really inefficient to do anything within the youth council at all. In general, it doesn't matter if they are politicians or civil servants – it's slow, complicated, difficult and tiresome. It feels like anytime the youth council wants something, the initial reaction is to oppose it. Of course, the world is like that and you've got to get used to it, maybe it was just waking up from the innocence of childhood, but it's been infuriating.*

> Hilja: *People show up on the youth council thinking they are going to improve school lunches. But then they realize that all our decisions are part of a bigger picture. You've got to consider budgets, allergies, or something. There are so many obstacles that all the enthusiasm disappears when you realize it is so much harder to change anything.*

A team of ethnographers studying a selection of social movements in the US (Baiocchi et al. 2016) has drawn attention to the different ways in which imagination is used to define problems and perceive solutions. They categorize these civic imaginations broadly into those that deal with the redistribution of power and

privilege, those that build community solidarity, and those that solve problems (ibid.:59–65). Almost two thirds of the motions listed in Table 1 fit into the last category: they concern bus routes, sports facilities and graffiti walls. As the next chapter describes, participatory budgeting mainly engaged this kind of imagination among its participants. A similar tendency was also found in a recent study of initiatives posted on a national platform for electronic youth participation (Eranti & Boldt 2020). It is worth noting, however, that a third of the motions could be described as dealing with the redistribution of power and privilege, and with building community. They do so in a reflective, sincere and politically mature way. The facilitated interactions in the participatory budgeting process, which are analysed in the next chapter, were unable to initiate such reflections on any comparable scale.

The inefficiency and obstacles described by the informants are nicely characterized by one of the motions that was considered acceptable by Neartown city officials: the motion to erect walls for the painting of legal graffiti. The youth council submitted two proposals on this, the first in 2012, followed by that referred to in Table 1 in 2014. Two years later, in 2016, the first legal graffiti wall was constructed in Neartown. Since then several more have been built, but in the meantime many of the originators of these motions have become adults and carried on with other things.

While I was reading a newspaper in the summer of 2019, my eye caught a small news piece stating that Neartown would introduce vegan school lunches as an option for all school students. The change in the tone of the officials interviewed was absolute compared with the response the city officials had given to the youth council motion four years earlier. Veganism was no longer considered to be a risk for proper nourishment, and no one mentioned anything about compulsory visits to a nutritional therapist or the dangers of handling the potential allergens that are necessary for a balanced vegan diet. This just goes to show that if local governance were more sensitive to the voices of young people, it could react more quickly to social and cultural changes and produce services that are better adapted to the needs of those consuming them.

5.7 The individualist style of engagement

Why do the youth councils not engage in collective action, organizing themselves as a broad coalition rather than playing a game based on exclusion? The youth council can affect internal issues – elections, regulations, and the food they are served during

the breaks – but they have limited influence externally, on the world of adult politics. The only political victories that are offered are those available within the council. Alas, the structures and procedures that have been institutionalized within the youth council do not manage to offer – even to the refined selection of individuals elected to the youth council – an equal chance to participate and perpetuate democratic participation. Since efforts to achieve a minimum shared level of capability have failed, group socialization practices that award a specific mode of civic engagement have emerged, leading to the exclusion of anyone who is not able to adapt their way of participating to the scene specific style. This style is characterized by strong voluntary commitment to the normative standards of liberal representative democracy, and close bonds with core members of the youth council. Nevertheless, these bonds should not be mistaken for friendship or compassion. They are bonds based on shared responsibilities and obligations that follow the common project of running the day-to-day business of the youth council. Since members are not mobilized as part of any collective movement with shared goals and ideologies, their main incitement to participate is individualist. This phenomenon is echoed by Bennett's description (2012:37) of how social fragmentation and the decline of group loyalties has brought about personalized forms of political participation, a principal characteristic of contemporary political culture.

Likewise, Harris (2015:88) argues that as young people are turning away from classic civic and political associations and institutions, including unions, community organizations and political parties, they now engage in individual rather than collective action, and in transient, issue-based engagements, especially those that resonate with self-actualization and lifestyle politics (also de Moor 2017). Membership in the youth council can be like a 'light cloak' that is donned according to one's needs and in consistence with an individualist rationality that shuns lasting commitment and durable engagement (Bauman 2003:47). While this was a common thread throughout my observations of the youth council, the style was regularly contested by members with a hankering towards camaraderie, collective action and the deliberative democratic ideal. To quote former chairperson Ellen:

> *I think the youth council is too big. When I meet youth councils with 15 members, it seems they are much tighter, they get more done. You can't create a collective identity with 40 members. I also don't think we should meet in the city hall. I don't like sitting above everyone else. I think it would be better if we all sat at the same height around a table. In the hall everyone is seated so far away from each other, and it doesn't feel like we are doing things together.*

Instead of building the strong voice of a coalition, interaction in the youth council was tuned to the construction of a community of individuals with likeminded repertoires of action and a shared level of commitment. During my fieldwork I encountered one council member who was in the process of coming out as transgendered, as well as several representatives with an ethnic origin different from the mainstream. They were mostly unsuccessful in entering the core group of the youth council because it was restricted to those who were interested in working on the same subjects and in the same ways as those who were already included. As a consequence of this, the youth council was effectively reproducing inequality and accumulating civic skills among those who are already socially privileged.

Nurturing civic skills at home is different from negotiating divergent interests in a coalition, much like convincing a group of friends is different from knowing how to make one's voice heard in public affairs. Unless individuals are pushed outside their comfort zones, forcing them to build coalitions for mobilizing broad collective action, participants will not develop the discursive qualities that youth participation policies call for. Participatory democracy can foster values of freedom, equality and community (Wright 2019), the development of political efficacy, sense of cooperation, commitment to collective decisions and democracy (Pateman 1970). Nonetheless, the democratic participation in the youth council shares few of these qualities. A change is not likely unless the municipal administration creates clear channels of influence for the youth council, revises election procedures to make the council more representative, and proposes changes in internal procedures to allow purposeful deliberation.

Despite being elected, youth council members are not commonly referred to as representatives, but are rather seen as experts by experience who – like the collaborative and objective participants described by Meriluoto (2018a) – are conveniently available to civil servants when they need to tick the box of citizen participation. In this role they are invited to sit in as spectators, and sometimes to express preferences at meetings of the city council or its subcommittees. In terms of substantive participation, the youth council deliberate and develop preferences among themselves, and some of them get a chance to develop political techniques and make use of their expertise in meetings. Members who had spanned consecutive mandates stated that the biggest benefit they had gained from being a youth council representative was personal. In spite of procedurally adhering to the same rules as other parts of local governance, the youth council shares very little with them in terms of power and authority, exercising only some degree of communicative influence. When this is combined with the exclusive group construction practices on

the youth council, the outcome is that the young people who would most probably become politically engaged anyway through NGOs or political parties get a head start in doing formal politics during their adolescence. As such, this mode of engagement is anachronistic, since the public sphere ideal it adheres to is at odds with current trends in governance that favour popular inclusion rather than feeding the iron law of oligarchy, which is casting its shadow over liberal representative democracy.

This contradiction was clearly expressed at a debate taking place at a monthly assembly of the youth council in October 2016. The debate concerned a motion on reduced student prices on local transport, submitted to the youth council by the (then) newly instated Neartown participatory budget. The debate about whether or not to carry the motion and forward it to the city council quickly turned into a discussion of personal experiences of municipal transport. Since nobody suggested any substantive changes to the original proposal, the discussion petered out, and a long debate on wording and grammar took over. Eventually the council voted against passing the motion on technical grounds, although many argued that the motion was substantively sound. Following the vote, the meeting was adjourned, and council members enjoyed a break with coffee and sandwiches in the foyer. This otherwise typical meeting of the youth council differed from the others I had attended because there was a group of visitors present. Like all public meetings in Neartown, those of the youth council are open to the general public, but this opportunity was rarely made use of. It was past six o'clock and getting dark outside when, quite unexpectedly, a group of teenagers led by an adult entered and seated themselves in the gallery on the balcony encircling the room on three sides. The debate kept going, and none of the council members seemed to take any notice of the guests. They left the gallery quietly after some 20 minutes, missing the outcome of the vote on whether to carry the amended motion.

Essentially, the group of young people's visit to the general assembly of the youth council emphasizes the distance between youth council representatives and young people in Neartown. Much like the guests in the gallery, most young people in Neartown are spectators of the youth council and formal politics in general, making it difficult to equate youth participation with any notion of participatory democracy. In this municipality, only a couple of young people per thousand participate through the youth council, in a style where individual goals and aspirations have taken precedence over a shared ambition to further the common good in a spirit of popular inclusion.

Former members of the youth council contributed reflections on their experiences for its 20th anniversary celebration. Many of them acknowledged the youth council as the place where they had learnt about local governance, bureaucracy and networking, as well as argumentation, justifying one's positions and listening to others. The following quote is from one of these contributions and it summarizes many of the experiences and points of view informants shared with me.

> *I think the slowness of local governance has frustrated nearly every former and current member of the youth council. A year is a long time in the life of a young person, but in terms of the city administration it is nothing. Political process can be painfully slow, and I was bored by this. It is rewarding to notice that many of the things we advocated more than 10 years ago are slowly becoming reality. Maybe all that work wasn't wasted after all.*
>
> *By the end of my four-year stint as a youth councillor, I realized I wouldn't make a career in politics. I got sick of watching how the parties in the city council fought over the smallest things. Even to someone in year nine, it looked like childish bickering. I didn't want to immerse myself in a world I couldn't identify with and where I sometimes had trouble understanding the rules of the game.*
>
> *In retrospect, my time on the youth council was extremely edifying and busy. It took a lot of time away from school and free-time interests, but I also feel I gained so much from being a member of the youth council.*

Paul (2015) puts into words one of the quirks of transformative experience: it is impossible to anticipate the outcome of a transformation, precisely because such experiences are radically new to the agent and change him or her in deep and fundamental ways (ibid.:761). They open up new possibilities that the agent might not have been able to anticipate before having the transformative experience. Likewise, one cannot know what the outcome of choosing not to have that experience will be until one does so. If developing political efficacy on the youth council constitutes a transformative experience, understanding why some representatives have access to it while others do not, becomes a central question.

The youth council is framed as the voice of young people and a chance for them to affect things that concern them, inspiring young people to civic action. While some participants found the actual practice meaningful, the steep drop in attendance gives a signal that many of those elected to the youth council had a boring, frustrating or unremarkable experience. The youth council dropouts who contributed to this research described a loss of frame resonance that led them to disengage.

Much of this loss of resonance boiled down to an internal decision-making culture based on intersubjective relations, and a socialization process that rewarded certain styles of action and where breaking the script was sanctioned. This culture or scene style was established and maintained by a core group of active youth

councillors. This group consisted of the youth council leadership: a chairperson, two vice-chairpersons and five board seats. Additionally, nine persons were elected to represent the youth council on the municipal committees. During the 2016–2017 mandate, these 17 positions were filled twice but were mostly rotated among the same group of people. Only 17 individuals out of 40 ever attained them. Of these 17 individuals, eight held positions for two years, and four had been re-elected from the previous term of the youth council. Herein lay the mechanism that ensured that the central elements of the scene style remained constant: namely, group bonds based on a mutual commitment to running the youth council, a loyalty to the parliamentary style of politics, and the construction of boundaries internally against repertoires that did not fit the shared script of action, and externally towards actors questioning the authority or attempting to limit the autonomy of the youth council.

Somewhat surprisingly, a review of the youth council election results does not show any correlation between the number of votes a specific candidate received in the election and their success in securing positions within the youth council. Nor does it correlate with their losing interest in the youth council.

All this suggests that there is a group of people that seem to find it easier to deal with the logic of the youth council than others. The interaction dynamic can be described as one in which participants engage in a style which they proceed to negotiate through their own interpretations. The result of this negotiation is threefold. Some members choose to leave and focus their energies on some other site of civic engagement, staying loyal to the general idea of political participation; others stay committed, either experiencing a transformation of civic skills and capacities, or enjoying the accumulation of privilege that is available to core group members that have gained a high capacity for public functioning. Sometimes the same individuals experience several of these outcomes throughout their time on the youth council, depending on how they choose to align with the group style.

In summary, the youth council as a means for political engagement is characterized by its procedural closeness to formal politics and a strongly individualist scene style. This entails that the youth council facilitates the sustenance of a culture in which those best fitted for that particular style of politics stay, while representatives with different kinds of skills, experiences, capacities and repertoires of political action tend to be excluded. The organizational style of the youth council is shaped by interpersonal bonds in the core group of the council, boundaries highlighting an antagonistic relationship towards adults who act against the interests of the youth council, and norms of speech and action that uphold the kind of civility and procedure that characterizes the world of parliamentary politics.

The next chapter will describe participatory budgeting in two fieldwork locations in Helsinki. It begins with one of the main contrasts with this chapter's case: the remarkable difference in civic imaginations which the procedures engage in their participants. This is followed by a description that shows how the individualist scene style that has been described in this chapter was mostly absent in the participatory budgets.

6 RESONANCE AND IRRELEVANCE OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN HELSINKI

In Helsinki, an annually recurring process of participatory budgeting is organized for students in lower-secondary school. Each year the process starts with RuBufest, a mass participation event for information-gathering. This is followed by workshops where proposals are developed based on popular themes from RuBufest. The popularity of these proposals is assessed through school votes. Following the vote, an executive committee meets to discuss how to proceed with the implementation of the budgetary proposals. Most of these events are organized in schools and municipal youth centres during school hours by the Helsinki city youth department.

While youth councillors engage on their own initiative, the participatory budget is clearly a youth work practice, sharing many attributes with the empowerment projects described by Nina Eliasoph in her book *Making Volunteers* (2011). These are projects that seek to promote civic engagement in a safe, family-like atmosphere of intimacy, transforming the identities of the participants by giving them a sense of competency and confidence (ibid.:2–8).

The participatory budget builds on a markedly different conception of democracy from the youth council. Rather than the election of a small group of representatives, everybody in the age group is invited to take part. Participating in mass events does not require the courage needed to run for public election; reducing the expected length of commitment from years to hours lowers the threshold for engagement; and focusing on tangible, local issues, rather than the general and abstract, increases the number of people that can envisage a project within the given framework for participation. Most importantly, participatory budgeting in Helsinki has some direct influence over how the youth department budget is allocated.

However, increased influence is coupled with stronger oversight and control by adults. Participants were engaged on the initiative of youth workers and school authorities, and they were invited to work on categories and subjects that had been chosen by adults. Although open participation ensured a pluralism of participants in comparison with the youth council, the process misrecognized the capacities and interests of the target group. Due to this, there were significant differences in the

perceived utility of the participatory budget and in the commitment participants showed.

A few words on the common institutional framing of the process are appropriate, before getting into the specificities of the two neighbourhood cases. At the start of most events, a short video (Ruuti Munstadi 2015) explaining the RuutiBudjetti (participatory budgeting) process was shown to the participants. A professionally produced animation outlined the steps in the process, with a voice-over stating that the objective of participatory budgeting was to engage young people in planning free-time activities and developing the city. Young people were encouraged to suggest anything: *'Sometimes crazy ideas will become reality'*, and the *'suggestions that gain the most votes will be realized in the following year'*. As the next section shows, a few proposals did sound a little crazy, but most of them were predictable reflections of known issues. They dealt with topics such as establishing places where young people could mingle and interact without feeling threatened or bothered, changing the public perception of young people as an unpredictable nuisance into something more positive, preventing bullying, and getting help with everyday problems. These results were very similar to the changes young people all over Europe wish for (Autio et al. 2008; Boldt 2018; Borland et al. 2001; Hill et al. 2004; Morrow 2001). Unfortunately, the participatory budget often turned out to be a blunt tool for these purposes.

Besides the shared features, there were distinct differences between the two neighbourhoods in terms of the dreams formulated, the commitment shown, and interpretations of what the participatory budget could be used for. This difference in interpretation turned out to be one of the bigger tensions within the process. While many participants were enthusiastic about developing their neighbourhood and the city, what was actually being offered was an annually recurring opportunity to suggest changes in how local youth work was organized. Apart from projects within the institutional boundaries of the youth department that could be achieved for less than €3000, the influence of the participants was small and mostly communicative. Ideas that were more costly or related to the competencies of other departments of the city could receive institutional support from the youth department, but their chances of becoming reality proved to be slim.

What follows is a description of how participants in the neighbourhoods of Hilldale and Oceanview responded to this style of institutional youth participation. I first present the results from the 2016 and 2017 participatory budgets in Oceanview and Hilldale and discuss the types of civic imaginations employed. This is followed by a description of how differing scene styles encouraged abstract political thought in one location and tangible, direct proposals in another. The chapter ends by

showing how the young participants used styles, scene-switching and internal resistance (Berger 2015) to coordinate their action in relation to the empowerment style of the process and the ways the institutional frame of participation was keyed.

6.1 Keying the civic imagination

This section describes the initiatives suggested by participants in the two years I followed the participatory budgets in Oceanview and Hilldale. I present the variance between the localities, and how they both differed in one fundamental way from the youth council: while the youth council members expressed the full repertoire of civic imaginations through their motions, participants in the budgeting process mainly suggested technical solutions to everyday problems. Their suggestions engaged them as consumers evaluating the provision of services, rather than as members of a polity exercising their democratic right to participate in decision-making (Pateman 2012:15).

If we look at the proposals brought forward through the participatory budgets, the absolute majority can be categorized as ultra-local and technical solutions for achieving a better world. Participants suggested *'a youth café'*, *'improvements to the hockey rink'*, *'a girls' night at the youth centre'*, and *'clean train stations'*. A few suggestions proposed means to deal with the various ways in which young people are excluded from public life and society, such as *'a newspaper column written by young people'* and *'subsidized summer jobs in year seven'*. Additionally, there were expressions relating to solidarity and community, such as 'low-threshold communication with the police' or 'youth inclusion in city planning'. Although all three categories of civic imaginations identified by Baiocchi et al. (2016) could be found among the suggestions, claims that were not technical solutions to everyday problems were less common than in the youth council. Moreover, if we look at the two neighbourhoods, abstract and politically contentious suggestions were almost exclusively voiced in the well-to-do Oceanview neighbourhood.

While the budgeting process had a common framing constructed through material such as the previously described YouTube video, there were local differences in how the process was keyed (Goffman 1986), producing different transcriptions of the common model. Central differences in how participants were directed in the two localities set into motion very different styles of interaction among youth and youth workers alike.

At both introductory events, participants were asked to construct plasticine figurines of demonstrators holding tiny placards. At the Hilldale event, the topic for the placards was 'what's wrong?', but in Oceanview it was 'a safe and equal city'. Hilldale participants defined problems in their everyday lives with slogans such as *'less rubbish, more bins'*, *'no bullying'*, *'no lying'* and *'more places to hang out'*. Meanwhile, in Oceanview the slogans expressed solidarity with marginalized groups and called for equal opportunities, with banners stating, *'get rid of prejudice'*, *'freedom to be oneself'*, *'more support for refugees'* and *'give everyone a chance'*. Participants were also asked to place pins on a map of Helsinki, identifying places where they did not feel safe. In Hilldale the pins signifying places to avoid were placed near neighbourhood bars, corners and squares that participants described as risky, whereas Oceanview participants generally put the pins in neighbourhoods other than their own – mostly in or close to Hilldale, an area notorious for subsidized rental apartments, little social mixing, high unemployment, large shares of migrant-background inhabitants, and the wholesale accumulation of social problems. While Oceanview residents did not identify dangerous spots in their own neighbourhood, Hilldale participants described a grim reality: *'In Hilldale there are gangs that can beat you up, attack you. I don't like walking here by myself'*, *'Subsidized rental apartments make areas unsafe'*[12] and *'I do avoid the shopping centre in Hilldale in the evenings, both young people and older ones are making a racket'*, to which someone laconically responded, *'There are quite a lot of drunks there'*. These are only two examples of how the common model for participation was keyed in two disparate social realities. It also gives a glimpse of how the interaction between organizers and participants influenced perceptions of appropriate agency and consequently claims on the participatory budget.

According to a survey done by Oceanview youth workers, nearly a quarter of the respondents were not allowed by their parents to visit the areas of town close to Hilldale. Likewise, when the youth workers in Oceanview organized a trip to Vuosaari beach in eastern Helsinki, only two persons showed up. When they enquired why so few had chosen to join, the young locals said, *'We're just going to get stabbed if we go there'*. They were blatantly ignorant and misinformed: the beach in Vuosaari is in a middle-class area not much different from their own. In any case, neither stabbing nor any other indiscriminate violence is habitual in any part of the city. They would probably be surprised if they were to make a visit to Hilldale. The neighbourhood looks much like any prefabricated suburb in Helsinki: parkland

[12] In comparison with other neighbourhoods in the district, Hilldale has mainly rental apartments, and many of them are subsidized. See Junnilainen (2019) for more on the effects of the stigmatization of the neighbourhood.

dotted with high-rises, patches of forest, playgrounds, and low buildings housing the local school, library and youth centre.

Another task at the introductory event in Hilldale was called 'the Hilldale of my dreams'. Participants were encouraged to use Lego to build something that they lacked in the neighbourhood. A group of girls arrived at the table, and one of them ironically stated: *'We lack bars, we only have four – oh, right – five bars here'*. Everyone smiled, since bars are the main commercial service providers in the area in addition to the two grocery shops. A youth worker prompted the locals to tell him more about the area. Soon the boys were talking about the sorry state of the ice-skating field, complaining that the ice was uneven and that it lacked a rink for playing hockey. The girls were dreaming of a new place to spend their free time, alternately referring to their Lego construction as 'the pink juice bar' or 'the bubble tea shack'. Mostly participants were silent or whispered to each other, but fiddling with the Lego seemed to help them overcome their initial shyness. Several of the girls said they felt unsafe in public spaces. They said things such as: *'I'd like a place where I can eat without all the other customers being 60-year-old men that want to rape you'* or *'All the gyms are filled with old guys, I don't want to go there'*. As I listened to these discussions, it seemed as if the things that were really lacking in Hilldale were places where young people could feel safe and be able to enjoy the company of others like them, with as little intrusion from the world of adults as possible. Their longing to enjoy bubble tea, smoothies and home-made buns in a cosy and hip location without disruptions from drunks seemed to articulate a desire to live a normal, middle-class life (Junnilainen 2019:242–269) – a yearning to be autonomous consumers, rather than recipients of municipal youth work services. Indeed, feelings of social exclusion based on the lack of resources to participate in capitalist exchange have emerged as equally significant as the inability to participate in the democratic process (Patton 2005). The only places in Hilldale where minors could spend their free time indoors, away from home, were the library, the local public sports facility and the youth centre. Espresso-based beverages and café culture were discussed with much yearning and less first-hand experience. This was the background for the most popular proposal in Hilldale in 2016 and 2017: the youth café.

There was a similar degree of consistency in Oceanview. In both years, the top suggestions proposed cheaper prices for young people. In 2016 the proposal specifically concerned tickets to the cinema. The following year, the suggestion was for summertime youth subsidies on a range of things, from public transport to entry fees at museums, concerts and other events. A comparison of the proposals exposes fundamental differences in the ways young people lived their lives in the two

locations. The proposals from Oceanview engaged with adult institutions, positioning young people in contexts such as consuming services, visiting shopping centres, working, participating in city planning, doing journalism and exhibiting art. The Hilldale proposals referenced a more modest universe consisting of the youth centre, school, the sports field, online games and the elusive youth café.

Tables 4 and 5 present the initiatives that made it from the workshops to the school votes in Hilldale and Oceanview. In 2016 both field sites arranged the participatory budgeting locally. As the process expanded to include all neighbourhoods in each district in 2017, both fieldwork locations were integrated into their respective district-level participatory budgets. For the sake of comparison, neighbourhood-level results are presented in brackets.

Table 2. Results of votes on the participatory budget in Oceanview, 2016 and 2017: district-level turnouts, local votes in brackets.

2016	2017
Reduced prices at the cinema 35%	Reduced prices for young people during summer 21.5% (22%)
Youth spaces in shopping centres 23%	Scooby-Doo themed bouncy castle 12.3% (15%)
Sports tournaments between school classes 14%	Jobs for young people 11.7% (12%)
Keeping the youth centre open on Saturdays 12%	Outdoor cinema screenings 6.5% (7%)
New flooring for a (private) dance studio 6%	Sports event in Oceanview 6.3% (15%)
Free youth event during the autumn holiday 4%	Outdoor basketball court 4.3% (3%)
Training in events production 3%	Summer camps 4.2% (2.3%)
Open mic event 3%	Music festival 4.2% (3.7%)
	Places to meet up with friends outdoors 3.8% (3.7%)
	Youth inclusion in city planning 3.4% (3.7%)
	Opportunities to study languages and cultures 2.9% (2.9%)
	Newspaper column for the young in Helsingin Sanomat 2.9% (4.4%)
	Art exhibition by young people in the contemporary art museum 1.8% (1.7%)
	Lower threshold for getting in touch with the police 1.76% (1.7%)
	Podcast by Oceanview youth workers 0.5% (0.5%)

Table 3. Results of votes on the participatory budget in Hilldale, 2016 and 2017: district-level turnouts, local votes in brackets.

2016	2017
Youth café 31%	Clean train stations 22% (9%)
Night-time events and films at the youth centre 20%	E-sports event 20% (24%)
Hockey rink and improvement of existing ice-skating field 18%	Youth café in Hilldale 18% (30%)
Campaign against bullying 16%	School café (location redacted) 13% (5%)
Tuition in languages not available at school 15%	Films and food event at the youth centre 7% (10%)
	Place to wash mopeds 7% (5%)
	Use of school facilities outside school hours 5% (8%)
	Opportunities to try different sports 3% (5%)
	Adult to share concerns with in school 3% (5%)

If we compare the two neighbourhoods, Hilldale completely lacked the type of proposal that gained the most support in Oceanview: those related to commercial actors.[13] In both years, youth from Hilldale called for local improvements, while in Oceanview a world of summer camps, dance studios, museums, and the aspiration to engage in the public sphere and job market revealed itself, and there was an almost inverse relationship between the popularity of a proposal and its association with the local and everyday. In Hilldale, all the popular suggestions were local in character, while proposals involving the youth centre were some of the least popular in Oceanview.

The differences in the proposals also strongly suggest what Elster (1983) calls adaptive preference formation, an unconscious alignment of preferences in light of the options presented – a phenomenon which leads those who have little to demand less. The capacities (Bohman 1997; Hill et al. 2004) needed to lead a civic life are not equally distributed among citizens, and nor are the culturally informed repertoires (Tilly 2006) that actors bring to make sense of a scene. These routines – learnt cultural creations – emerge as people get together to act on their shared interests. Repertoires crystallize as patterns of collective claim-making and regularities in the ways in which people act together: *'People learn to break windows in protest, attack pilloried prisoners, tear down dishonoured houses, stage public marches, petition, hold formal meetings, organize special-interest associations. At any particular point in history, however, they learn only a rather small number of alternative ways to act together'* (Tilly 1995:26). The following

[13] Neither Hilldale nor Oceanview has a cinema. There is a small shopping complex in Oceanview.

vignettes describe how deliberations in Hilldale and Oceanview produced proposals for the participatory budget.

6.1.1 The Hilldale youth café

Despite getting more than a third of the votes in 2016, the proposal for *'a new place to hang out! A youth café in Hilldale'* did not become a reality in the year that followed. That did not stop the Hilldalers from dreaming about it. In the following round of participatory budgeting, while waiting for workshop participants to arrive, Maarit, one of the youth workers, confided in me: *'The youth café will probably be a popular topic today. We took it on since it came up a lot at the introductory event and in the Hilldale vote last year. The problem is there are no commercial spaces available'*. She was right: more than half of the group from Hilldale chose to work on this topic for the duration of the workshop, and it turned out to be the most popular of the workshop. Nonetheless, the difficulty of obtaining a location for the café had been a central problem for almost a year already, so taking on the topic was understandably a mixed challenge for the youth workers.

The participants at the workshop brainstormed about the café while the youth workers took notes on a flipchart. Yasmin, one of the participants, vividly described her vision: *'A brick wall! I'd like to be an interior designer. Let's get a sofa'*. Another participant said: *'It should be a place where you don't have to buy anything'*. The discussion went on, with participants taking turns describing the features they wanted. The place should be warm and peaceful with enough seats for everyone, and it would be open around the clock. Prices should not be too high, and the toilet should be free of charge. The café should have a terrace, free Wi-Fi and spots for charging mobile devices. There should be board games and live performances in the café, and definitely no alcohol. The vision they presented could very well have been a hip café in central Helsinki.

When the group resumed work following a break, the youth workers encouraged the participants to read the notes from the previous session and to focus on the things they perceived as realizable. The participants decided to drop the idea of having the café open throughout the night. The youth workers said that the local youth centre already offered many of the things that had been proposed, and kept insinuating that the café could be housed within the youth centre. Nevertheless, the participants were not too keen. One of them said: *'I think Hilldale needs something more than the youth centre'*. The discussion mostly circled around what the café should be

like, not how to realize it. Talk about home-made pastry, organic coffee and second-hand furniture engaged all the group members, but when a youth worker asked them where the café should be, the participants shrugged it off. *'Let's evict one of the bars, Hilldale has too many of them'*.

The local head of youth work offered to discuss the financial side of their proposal, but no one said or asked anything. After a while the group started manufacturing posters to advertise the café proposal at the school votes. Instead of dealing with substantial questions that needed to be answered, there was a scuffle to cut headline letters from a magazine for the poster. The local youth workers were faced with a conundrum. Their attempt to convince participants to start the café in the youth centre was unsuccessful, and the group were incapable of or uninterested in suggesting or discussing any other viable solution, much less business plans, leases and contracts. They only wanted to get their own place: *'A café where young people make the decisions, a place to hang out without buying anything'*, an oasis of normality and middle-class existence separated from the drunks and other substance abusers in their troubled neighbourhood.[14]

6.1.2 Lacrosse and cheaper films

Dozens of participants attended the Hilldale workshops, but in Oceanview only four school students attended in the first year, and two in the next. The 2016 workshop in Oceanview started with breakfast. While eating sandwiches and drinking coffee, the participants got to pre-order lunch from a local pizzeria – quite a step up from the spartan offerings in Hilldale. The participants were familiar to the youth workers, and the interaction was informal and easy. Two of the participants, Anita and Taher, were not from Oceanview, but both lived and attended school there. Anita, a member of her school student council, was also active in the guide movement and about to run for the Helsinki equivalent of a youth council. Taher came off as very polite, shaking hands with the youth workers, asking how they were doing, and introducing himself to the people he had not met before. His small talk was fluent and delightfully polysyllabic in comparison with some of his peers in Hilldale. My discussion with the two of them revealed that the youth centre in Oceanview played a very different role in the lives of the young locals than in Hilldale. Anita and Taher

[14] For more on the desire for 'authentic' urban life, see Zukin (2010), with the caveat that suburbs such as Hilldale, consisting of subsidized rental apartments, will hardly be gentrified by the opening of a few cafés, since rents are fixed.

both told me that that *'if something happens at the youth centre, only the regulars attend'*. Taher said he was a frequent visitor at the local youth centre, while Anita had found out about the workshop through her work on the school student council.

Thinking about possible initiatives, Taher and Anita said that the Oceanview sports hall was always booked up by sports clubs. They were disappointed that it was not possible to go there with friends just to play football or do some other sports, and they proposed to rearrange the booking system so that there would be open practice times for less formally organized groups. They also proposed a youth spot either in the new shopping complex in Oceanview or in the central Kamppi shopping centre in central Helsinki. The two of them were producing suggestions for free-time activities almost as fast as the youth workers could write, suggesting camps, sports tournaments, an open mic event, and training in events production. As their stream of suggestions slowed down, a youth worker asked them if there was anything they would like to do that was not offered in Oceanview or close by.

> Taher: *As far as I've heard, everything my friends have wanted to do [as a hobby] has been possible.*
>
> Anita: *All hobbies have become more expensive.*
>
> Taher: *Ice hockey is super-expensive.*
>
> Anita: *Or like horse-riding.*

Taher added that the only thing he could think of that he could not do was playing lacrosse, something he had got into while living abroad. The discussion reflected the breadth of opportunities available to the participants from Oceanview and their friends. Lacrosse is a very uncommon sport in Finland, and it is doubtful that many here would even be able to give a general description of the game. Calling hockey expensive is no exaggeration if it refers to the cost of joining a team, buying the protective gear and paying for licences. However, in Hilldale hockey referred to playing with friends in the local ice field, without a rink, improvising marks for the corners of the field. Even when the themes of the discussions were the same in the two areas, in this case sports and hobbies, the reasoning of the participants in the two locations was based on completely different cultural references and life experiences.

The Oceanview participants were bubbling with ideas and suggestions, and they were confident and dynamic in the way they discussed with adults. Their fluency in the appropriate style of reasoned discussion was strong, and the participants did not need long to think up answers to questions posed by the youth workers regarding the viability and usefulness of their suggestions. By the end of the day, the group had

finalized eight proposals to present at the school vote, half of them outside the control of the youth department.[15] In a marked difference from the practical projects proposed in Hilldale, in which the young were mostly recipients, the Oceanview projects envisaged young people interacting in public spheres and actively pursuing social, political or economic goals. Sports tournaments, festivals and youth events were popular proposals in the spirit of what Baiocchi et al. (2016) term community solidarity, while newspaper columns, exhibitions and inclusion in city planning contested power relations and the inequality faced by young people in daily life. With the caveat that these proposals were edge cases in terms of popularity and were mainly observable in the second year, it does speak to the challenge of doing traditional youth work in places such as Oceanview. Helping young people to write and publish a regular newspaper column, involving them in city planning, and exhibiting their works in a contemporary art museum is quite a different ballgame from playing pool, helping with homework or hosting a film night.

But why was the local character of the proposals more significant in Hilldale, while suggestions from Oceanview engaged with the wider world? In principle, participatory budgeting was arranged in the same way all over Helsinki; but in practice, local differences affected the claims they voiced and the ways in which participants used the opportunity on offer. These responses to situationally and temporally defined scene styles (Eliasoph & Lichterman 2003) are inherently cultural, based on actors' assumptions about *'what is going on here in this scene'* (Goffman 1986:8–10). The next section will examine how local scene styles incited abstract political thought in one location, and tangible, direct proposals in the other.

6.2 Boundaries and local differentiation

Different boundaries were being created from the very start in each of the locations. The Oceanview introductory event was organized in cooperation with neighbouring districts, in a square in central Helsinki. Classes turned up in clusters, on the hour, and the place was alive and buzzing with people producing information for later stages of the budgeting process. Organizers had built a metaphorical agora, a village of marquees occupied by city officials and NGO representatives, offering participants the opportunity to comment on different issues. There was also a line-up of musicians performing in the square, all of them from local schools. After

[15] There were roughly twice as many proposals in 2017. The share of proposals involving other city departments or private actors remained the same.

arriving for an initial briefing, participants strolled around, choosing to participate in whatever piqued their interest. A public sphere dominated by the young materialized through meetings and conversations between youth and civil servants. While subsequent events in Oceanview were sparsely attended, the introductory event embraced public-spiritedness in a style that was echoed in the proposals brought forward in Oceanview, but that remained unseen in Hilldale.

Meanwhile, in Hilldale, teachers arrived with their classes at the youth centre in order to attend the introductory event. Tucked away from the public, participants were whisked through a coordinated programme from the moment they entered until they left 90 minutes later. By focusing on what was wrong or lacking in their own neighbourhood, rather than engaging with the city and the world at large, the event was keyed to produce suggestions from a geographical rather than an ideological point of view. Additionally, rotating the participants every so often when time ran out kept them busy and attentive to the programme, rather than letting them focus their attention on the things that interested them the most.

A similar contrast was apparent in the ways the school votes were arranged. Consider the following example. A classroom in the Hilldale secondary school was devoted to voting, and classes were scheduled to attend, one after the other, throughout the day. Once they entered the room, a youth worker told them:

> *Everyone will get four notes of RuBu money. We have a real ballot box and voting booth. You will find the ideas listed with their corresponding numbers inside the booth as well as on the blackboard. These are official election props, and they will be used in the upcoming presidential election, so they need to be really clean without any marks when we return them. This is the way elections are conducted.*

The arrangement was a sincere effort by the local youth workers to turn the vote into a fun event laced with a message of empowerment. The voting props were literally stage scenery, a set-up intended to show school students in one of the lowest turnout areas of the city what a voting station looked like and how a closed and secret ballot functioned. Maximum diffusion was achieved by scheduling every class to visit during the day. The election props and the encouraging attitude of school officials in Hilldale gave weight to the participatory budgeting process and the vote, by framing them as democratic rights and freedoms. In Oceanview, voting was nothing like this. There, the event was decidedly extracurricular, carried out on a table just inside the entrance to the school building. The style was informal, without the weight of civic mindedness that set the tone in Hilldale. Apparently, the need for dress rehearsals in democratic procedures was less topical in Oceanview, since the event was completely devoid of any resemblance to formal election procedures.

Instead, eight envelopes, each representing a proposal suggested by workshop participants, were taped to the edge of a table, and participants were instructed to place their ballots in the envelopes according to their preferences, in plain view of everyone else. Small clusters of school students passed by during breaktimes, and a few groups arrived to vote during class hours. The event was not endorsed by the school as something every class should attend. One of the school students said that their teacher had told the class that everyone was free to go and vote during the class if they wanted. By the end of the day, 33% of the students had voted. This increased to 50% the following year. If we compare this with the 80% turnout in the first year of voting in Hilldale – and the 90% the year after – the difference in the interinstitutional anchoring of the process becomes clear. Public actors such as the youth department and local school pooled their resources to support civic engagement in Hilldale. In Oceanview, this kind of cooperation was missing, and the youth workers hardly had any role in the development of the civic capacities of young locals.

The low turnouts in Oceanview were mostly ascribed by the youth workers to the wealth of available activities competing for the time and attention of young locals. Youth workers in Oceanview mentioned that the mother of a participant had asked her daughter not to spend time at the youth centre, since she was hardly ever home due to all her hobbies. Although anecdotal, this shows two fundamentally different sets of boundaries shaping the worlds of these cohorts: one where routines and expectations drive the young towards and beyond the borders of the local and familiar, and another where young people are attached to their neighbourhood through responsibilities and habitudes.

Advocates of participatory budgeting among city staff applauded this democratic innovation and the popular inclusion it represented, giving voice to 'non-organized' youth rather than activists already engaged in NGOs and political parties (Siurala & Turkia 2012). Accordingly, the introductory RuBufest and voting was offered to every 13–15-year-old, increasing legitimacy through mass participation, while workshops and executive meetings followed the principle of self-selection (Fung 2006:67), meaning they were open to anyone wishing to attend. In practice this freedom was curtailed by gatekeepers, mainly parents and teachers, who limited participation through boundaries based on individual merit and trust in the youth workers.

None of the young people from Hilldale made it to the executive committee meeting in November 2017. Unlike the year before, when everything had been arranged locally, participants now had to travel to another neighbourhood after

school for the meeting. According to the youth workers, this raised the threshold too high for the participants from Hilldale. Leaving the villagelike Hilldale and travelling for 30 minutes across a main road, two different neighbourhoods and a railway was different from walking a couple of minutes from school to the local youth centre. Ella told me she had wanted to go but decided not to since none of her friends were going.

Another example of how these boundaries affected the participation of youth from Hilldale was observable at the citywide negotiations in 2017. The event was arranged in the centre of Helsinki to deliberate on and rank proposals in need of funding in excess of the €3000 that was available at the local level. School students from all over Helsinki arrived to discuss and evaluate each other's initiatives in a spirit of deliberation. After spending the day in workshops, the participants were invited to attend the Ruuti gala, an event with speeches by the top political leadership of the city, performances by DJs and musicians, and most importantly the announcement of the funding decisions. The girls from Hilldale would all have liked to stay for the gala, but their parents would not let them, even though they would have been in the constant company of (Hilldale) youth workers on their way to the event, during it and on the way back home. They missed the ceremony for the award of €8000 – a substantial amount of money – for their proposal to create a youth café in Hilldale. Of course, it is impossible to quantify the potential effect of attending the ceremony and walking up onto the stage in front of a few hundred peers to receive an oversized cheque; but it goes to show the diversity of factors that affect the experiences of individual participants and how being (under)age adds an additional row of hurdles to cross.

Gatekeeping by school authorities also caused youth workers in Hilldale much frustration. Their resources were bound up in organizing the introductory RuBufest, but classes repeatedly failed to show up, or cancelled on the day of the event. One of the youth workers told me: *'These events should be arranged in the schools, otherwise school students aren't treated equally, since some of them get to participate and some don't'*. The next time we met was at a workshop some weeks later. There he told me only nine participants were coming from Hilldale, compared with the 30 that the two other schools in the district were sending. The Hilldale school had made a decision to limit access to the workshop on meritocratic grounds. According to the youth worker, *'We had a situation where several more wanted to come from Hilldale, but their school didn't let them because of absences. They said that those students can be wayward and not show up when they sign up for an event outside school'*. The use of authority in this way speaks to the nature of the participatory budgeting process. Rather than being recognized as a democratic

right of every school student in Helsinki, it was still – even after five years by this point – considered more of an exercise in civic skills. This allowed the school to switch styles: from choosing which students were allowed to attend the substantively significant workshops on a case-by-case basis on the grounds of credibility, to aligning with the values of empowerment and capacity-building when organizing the vote.

6.3 Bonds in suburban villages versus life in the city centre

The tight social bonds in a villagelike suburb where most youth meet at the youth centre after school, and the looser fabric of social life in a city neighbourhood with a multitude of opportunities, were also significant factors affecting interaction in the participatory budgeting. Commitment to the participatory budgeting process was strong among participants, youth workers and school staff in Hilldale. Although the school in Hilldale limited the participation of some of its students, the workshops and the school vote were consistently attended by more people than in Oceanview. Having said that, participants from Hilldale stayed in Hilldale. A characteristic lack of mobility singled them out as a class apart from young people in other city locations. One of the participants there remarked: *'We pretty much stay in our neighbourhood; we go into the city centre if we have to'*.

Commitment to the budgeting process in Oceanview was fleeting, without much expression of shared responsibility for the realization of mutual interests. Taher was the only workshop participant to attend a meeting of the executive committee in my two years of fieldwork in Oceanview. The other participants were not committed to following through on their projects, engaging only momentarily. Since participatory budgeting in Oceanview lacked participants committed to their projects, decisions in each subsequent stage of the process were made by people not previously involved in discussing the suggestions. They would often arbitrarily, without reasoned discussion, decide against something participants in a previous step had prepared. The accountability that goes hand in hand with pluralistic participation is an important safeguard in democratic decision-making. In a process where each stage builds on the previous work of others, respectful consideration of that input should be the norm. The lack of direct accountability was a feature of the participatory budgeting, due to the self-selection of participants and the lack of public reporting throughout the process. This atomization of the participants counteracted the formation of strategic collective action. Accountability was never an issue where

participation was high. However, when inclusion was traded off against efficiency and easy implementation, the process shifted style, from democratic participation in support of civic renewal and increased trust in public institutions (Fung 2004) to a fun day with the local youth workers.

Weak bonds to the scene of participation led to events which were not always in agreement with the normative values that characterize participatory and discursive democratic practices, namely the avoidance of imposed, non-consensus-based closure, dialogue and mutual respect. The ways in which the public is involved in decision-making affects the perceived legitimacy and justice of participation (Fung 2006:70–72), and when differences in access to participatory opportunities exist, they lead to unequal power relations and the promotion of self-interest rather than the common good (Ercan 2014). Youth workers in Hilldale repeatedly reminded participants to represent Hilldale, not only their own interests. This attitude was not shared in Oceanview, as the following excerpt from my fieldwork diary shows.

The executive committee meeting in Oceanview was discussing the results of the 2016 school vote and the desire for youth spaces in shopping centres. Joonas posed the question *'should I think of the common good or myself?'*, arguing that *'I don't see how spaces in shopping centres improve the situation of young people'*. The response from the youth workers was confused head-scratching and silence, although the proposal had received a quarter of all the votes in the district. Since no one argued against him, Joonas decided to stick to his personal principles and preferences rather than reason on behalf of ideas that had fared well in the school vote.

At the end of the 2016 meeting, there was a discussion about how to develop the meeting for the following year. Joonas said: *'Those who came up with these ideas should have been here'*. Yes, that would have happened if the process had managed to engage local participants committed to furthering their suggestions throughout the process. Nevertheless, that was hardly a legitimate reason to go against suggestions that had the support of a popular vote. The scene style that was adopted in this situation did not express bonds with a shared common good, understood as the voice of the neighbourhood. Instead it subscribed to a technocratic discussion in which participants took it upon themselves to act as the voice of reason. This was a surprising inversion of roles, because the head of local youth work at the Oceanview executive meeting was forthcoming and supportive in describing what funds were available for each of the suggestions, while Joonas took on the task of gatekeeping.

The following year no young people showed up for the meeting. By chance Joonas was visiting the youth centre, and once again he was asked to participate in the meeting. While waiting for someone else to show up, we chatted. He told me he

liked spending time at the youth centre, doing school work and hanging out with the youth workers. When we discussed my research, it turned out that he attended the same school as Anna and Antti from the Neartown youth council, a school with an emphasis on social sciences and entrepreneurship. He told me how impressed he had been by their eloquence at a recent debate at their school. I was not surprised. At the executive meeting in 2016, Joonas had used a style of engagement reminiscent of the individualist style of the youth council, rather than disposing to the empowerment style that was commonly prompted at participatory budgeting events. The ways in which he justified his positions revealed a wide knowledge of a myriad of topics. He was not shy about making his opinions known as he reflected upon the proposals that had done well in the school vote. His reasoning was centred on the implementation of the proposals and whether or not he believed the youth department was the correct actor to carry them out. In most other locations the discussions tended to focus on the merits of the suggestions, and when implementation was brought up, most participants were lost for words, unable to grasp budgets, permits, and the roles of different departments in local administration.

After we had waited for some 20 more minutes, two visitors arrived at the youth centre, and the youth worker in charge immediately seized on them, saying,

– *Hey guys, I have a task for you, you'll get cinema tickets and food for doing it'.*

– *Do we have to participate, or what?*

– *Yes, you'll get to influence our activities next year.*

– *Ok!*

The older boy, Antti, was 18 years old. He was attending vocational education, and because of his divorced parents he spent half his time in Oceanview. His friend Ville was 16 and studying to become a chef. Like Antti, he also had one parent living in Oceanview. Thus, since the three boys were already attending upper-secondary schools, they were older than participants in the participatory budgeting in general. That being so, they had not been involved in preparing proposals or voting for them. The Scooby-Doo bouncy castle proposal (described in detail in the next section) confused them, and when they asked about it, the local youth worker sighed and responded: *'This is what it's like when you do participatory budgeting with young people'*. Next, they looked at a suggestion to buy rickshaw bikes that young people could borrow to make some pocket money. In response to this, Joonas explained that taxi permits in Finland are granted by the Finnish transport and communications agency, and

getting permits could be difficult. He went on to say that taxi drivers abroad hated rickshaws, because they were illegal, and their drivers did not know the traffic rules.

The youth worker asked whether the participants would like to remove some of the suggestions immediately, to make it easier to focus on the suggestions that seem possible to implement. The boys agreed, and the bouncy castle was the first idea to be removed, without any further discussion, regardless of its being the second most popular suggestion. Joonas continued: *'The rickshaw is too chaotic, most of the users would be under 16 years of age, they can't even get a licence for a moped. They would need to get training in the rules of the road, they'll get hit by a car, let's get rid of it immediately'*. Next, he took the lead on the suggestion to host an exhibition of young artists in the contemporary art museum. *'This could cause a lot of problems with professional artists; they have worked a long time to get their art into the museums, and suddenly young people get there just like that. It sounds very hard to execute. Maybe I'm too strict, do others have any opinions on this?'* Since no one had anything to reply, he exclaimed: *'Remove it!'*

The meeting went on in a similar way. On the proposal for cheaper tickets, Joonas suggested: *'If you think about how cheap municipal transport already is, I don't think prices could be reduced from that. Let's get rid of it'*. The other participants in the meeting were mostly quiet or agreed with the arguments offered by Joonas; after all, they had not been involved in drafting or voting for the proposals, so why argue? The youth worker in charge of the meeting took notes, and the meeting moved through the proposals. Joonas continued: *'Is there some kind of trend with outdoor cinema?'* The youth worker explained that the workshop participants had identified it as one of the most popular suggestions at RuBufest. *'I would get rid of it'*, said Joonas, and it was off the table.

Suggestions that had received plenty of support in the school vote were discarded in a matter of seconds. While the executive committee participants in Hilldale had attended the meeting in order to further a common goal, it seemed as if the role Joonas had taken on was to curate the selection of initiatives according to his own tastes, engaging in self-actualization instead of speaking on behalf of a collective of local youth.

Since none of the initiators of the proposals were present, there was no one to speak in favour of them; but even more crucially, none of the participants were expected to commit themselves in any way to the projects and ideas they were discussing. Therefore, the motivator for the rationalistic, informed and in some ways pessimistic rhetoric was not the avoidance of commitment, but the lack of bonds with the groups behind the initiatives and of boundaries for action informed by

transparency, accountability and respect for the work previously done by other youth during the process.

Disseminating information widely about the possibility to participate can force participants to consider the public good in addition to their own self-interest, since more people are bound to know about the process and be curious to know who decided what. Transparency builds trust (Irvin & Stansbury 2004:61) and educates the public (Beierle 1999:82) about the mechanics of the decision-making process and the trade-offs involved. A lack of transparency and predictability can also cause a loss of commitment, as the following description from Hilldale shows.

Regardless of the strong initial support for the process, the shared understanding of responsibilities among participants was fluid rather than static. As the process kept going without any tangible signs of progress after the school vote, the commitment of participants showed signs of foundering. This was noted by youth workers who shared a concern that that the ideas would take too long to realize, and that the participants and young people in the neighbourhood would lose interest.

Following the school vote, between the end of October and early December 2016, five consecutive executive meetings were arranged in Hilldale, while other neighbourhoods hosted one. The first four meetings of the executive committee in Hilldale were mainly concerned with fleshing out details for the proposals that had got the most votes. Over the course of the meetings, participants dropped out as it became obvious that a youth café would not instantly materialize in their neighbourhood. This loss of resonance came about as the group bonds and shared assumptions about obligations among group members (Lichterman & Eliasoph 2014) were challenged by youth workers asking participants to commit themselves to the realization of the project. Prior to these gatherings, all parts of the participatory budgeting process had been carried out during school time, and participants had not been expected to commit themselves to more than actively participating in the meeting they were attending. By underlining the responsibility of the participants for achieving their goal, youth workers shifted the group bonds, changing the scene style from a collective endeavour into one of individual duty.

At the first of these meetings, just three out of the 13 that had signed up for the meeting arrived. Following the introduction, the youth workers left the three participants by themselves to prepare a presentation for the upcoming youth expo, where they hoped to gather comments and suggestions regarding how to go about opening a youth café. Melissa put on some music from her phone, and a tune by Rihanna got the girls dancing in a shared choreography, while Jimi flipped his water bottle, trying to get it to land bottom-down.

The participants were uncertain how to proceed, and time was spent discussing details such as furniture and the selection of pastries for the café. I helped the group to get started with their presentation. Melissa was worried that her handwriting was not tidy enough, so we decided to use PowerPoint on a computer instead. The three participants had a hard time formulating any text on the computer screen, and preferred to play with colour gradients on the background instead. I assisted as much as I could, but afterwards I kept thinking how easy it had been for Anita and Taher to brainstorm in the Oceanview workshop, in comparison with how hard it was for the participants in Hilldale to express themselves in a similar context. This observation echoes those made by Junnilainen (2019:256) on cultural resources in poor and stigmatized neighbourhoods, describing the difficulty of inhabitants in identifying the correct vocabulary and format of composition in formal language.

When I arrived at the youth centre two weeks later, I learnt that the youth worker in charge of the participatory budgeting had to leave shortly, and that Melissa would not arrive at the youth centre until later because her brother was there and they were taking turns caring for their younger siblings at home. Regardless of reminders from the youth workers sent by text and instant messaging, Jimi and Sofi were missing. After considering their options, the youth workers decided to postpone for a week.

A week later, Melissa brought four new participants to the meeting: Asta, Joonatan, Jenna and Pekka. Jimi and Karen were also there, as well as Jemima, a member of the school student council. Sofi was missing again. We split into smaller groups to discuss the initiatives from the school vote. Jemima wanted to plan night-time events at the youth centre, and since she was on the student council, she was also assigned to sketch out the campaign against bullying. These smaller, less costly initiatives could be realized within the local youth work budget, but the hockey rink would require cooperation with the sports department. Additional economic and institutional backing was also necessary for the café. The youth workers appeared to be hesitant about presenting the proposals to their superiors in the youth department just yet, preferring to arrange more meetings in order to develop the proposals further. Nonetheless, since there was nothing tangible to base the discussions on, the group turned to collective daydreaming. At the end of the meeting a youth worker suggested arranging an event at the youth centre with the head of district. Her suggestion was basically the executive meeting that other districts organized directly after the vote.

A familiar story repeated itself at the following meeting, as only Jemima and Jimi were present when the meeting was supposed to start. The youth centre felt almost deserted in comparison with most afternoons. It was almost as if the usual visitors

were avoiding the youth centre because they knew they might be recruited to join the meeting. Sofi and Jimi started working on invitations for youth department and sports department officials to the upcoming executive committee meeting.

Finally, a week before Christmas, the executive committee met with the composition that was typical elsewhere, including the head of district, the person in charge of the budgetary decisions, and a representative from the sports department, as well as two youth workers. Again, only a couple of young persons were at the youth centre. Maarit said that it was typical; normally there were about 30 young people in the youth centre every afternoon. She had sent reminders about the meeting by text message to regular visitors, and thought that was the reason they were avoiding the centre. It was doubly ironic, first because the process was meant to improve the youth department activities locally, and second because not going to the youth centre was a big price to pay in a neighbourhood where places to spend free time were very few and far between unless one was old enough to visit a bar. Jane Mansbridge, interviewed by Archon Fung (2004), raises the point that non-attendance at deliberative meetings is not a signal of satisfaction, but rather shows that people have learnt that their views are not given sufficient weight to make participation worthwhile.

A few more participants arrived, and finally five local youth and six adults gathered around the table to review the results of the vote. A youth worker said, *'The trouble with this Ruuti thing is that these ideas might not be accomplished before you are a lot older'*. As the meeting went on, more young people arrived and joined the discussion. One of the youth workers gave a recap of the process and explained that a film projector and licences had already been bought for the film nights, and that the school student council would do a campaign against bullying together with the youth workers. Then she told the young participants that *'the role of the executive committee, that's you guys, is to further these initiatives'*, once again switching the scene style: from the style at the introductory event and workshops, where participants could express their wishes without committing themselves to further action, to one in which the group members were faced with the responsibility for achieving the collective aspirations of the neighbourhood.

When the discussion turned to the café, everybody sat quietly. The participants were clearly lost in terms of how to turn their dream into reality. The district director summarized what had been said about the youth café so far, and suggested it might be easier to start the café in the youth centre. The youth workers tried to ask the young participants whether the café would compete for visitors with the youth

centre, trying to provoke reactions, but everyone remained quiet, looking away. Nothing was decided except for continuing to work towards the café.

Next, the representative from the sports department gave a briefing about how the initiative to improve the skating field could move forwards within the city bureaucracy. He said: *'The rink will not happen unless you make some noise. The message that locals want this has to come from here (not from me)'*. It seemed strange, considering that the representative of the sports department had followed the process and had heard the young participants explain the trouble with the current skating field. Additionally, there was the result of the vote, in which the rink was the third most popular suggestion. The sports department representative encouraged the initiators to frame a proposal for the sports department around safety aspects: a rink would protect children and other skaters from those playing hockey. A handful of guys were enthusiastic, promising to continue working on this with the youth workers. *'We will aim directly at the leadership level in the sports department'*; *'Should we write an address?'*; *'Everyone will help, if we start now, we might have it by next winter'*.

Considering that Hilldale is the neighbourhood of Helsinki with the lowest levels of political engagement defined by voter turnout, the fact that a group of rowdy boys managed to formulate a proposal with good arguments and gather enough votes to make their suggestion the second most popular was quite extraordinary. Nevertheless, it was not enough to make their 'wildest dream come true', as the info video describing the participatory budgeting process had claimed. Instead, both the youth workers and the sports department official told them that the future of their proposal was in their own hands, implying that all their work would be in vain unless they did some more. At the meeting, the participants expressed a readiness to keep on working for their goal. However, it is unclear what has happened since then. As of April 2019, there is still no hockey rink in Hilldale; nor is one in the making, according to the sports department official that attended the meeting.

In summary, the Hilldale participatory budgeting turned out to be an exercise in civic skills: expressing needs and hopes, deliberating and voting. The main benefit to the participants was the satisfaction derived from small projects, such as the night-time events at the youth centre or the campaign against bullying. In addition, some participants learnt about writing petitions to the city administration through the mediation of adults. The same story was repeated in 2017, when Hilldale youth once again proposed a youth café in the participatory budget. The youth workers kept worrying that the relevance of participatory budgeting would be questioned by participants unless the proposals were actually realized. As school students left the room after voting, a youth worker asked them how it felt, reminding them that in a

few years' time they could vote in real elections just as easily. As she was walking out of the door, a student said, *'The café proposal was already there last year, and it didn't lead to anything'* – as if reminding the youth workers that although no one else had brought this up, it did not mean they were not aware of it.

The observations that have been described so far are examples of recurring attributes and characteristics of the fieldwork locations, most of which were influenced by the empowerment style of promoting civic engagement in a safe, family-like atmosphere (Eliasoph 2011:2-8). While this style resonated well with the youth in Hilldale, who were accustomed to positive discrimination strategies and the presence of municipal youth workers in their free time, it could not have been less appropriate for students in Oceanview. The low turnout of participants speaks to the poor local relevance of the participatory budgeting process, and when young people did participate, their desires were often a mismatch with what the youth department could offer. I now turn to passages of particular resonance or dissonance: unexpected events that uncovered tensions and conflicting interpretations of the appropriate norms of speech and action.

6.4 Norms of speech and action, and how resonance informs interaction

Just as narratives can appeal to one group but leave another untouched (Ferree 2003; Polletta 2006), the resonance of a style is dependent on the scene where the style is applied. This indicator of when and how culture works is based on concepts developed within frame analysis and diffusion studies (Benford & Snow 2000; Schudson 1989; McDonnell et al. 2017) that deal with *'why some framings seem to be effective or "resonate" while others do not'* (Benford & Snow 2000:621). An engaging frame effectively diffuses and reinforces engagement in the scene, but it can also lose resonance or cause outright dissonance (Koopmans 2007; Koopman & Olzak 2015). Using concepts developed within this line of research, this section describes how claim makers and gatekeepers (Koopmans & Olzak 2015) employed scene-switching practices (Lichterman & Eliasoph 2014) in support of their position.

If the resonance of a frame is measured by how many participants the scene attracts, then the resonance of the participatory budgeting in Oceanview was low. Workshop attendance was low, and the turnout at the school vote was about half that in Hilldale. This implies that the configuration of bonds, boundaries and speech norms did not align in a style that young people in the neighbourhood considered

attractive or useful. Meanwhile, in Hilldale, participation at all stages of the process was high, and participants showed strong commitment to the process through the way they developed, promoted and followed up on initiatives that were important to them. The previous sections have established the differences in the social fabric in the two neighbourhoods. The villagelike community of Hilldale, with few competing pastimes and the strong bonds of a collectively defined local identity (Durkheim 1960; Junnilainen 2019; Luhtakallio & Mustaranta 2017), had a different receptiveness to top-down empowerment projects than a place such as Oceanview, where individual reflections, initiatives and aspirations were stronger traits than identification with the neighbourhood. But even inside one organization or group, multiple scenes and styles can exist in parallel. A scene changes when shared assumptions about what is going on have changed, even if the physical setting remains the same. Distinguishing these scene-switching practices becomes easier when the switch is challenged (Goffman 1961; 1986:308–377).

As the previous section showed, non-disadvantaged youth identified the scene to be irrelevant for furthering their interests and chose either not to participate or to engage in ways that did not follow the preconceived script of participation and interaction. This section describes how some participants mockingly subverted the process; how others resisted engagement, a moment of particular resonance; and finally, how participants contested attempts by adults to switch scene styles. Observations of these acts show how the loss of resonance of a process is interlinked with challenges to and disagreement about the perceived bonds, boundaries, and especially norms of speech and action in the scene (Lichterman & Eliasoph 2014:816, 824–835).

6.4.1 The Scooby-Doo bouncy castle

Unlike the 2017 Hilldale workshop, which was attended by young people from all three schools in the district, Oceanview youth workers organized separate workshops in each school within their district. Since the Oceanview workshop was attended by only two persons that year, I decided to visit another workshop within the district.

It took place in a small classroom, stuffed to full capacity with participants. A particularly rowdy boy was constantly interrupting and disturbing the others by conversing with the persons next to him while the youth workers were talking. The restless atmosphere increased when the youth workers got annoyed and shouted at

everyone to stay calm and focus. Leino, the unruly boy, managed to disrupt the scene together with his friends. The workshop failed to establish the mutual respect between participants and organizers that was the norm at other events. The boys made a joke of suggesting a Scooby-Doo-themed bouncy castle, and it ended up as one of the ideas from the workshop. One of the boys turned to Leino: *'Did anyone even vote for that, weren't these supposed to be the ideas of the youth and not your ideas? It's such a stupid suggestion'*. Leino simply responded: *'That's the point'*. While one of the boys recognized that the bouncy castle was not a representation of the type of idea that should be suggested within the participatory budgeting process, Leino took the opportunity to underline that his idea was meant to ridicule the process, thus breaking with the expected norms of action and switching the scene style as an act of counter-conduct.

What started out as a skilful act of disruption (Isin 2009), turning the process upside down while still staying within it, eventually became the second most popular initiative in the school vote, just behind reduced-price summer events and tickets for young people. Although some of the participants at the workshop were trying to develop ideas based on the aggregate results from RuBufest, the workshop disintegrated because Leino rejected all responsibility for working for a common good through the budgeting process. Nevertheless, Leino did not leave or refuse to participate: he managed to subvert the process by proposing something completely ridiculous. When a scene style is dissonant, a participant has the three options of playing along, questioning the script through scene-breaking acts (Goffman 1986; Isin 2009) or leaving. Although Leino's actions could be dismissed as the reactions of an adolescent with an attention deficit, they can also be interpreted as acts of citizenship. Consciously breaking the script by making a fuss was a tactic repeatedly resorted to when the scene style made participants to consider whether or not they were losing their dignity by playing along. The timing and formulation of such acts require skill in identifying situations where the tension in interaction is strong and the risk of losing face because of someone taking sides with the organizers is small. Berger (2015) describes how participants in scenes of asymmetrical interaction resist the ways of being that are imposed upon them. Institutional criticism can be more convincingly delivered by participating according to the instructions, down to the last detail. This lets participants use their attentiveness to the process as a cognitive and moral resource, forcing officials to maintain a mutual commitment. Lastly, by subverting the order of visibility, participants can turn themselves into the protagonists of the scene (ibid.:17–18). On the other hand, in this case, the use of the arts of resistance (Scott 1990) did not benefit all participants. One of them

continuously but unsuccessfully tried to propose *'that adults would react to harassment, that they would come to ask if that's ok'*. The attempt by the youth workers to control the chaotic workshop through authority failed, at the cost of excluding the weak voices in the room.

6.4.2 'Having a laff' in Hilldale

A similar situation, in the sense that the relevance of participation was questioned through the actions of the participants, led to a different outcome in Hilldale. Right from the start of the first workshop in 2016, it became apparent that a group of boys were mainly there in order to get some time off school. Like the Hammertown lads described by Paul Willis (1978), they showed no interest in following the rules and instructions, but rather in 'having a laff'. Willis attributed this to the effects of symbolic violence and a school setting in which the dominant class culture co-opted the have-nots in a way that rendered resistance the only worthwhile option to being short-changed. Nevertheless, the outcome in Hilldale was different.

The racket made by this group of boys repeatedly made it impossible for the rest of the participants to discuss their projects, and it required all the professional skill of the youth workers to channel this energy into something constructive. Eventually the boys got enthusiastic about a suggestion to improve the skating field. They broke off from the group to play ping-pong while one of the youth workers, in a relaxed but professional manner, managed to coax them into formulating a proposal on improving the skating field and building a rink for hockey. After a while everyone gathered to discuss the proposals. Among them was a proposal for a hockey rink that the boys proudly committed to defending. In many ways this example is the inverse of the previous one. Here the outcome was not a critique of the process, as in the previous example. Instead, the empowerment style worked to ignite a spirit of engagement in a group that habitually resisted the dominant class culture. Significantly, youth workers used soft authority to regulate the action of the boys by aligning their interests with the objectives of the workshop in a way that did not notably affect the other participants' chance to be heard.

This section has so far outlined some links between resonance and norms of action. I will now turn to the elusive phenomenon of transformation by offering a description of one of the few occasions where participants verbalized a transformative experience.

6.4.3 An experience out of the ordinary

A group from Hilldale consisting of Aminah, Hameda and Ella attended the citywide budgeting negotiations in 2017, along with dozens of other young people from all over the city hoping to convince participants and civil servants to grant additional funding for their initiatives. At first the participants were instructed to evaluate and score each other's initiatives. Aminah decided to give her second-best ranking to a proposal to offer free courses in food security[16] in a school she did not attend. I asked her why, since it seemed that her interests would have been better served by voting for something that she could benefit from personally. She told me that she found this particular proposal to be good and important, a cause worth supporting. Abandoning one's personal interests in favour of a moral justification for action is civic virtue. This was a real-world example of participation leading to public-spirited, deliberating individuals. The results from the school votes showed that participants mostly voted for proposals that were local and of relevance to their own lives, rather than considering the common good from a wider perspective. The citywide negotiations shifted the style of interaction into a more deliberative, considerate and empathic style by stressing these values from the outset and designing the aggregation of preferences to be based on deliberation among the participants.

The Hilldale youth café scored the highest with 257 votes, and the trio from Hilldale broke out in a collective *'whaa… nice!'* There were 17 participants from various parts of the city attending the session, and obviously many of them, without necessarily having any connection to Hilldale, had nonetheless decided to offer the café initiative their support. Having established the order of popularity, a discussion followed, offering participants an opportunity to reconsider the outcome and pose additional questions. The two facilitators were Helsinki city youth council representatives. They were seated at the end of the table, with the participants and a bunch of youth workers, youth department officials, teachers and the researcher mostly standing around it. The facilitators asked the girls from Hilldale whether the money they had applied for would be enough.

Ella, Hameda and Aminah tensed up: they had not been prepared to be questioned like this, and they quickly approached each other to discuss it in hushed voices. Taking turns, they explained that they would keep costs down by using second-hand furniture and employing local youth in the café. They added that the café would be a place for young people in Hilldale to hang out regardless of whether

[16] A 'food security pass' is required for anyone working with food, and a necessity for anyone looking for a summer job frying burgers or scooping ice cream.

they spent money there or not. Then someone asked if others (i.e. non-locals) would be welcome. The girls seemed surprised and pleased that anyone would want to come to their neighbourhood, and responded *'of course'* with a smile. Afterwards the girls were bubbling with enthusiasm; they told me: *'It was worth coming here! We learnt social skills'*. They had also been deliberating public-spiritedly and delivered a satisfying answer to a public question about their project, giving an argument about efficiency, economic restraint and openness to others. This style of interaction was different from any of the other meetings and events related to the budgeting process, perhaps coming closest to the youth council in style of speech and argument, while also retaining normative qualities associated with discursive democratic practices. Whether or not the three girls from Hilldale had a transformative experience is difficult to quantify in any meaningful way. However, the meeting shared many of the features suggested by Goffman (2018) to prompt bursts of change in social occasions. The citywide budgeting negotiations constituted a special world set off from ordinary life – especially so for the participants from Hilldale; in addition, the event brought together people who did not usually meet, and it played host to a sudden outburst of emotional energy in response to the public ranking of the participants' proposals. Goffman (2018:12) argues that the more these features are present in an occasion, the more likely the occasion is to shift people's bonds, habits, thoughts and plans, and to *'spill past the boundaries of the occasion to matter in the later lives of those attending'* (ibid.:15).

It can be argued that few of the events linked to the budgeting process shared these features, highlighting the need to consider the importance of these features when designing participatory democracy and ensuring equal access to these occasions regardless of socio-economic position and family configuration.

The next section describes gatekeeping and claim-making practices in the participatory budgeting process, how actors reacted to discursive opportunities and utilized strategies of scene-switching, and how these acts resonated or were dissonant with the participants.

6.4.4 Contesting the scene style: gatekeeping and claim-making on the executive committee

The executive committee meetings were the liveliest parts of the budgeting process in terms of argumentation, and one of the few occasions where participants resorted to agonistic or politicized discursive modes of discussion. This interaction of claim

makers and gatekeepers (Koopmans & Olzak 2015) manifested itself through the ways in which scene-switching was employed as a strategy by one side and resisted by the other. This regulation of resonant potential revealed the true relationship between discourse and power in the participatory budgeting process.

Since the executive committee decides on how to proceed after the results from the vote are in, they have proportionately a lot of power in comparison with other steps in the process. Attempts to change the outcome of the school vote and to reprioritize initiatives were made by young participants as well as by youth department officials attending these meetings. The following examples show how these practices revealed scene-switching to override the results of the democratic process that had preceded the meeting.

The section on loss of resonance described how interaction in the executive committee meeting in Hilldale in 2016 was marked by a change of scene style – a change implying that the young people attending the meeting were expected to commit time and effort to realizing the result of the school vote. This switch was contested to some degree, mainly by participants dropping out. However, this section describes how participants actively contested authority and made an attempt at switching styles at the Hilldale executive committee meeting in 2017. This is followed by a discussion of how the roles of gatekeeping and claim-making were reversed at the committee meeting in Oceanview.

The combination of organizing the meeting after school hours and in a different neighbourhood meant that none of the Hilldale youth made it to the 2017 executive committee meeting.[17] Participants from the two other schools in the district were present, in addition to youth workers from all three neighbourhoods, the head of the local youth work district, and a head teacher from one of the schools in the district. The head of district invited the young participants to have a seat: *'Come sit down at the table everybody, so that we'll be equal discussants'*. They quietly sat down while the adults continued a private conversation on the other side of the table. Soon one of the youth workers opened the meeting, telling the participants: *'Today the youth voice is more influential than that of the youth workers'*. Following these words, the participants got to present their nine proposals in order of descending popularity.

The most popular initiative in the district was one to make the local train stations more inviting. The boys behind the initiative explained that the lifts were so dirty no one wanted to use them, and that the graffiti made the stations feel inhospitable. The district head of youth work gave some examples of young people decorating public buildings in Helsinki, saying this might be something the young could do to improve

[17] I am indebted to research assistant Roosa Tuukkanen for the field notes from this meeting.

things, and underlining that the cleanliness of the station was the responsibility of the station owner. The youth workers turned to the young participants to ask how young people hoped to get involved with this initiative. They replied that there had not been any talk about it, and the district head responded by asking whether there was no talk about organizing volunteers to do the work. The youth participants started laughing and said this was the first time they had ever heard such a suggestion. They reminded the adults that their suggestion had got the most votes and should therefore be prioritized. The district head responded by saying that the youth department could help by assigning some work hours to this issue, but that they could not spend department money on it. A youth worker summarized the discussion for the minutes: *'Priorities are cleanliness and lights, not decoration? Are you satisfied?'* With this the discussion moved on to the e-sports tournament, the second most popular proposal and the suggestion that had gathered the most uniform support from all three schools in the district.

Three boys, Atte, Aaro and Jero, presented the proposal. They started by saying that tournaments were already being organized in libraries and private homes, but that they intended to arrange a bigger event. When one of the youth workers asked them if they would like to take part in arranging the event, Aaro said: *'I think it is obvious we should ask the youth what they want. Should games be streamed [online], and should the event be organized by young people for young people?'* He added that he would personally be interested in participating in the organization. Jero also confirmed his interest in being involved. Following that, a youth worker proceeded to report on the technical capabilities and collaborations the youth department could utilize to support the organization of the event, concluding that the size of the event would be limited mainly by the budget. Once again, the head of district underlined that the youth department would primarily invest work hours, not money. The adults turned to each other to discuss the technicalities of organizing the gaming event. In the end they decided to apply for money from the central budget, which is reserved for bigger projects. The discussion was long, and meanwhile the girls that had proposed a school café (not to be confused with the Hilldale youth café) were talking in hushed voices, preparing their presentation: *'Remember to highlight that we, the young…'*. Since the Hilldale group was not present, a youth worker proceeded to explain both proposals, concluding *'oh, sorry girls, you could have presented this'*, and handing them the poster. The adults posed several questions that caught the girls off-guard. The head of district asked what they believed teachers in their school thought about their suggestion, and the head teacher (from the third school in the district) added, *'Have you asked if the space is available?'* She also advised them to ask if surveillance could be

arranged. The girls seemed troubled; they could not answer the questions, and mostly mumbled that they did not know. When a youth worker asked if the girls knew why the café that used to exist in their school had been closed, Aaro from the e-sports group chipped in by saying that he used to attend the same school as the girls and remembered the space being used for serving snacks, but that it had remained unused for a long time. The adult participants were using the meeting to discuss the practicalities of the proposals among themselves, often calling on the youth voice only in matters that the participants could not answer. While Aaro managed to verbally stand his ground in terms of bonds and boundaries, others were not as forthright and faded into the background.

One youth worker said that they could apply for additional funding for the two cafés if their school agreed to let them use the space. Two of her colleagues concurred, taking turns to stress the busy schedule: the applications had to be done by the end of the week, three days from the meeting. The fourth youth worker appeased them, telling them to relax: *'A lot can be done in three days if we get to work now'*. As the adults posed additional questions, the girls turned their gaze towards him. He seemed to be sensitive to their mounting desperation with the situation. He repeated that their proposal to host a café in their school had the support of the youth workers, and that the suggestion had the perfect prerequisites to become reality.

Attempting to finish the discussion, the head of district said: *'This proposal isn't disappearing anywhere, there will certainly be support for it until it's realized'*. But the discussion continued regardless. The adults posed questions about furniture, whether there would be a sufficient number of volunteers to run the café, and if the space contained equipment such as water boilers and other necessities. The Hilldale youth worker then asked if the girls were willing to make a shared application to the central budget along with the other café proposal. The young participants were getting tired, and one of them yawned just as the meeting took an unexpected turn. Out of the blue, the head of district asked whether the girls were in favour of or against the café in Hilldale. She repeated the question several times, stressing her question and confusing the participants. Finally, they responded *'no'*, and the head of district repeated, as if to make sure, *'So you do not object to the café in Hilldale'*, laughed and looked towards her colleagues.

The other proposals followed in a similar way, and the meeting ended at 17:47 after almost three hours, following a full day at school for the young participants. Still, the head of district continued talking about the proposals to the head teacher and the Hilldale youth worker. She told them that her favourite suggestion was a suggestion to have an adult with whom young people could share concerns in school.

She was thinking out loud about the possibilities to realize the proposal, and the general chatter stopped. She kept talking about it at length with the head teacher, asking whether the school could employ a youth worker for this purpose. The head teacher answered that unfortunately they could not do that. Effectively the head of district blocked the other participants from leaving the meeting, which had just ended, by bringing up the least popular suggestion for discussion, even though other, more popular proposals had been discarded. She had used her authority to gatekeep throughout the meeting, and then finally attempted to bypass the six-month democratic process through the use of her authority.

The continuous scene-switching was a challenge to the young participants. The youth workers tried to encourage and facilitate the discussion by adding clarifications when needed, making the meeting more approachable for the young. But there was only so much they could do when the other adults got started with questions on insurance or business models. Although the participants had been welcomed with a statement that the meeting would be a chance for the young to speak, the discussions ended up being dominated by adults. The questions they posed were often not relatable for the young participants due to their age and the role they had expected to be in. The adults often voiced the expectation that young people in general, and the participants presenting the initiatives in particular, should personally commit themselves to the initiatives they presented. Some of them managed to resist having words put into their mouths, but many did not.

A similar observation is made by Luhtakallio and Mustaranta (2017:28–42) in their book on democracy in a poor Finnish suburb. Whenever inhabitants requested improvements to the neighbourhood from local authorities, the response was to organize a work party rather than instructing civil servants to take care of the issue. The authors suggest that civil servants would never propose to inhabitants of a wealthy area that they should join a work party in order to fix problems in the neighbourhood. The city has good intentions when arranging participatory opportunities, but since civil servants do not imagine themselves in the shoes of the locals or recognize the validity of the claims they are making, participation remains tokenistic, and inhabitants stay in their roles as bystanders to the public decision-making process.

In terms of framing and style, the executive meeting in Oceanview in 2016 was something else. Since the start of the RuutiBudjetti participatory budgeting in 2013, there had rarely been any talk about money, budgets or a comparison of costs and alternatives. However, a glimpse of opportunity was visible during this meeting. Three young participants, two youth workers and the head of district were present

for the meeting, as it commenced comfortably within working hours at one o'clock in the afternoon.

The proposals were presented to the district director, and she asked the participants to define what the youth department should do in terms of them. She made offers of how much time and money she could commit to the various suggestions from her resources in the department. At no stage were young people either implicitly or explicitly expected to carry out these initiatives, only to define their execution.

While the gatekeeping was mainly done by adults in Hilldale, the configuration of players in Oceanview had the head of district acting more in the role of an enabler, giving information about available funds and offering helpful suggestions, while one participant in particular acted as a gatekeeper. While gatekeeping and claim-making at their most fundamental level describe a relationship of discourse and power, they are also culturally informed expressions of the types of speech and action that are perceived to be acceptable in a specific situation.

6.5 Subjecting to the empowerment style

This chapter opened with an account of the most popular suggestions from the Oceanview and Hilldale participatory budgets and how they had fared in the school vote. Most of the proposals could be described as technical fixes to everyday problems. Some suggestions from Oceanview extended beyond this level of commonality to deal with issues of inequality and building community, although they did not gain much support in the school votes. As such, participants mostly engaged in the role of consumers evaluating and developing public services. While this can be a useful approach to local youth work development, framing the participatory budget as a right and responsibility would be closer to the original intention of participatory budgeting. It could also help solve problems related to parents and schools regulating access to participation. One can say, due to its restrictions, that the participatory budget in Helsinki at its most fundamental level is a youth work practice, rather than an attempt to introduce empowered participatory governance (Fung & Wright 2003; Baiocchi & Ganuza 2014). This can be illustrated by an event at one of the school votes. While a local youth worker was explaining the voting procedure when a student unexpectedly stood up and exclaimed: *'Surprise, surprise, the youth understand something, and they know how to read too. Could we just vote?'* That the speaker was not afraid to stand up and make his remark – and that none of the others

present wished to challenge him or speak in favour of the youth workers – confirms a tension in interactions between youth workers and young people (Boldt 2018; Goffman 1967:27). This tension is brought about by patronizing attitudes, such as referring to the young as children and expecting them to sit still and keep quiet until they are given permission to act. While somewhat of an edge case in terms of agonistic exchange in the participatory budget, it exemplifies how the participatory budget, with its top-down organization and youth worker-led implementation, was something young people were subjected to rather than engaged in.

Generalizing, one can say that Hilldale participants showed a high commitment to the process as long as it seemed useful for the neighbourhood and the people in it. The familiarity between the participants and the youth workers was an important factor in establishing the bonds that guaranteed attentive participation. A framing of the participatory budget was keyed in which tight geographical and mental boundaries limited the ways in which participants could imagine a different world. Since the participatory budget rarely managed to attract Hilldale youth out of their neighbourhood to events at which they could meet with new people and together develop their ideas for a better world, the outreach and potential for political socialization and transformative experiences remained low. Some participants – most notably the three girls attending the citywide negotiations – expressed sentiments about having potentially life-changing experiences, but many others remained in the role of bystanders or spectators, unable to alter the outcome of the drama that unfolded. On the other hand, youth in Oceanview were keyed by the youth department to enlarge their perspective from their immediate surroundings. Combined with their skill sets and experiences, this drove them to a more civic and individualistic style of participation. For most of them, however, participatory budgeting was largely irrelevant, in terms of the style of engagement and the available opportunities. Most of them chose to vote with their feet, exiting the scene, while some used their skills to gain influence over the outcome of the process.

The strongest contrast between the two field sites was how popular participatory budgeting was in Hilldale compared with Oceanview. I suggest that the reason for this difference can be found in how participants related to the scene of participation that was offered by the Helsinki city youth department. The resonance of a framing can be described as its perceived usefulness. If a framing resonates for some people but not for others, what causes this difference? This study identified two central reasons for why the overarching empowerment style (Eliasoph 2011:2–8) of the budgeting process was reasonably well received in Hilldale but seemed out of place with students in Oceanview.

First, the scene style in Hilldale consisted of strong interpersonal bonds between participants and youth workers, boundaries that underlined the villagelike setting and isolation of Hilldale from larger contexts, and norms of action and speech that aligned with the non-formal learning approach to empowerment that youth workers directed. Local participants complied with the empowerment style almost out of habitude, the neighbourhood having been on the receiving end of welfare policy measures almost for the total time of its existence. Conversely, this style of engagement failed to attract any wider interest in Oceanview. This mismatch became most apparent when participants engaged in an individualist style, or when they opposed the way in which they were expected to participate through counter-conduct. The distinctive attributes of the style of engagement in Oceanview can be summarized as the skilled use of multiple registers of language and imagination, and the lack of collective aspirations or a locally defined identity.

Second, the perceived utility of the process was much greater in a neighbourhood where the youth centre was the central place to spend free time. Since few young people from Oceanview spent their free time at the youth centre, and the local school did not afford the process high status, participation appeared irrelevant, and attendance was low. After all, the benefit one can reap from spending time deliberating over youth work investments is limited unless one uses those youth work services.

On one hand, the events in the two neighbourhoods shared a common structure but keyed different conceptions of what was appropriate and desired interaction in the scene. On the other, neighbourhood attributes such as access to services, closeness to the city centre with its wealth of opportunities, and the social and economic class of inhabitants (Savage 2015) meant that participants had very different reference points for political participation, consumption and general life aspirations.

Participatory budgeting has become a central aspect of youth work in Helsinki. Some districts have had more time to develop successful praxis than others; some youth workers are very engaged in developing participation, while for others it is just one more thing to get done. Participatory budgeting can pinpoint where local investments are needed and allows youth workers to plan their work at the youth centres according to the wishes of young people. However, since there is no feedback or reporting on how decisions made through participatory budgeting have actually been implemented, participants are unable to formulate long-term strategies and political goals.

In conclusion, the participatory budgeting process for youth in Helsinki engages participants primarily in a style of empowerment. This approach is helpful for reaching those that are rarely included otherwise, but it misrecognizes the needs of those that have strong capacities for public functioning. Moreover, the participatory budget could be better at bringing people who do not normally meet together for deliberation and discussion. Practising participation only on the level of the neighbourhood seems to reduce the likelihood of momentous occasions that shift bonds, habits, thoughts and plans among participants and come to matter in their later lives (Goffman 2018:12–15).

7 DISCUSSION

This thesis has approached Finnish political culture through a study of two different kinds of institutional youth participation policies: municipal youth councils and neighbourhood-level participatory budgeting. Both policies are thought to strengthen democracy by instilling cohorts of young people with civic virtues while letting them decide on things that are important in their lives. This chapter proceeds to discuss the findings in relation to the theoretical framework. A general discussion of the scenes of participation precedes a more in-depth discussion of the specific scene styles and interactional dynamics encountered during fieldwork.

Municipal youth councils exist in nearly every Finnish municipality, and some of them have done so for more than 20 years. They are based on the traditional social-corporate model of organized expert stakeholders representing civil society. With increasing calls for popular inclusion in the democratic process, youth councils have been complemented by the introduction of participatory budgeting in several cities. In the first case, a representative liberal conception of the public sphere, elected representatives participate in a structure based on the hierarchies and logic of the local governance apparatus. Debates are characterized by composed and ceremonious discussion, an adherence to procedure, and the intention to reach closure rather than prolonging debates to find common ground. In the second case, informed by participatory and discursive democratic theory, participation is open and supported by targeted recruitment in schools and youth centres. The participatory budgeting process is characterized by empowerment, deliberation and consensus-based decisions. These normative differences in terms of inclusion, discursive style and closure (Ferree et al. 2002; Fung 2006) offer a snapshot of the ongoing global change in governance practice and political culture – a change of direction that promotes participatory and discursive styles of democratic participation (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2017) over a representative liberal conception of the public sphere. This has study examined political culture across this cleavage.

Following Clifford Geertz's (1973) definition of culture as structures of meaning, and taking politics as one of the principal arenas in which these structures publicly unfold, this study has set out to examine political culture in interaction (Eliasoph & Lichterman 2003) by drawing attention to the scene styles or patterned ways in which

actors coordinate action as they participate (Lichterman & Eliasoph 2014:800), and the civic imaginations (Baiocchi et al. 2016) they express in these settings. This interpretation is broadened by the complementary analysis of the scenes of participation by relating the circumstances of the participatory occasions and their institutional framing to the interactional observations.

Various benchmarks have been suggested in order to establish how democratic participatory democracy is, but these dichotomous scales of democratic legitimacy versus tokenism are insufficient to describe the results of the empirical findings of this study. Operationalizing resonance as an attribute that describes the effectiveness of a scene style in reaching the intended actors, and transforming their civic capacities, turns the focus onto how situated cultures affect the outcomes of democratic participation.

This thesis has two central research questions: what participants do and learn through institutional youth participation and how culture informs the ways in which young people make sense of these opportunities to participate. This discussion leans on the previously expressed theoretical framework and its tools for analysing the framing of the participatory opportunity, the observed scene of participation, and the style of interaction in this scene. While the following discussion is partly comparative, I am not striving for normative explanations or juxtaposing utopian ideals against observed reality; rather, I am reaching for an interpretative analysis (Reed 2011; Luhtakallio 2015). By leaning on a plurality of theoretical references, the theoretical framework is designed to strengthen and deepen the understanding of the contextual variables in institutional participation and how they work alongside each other to produce a diversity of outcomes.

The fields, arenas or scenes of engagement under study fall under the umbrella of institutional youth participation. In the language of public governance, they are also commonly referred to as practices of participatory democracy. This is understandable from the point of view of public governance law: youth participants can hardly be involved in representative democracy, since the institutional forms of doing politics in which they engage often lack the political and economic power of representative democratic structures. Nevertheless, the central characteristic of participatory democracy is the popular inclusion of anyone, compared with the elite dominance, expertise and proportionality that are hallmarks of representative modes of democracy (Ferree et al. 2002:316). That being so, the youth council can hardly be characterized as participatory democracy, whereas participatory budgeting with its low threshold for participation certainly ticks the box of popular inclusion. Moreover, the emphasis on empowerment, consensus and deliberation in the

participatory budget clearly distinguishes it from the detached civility and closure-oriented process of the youth council.

Fung (2006) suggests a typology of varieties of participation in complex governance. It brings into focus three aspects of participation: who participates, their authority and power, and the mode of communication and decision-making that is utilized. In Fung's democracy cube (ibid.:71), the participatory budget could be described as a variety of participation with open participation, direct authority over local youth work budgets, and a mode of communication based on deliberation and negotiation. If we consider the youth council through the same schema, participants are elected as lay stakeholders, authority is largely limited to communicative influence, and the mode of communication is on the level of developing preferences. It is not the intention here to evaluate practices of institutional youth participation, but simply to show the differences that these approaches entail. Moreover, this is not to say that participatory budgeting affords all participants the same level of influence, or that individual members of the youth council cannot access higher degrees of authority or more involved levels of decision-making; on the contrary, it is a simple reflection of the institutionally set boundaries for action.

While the youth council elections can principally be defended as ensuring representativity in selection, the observed election process makes the youth council less representative than random selection would achieve. Voting is mandatory in school years seven to nine, favouring the election of those age groups. Turnout in secondary schools is much lower, and nearly non-existent in vocational schools; consequently, fewer people attending these schools get elected.

Continuing the analysis of these scenes of engagement, I now turn to the resources, patterns and properties of the occasions themselves, following the framework proposed by Wynn (2016). The youth council plays host to tightly controlled events with limited access and defined roles, while the participatory budget is a mix of events with varying levels of access – for instance, the introductory event and school votes are open to anyone, but participants self-select to attend workshops and the executive committee. While both methods of youth participation have repetitive cycles, the youth council members get selected for a two-year mandate, compared with the six months or so that the participatory budgeting takes. Additionally, the participatory budget is porous in the sense that participants keep flowing into and out of the process, contrasting with the closedness and high density of commitment on the youth council. In terms of resources, as both the youth council and the participatory budget are organized by youth departments, they have the potential to operationalize similar physical assets. What sets them apart in terms

of resources is that the participatory budget does have direct influence over some share of budgetary allocations, while the youth council, due to its history and the type of young people engaged in it, has access to a larger gamut of human, social and symbolic resources, although it is not clear that this offers any direct benefit in respect of more influence.

If we compare the participatory budgeting in the two neighbourhoods, there was a clear difference in the human resources that could be summoned. In Hilldale participating seemed to be very matter-of-fact, while in Oceanview youth workers struggled to find participants. Another difference by design was that the youth council was more likely to bring together people that did not meet on other social occasions, causing them to face and adapt to new situations. In the participatory budget, participants were often classmates; the exception was the citywide negotiations in the participatory budget, which brought together representatives from all over Helsinki to discuss and evaluate each other's proposals. Confirming Goffman's (2018) notion of the prerequisites for transformative moments, this event played host to insights and reactions in some of the participants that seemed to fundamentally change the way they thought and felt about their project.

A final aspect of analysis concerning the occasions of participation is their turbulence (Wynn 2016), or the range of scripted and unscripted activity occurring in connection with them. As the chapter on the youth council describes, unscripted action was generally frowned upon and sanctioned in the youth council. Therefore, youth council meetings were relatively low-turbulence occasions. Likewise, the Hilldale participatory budget had little turbulence. Sometimes participants could be inattentive, but otherwise they tended to play along. The participatory budget in Oceanview stands out in this regard. There, the discontinuity of the process stood out, participants provokingly questioned the usefulness of the participatory budget, and made fun of aspects that did not make sense to them.

To sum up, the youth council was more likely to thrust participants into the kinds of scenes that hold transformative potential, but the non-inclusive nature of its events, and its failure to acknowledge and celebrate the intersectionality of its members, caused a mainstreaming of the core activists, most of whom had already been competent in their capacity to engage in the public sphere before becoming members. On the other hand, the empowerment narrative, youth work approach, and familiarity of the participatory budget, engaged youth who would probably not have a voice or choose to participate under other circumstances. That being so, both methods of institutional youth participation turned out to be inclusive of some groups and exclusive of others.

Returning to Goffman's discussion on transformative experience (2018) this study reinforced the understanding that the more activities bring together usually dispersed people into dramatic interactions, discussing the things that matter to them and putting themselves in the shoes of others in a respectful way, the more likely they are to trigger fundamental changes in participants.

Yet the transformation of capacities is not solely about having access to specific occasions; there is a temporal quality (McAdam & Sewell 2001) to it as well. Some youth council members only decided to commit themselves after many others had drawn their own conclusions and dropped out. Nevertheless, as with the participatory budget, these momentous occasions were few and far between. This suggests that more effort should be put into considering how to encourage bursts of change in the lives of those who attend participatory occasions.

When participants find reasons to commit themselves to these processes, they align with the scene style. However, when the resonance of the style is weak or lost, so is the commitment. The youth council scene style is constructed and maintained by council members in the core of the council. The main limit to political pluralism and wide inclusion in the youth council, in addition to the election procedure, is that the scene style mainly attracts those with ambitions to enter the world of politics. The membership would be likely to diversify if the youth council were given some real political authority.

On the other hand, participatory budgeting, conducted in the style of top-down empowerment, fails to engage participants in the wealthy area of Oceanview because these participants do not have much to gain from participation. The projects that do get support in the vote are often changed or deleted once they reach the executive committee, a symptom of the non-existent bonds of community or collective action, further decreasing the legitimacy of the process. Meanwhile, in Hilldale educators and youth workers actively use the process as a method for capacity-building and planting a civic mindset. Attendance and turnout are high, and participants identify realistic goals as well as dreams with large support in the community. Commitment only starts failing when participants are expected to go outside the boundaries of their own neighbourhood, or when meetings and discussions become endless without visible advancement of their projects.

These scenes hosted different styles of interaction, partly due to their structural and procedural character, but also because of the institutional framing they were given. This was mainly visible in how most members of the youth council stopped attending meetings before the end of their term as they found out that the scene did not correspond to their expectations. These expectations were based on the

institutional framing that was offered by the Neartown youth department and core members of the youth council. In the case of the participatory budgets, a local variance was keyed through the ways in which participants were encouraged to engage with society. In Hilldale participants were urged to focus on very local issues, while in Oceanview the perspective was wider. As a result, the civic imaginations utilized in Hilldale were concerned with local services and provisions, casting participants in the roles of consumers, while some participants in Oceanview used a wider range of approaches. Although the Neartown youth council is at odds with current trends in governance that favour popular inclusion, it managed to trigger civic imaginations and engage groups of participants that the participatory budgets largely failed to include. The youth council engaged in discussions that were ongoing in the public sphere, whether they concerned gender-neutral bathrooms, young people in foster care, or unequal access to municipal services. In comparison, the successful proposals in the participatory budgets in Hilldale and Oceanview were never political in the sense of having a moral dimension of contention.

The next two sections summarize the main interactional findings of the empirical cases.

7.1 An apprenticeship in politics

The youth council membership is characterized by a cleavage between those that occupy central positions of influence and those that do not. A committed community of 10–15 persons connected by interpersonal bonds and shared obligations develops. They recounted experiences of self-transformation, but also disappointment and frustration over the limited influence of the youth council. The benefit for most of them was personal: learning to confidently participate in political debates, and establishing connections to the world that the youth council could give access to. Examples ranged from visiting other youth councils for their Independence Day reception, attending meetings and events at locations with strong symbolic status such as the House of the Estates or the national parliament, meeting with politicians, and travelling to youth events abroad. All of these are important experiences for individuals loyal to the idea of liberal democracy, preparing them for an active life (Arendt 1958). Nevertheless, the youth council is not a very efficient method for strengthening the political efficacy of young people. Its elections eliminate hopefuls that lack the skills and capacities needed for a successful campaign and a majority of those elected never reap the individual benefits of becoming a

youth council representative. For them, the framing of the youth council starts to lose resonance as they realize the promise of influence was exaggerated and they fail to find other reasons to commit themselves. Nearly half of the elected youth council representatives disengaged during the first year, leaving a group whose bonds become tighter as more representatives stop showing up for meetings.

Group bonds within the youth council are established among members with a shared sense of obligations towards running the day-to-day business of the council. Belonging to this group is checked by a restriction to include only those people that want to work on similar issues in similar ways, creating a metaphorical home or safe haven that excludes those with uncomfortable or alien ways of looking at things (Ackelsberg 1996; Reagon 2000). These group bonds strengthen commitment among those that are included in the home community, while othering those outside that community, polarizing the representatives between those with obligations towards the council and motives to commit themselves, and those without. This dichotomy affects the inclusion and exclusion of representatives through the flow of information, collegiality and political support when they are running for positions. For about a quarter of its members, the youth council is a successful school for learning how to do politics, a gateway to a world of active citizenship, and an apprenticeship in the skills and courage needed to stake out a place of one's own in the public sphere. For the rest, it is a dead end on their path to somewhere else where they can express their immanent civic engagement. Although some council members express classic descriptions of self-transformation, it is worth noting that most of the individuals that engage in the youth council are not politically poor, to use James Bohman's (1997) expression for individuals that lack a capacity for public functioning. In other words, a dissonant scene style is more likely to lead participants to look for other opportunities for their civic action, rather than leaving them cynical, disenchanted and with a lack of trust in the political system.

The boundaries, or shared set of references for how the group relates to, or is distinct from, other individuals and groups (Eliasoph & Lichterman 2003), are distinguished by an agonistic position vis-à-vis adults that get involved with the youth council in unwanted ways. Examples range from politicians and journalists that publicly portray the youth council in a negative light, to teachers and civil servants that botch election procedures. Boundaries are also constructed against behaviour that is considered bad form for youth council representatives, such as destroying election materials or neglecting obligations.

Action and speech norms are used as a source of power to control newcomers and to consolidate bonds and boundaries within the council. Since authority is

mostly customary, based on experience, playing along is often the path of least resistance to positions of influence. The circle of people at the core of the youth council always includes members with experience from previous years, giving the style its continuity.

The voice of youth in Neartown is not very well heard outside of the youth council meetings. Motions sent by the youth council to the city are rarely successful, and their influence is mainly communicative, with results typically taking years to show. However, the initiatives cover a wide repertoire of civic imaginations, from foster care policies to gender-neutral bathrooms and zoning proposals.

In the case of youth councils, youth participation should not be confused with participatory democracy. The youth council that was observed for this research is closer to the normative standards of representative democracy, and for this reason the experience has served many council members well in their political careers. Some of its members describe warm recollections of how the youth council transformed their lives. Meanwhile, members that dropped out of the youth council found a scene style that was dissonant with their expectations of the youth council; but rather than sticking with it or completely losing the motivation to engage in civic action, they decided to invest their energies elsewhere, such as a political party or a much-loved free-time activity.

7.2 Not everyone fits the mould

In principle, participatory budgeting is arranged in the same way in all districts of Helsinki, but in practice local differences in style affect the outcome. The ways in which claims are voiced and a different world is imagined are inherently cultural responses, based on how actors make sense of the scene (Goffman 1986). Most proposals deal with everyday problems faced by youth, such as establishing places where young people can mingle and interact without feeling threatened or bothered, turning the public image of youth as an unpredictable nuisance into something more positive, preventing bullying, and getting help with everyday problems.

However, what set the scene styles apart in Hilldale and Oceanview are the tight social bonds in a villagelike suburb where most youth meet at the youth centre after school, and the looser fabric of social life in a city neighbourhood with its wider social variety and opportunities. Additionally, youth workers in the two areas key different versions of a common framing, producing local versions of the process

that give participants in the two locations quite different interpretations of what they are expected to do.

First, the proposals from Oceanview engage youth with adult institutions, and position young people in contexts such as consuming cultural services, visiting shopping centres, working, participating in city planning, doing journalism, and exhibiting art. Hilldale proposals show a more modest aspiration to live an ordinary middle-class life: spending time with friends at a youth café with upcycled furniture, gathering for LAN tournaments[18], and having access to better publicly funded sports facilities. Second, in Hilldale strong bonds to the neighbourhood are evident in how school votes focus on local initiatives, and in youth workers' reminders to act in the interests of the neighbourhood. Conversely, participants in Oceanview do not show any commitment to collective action. Instead, the ties they express are with issue-based engagements and self-actualization.

Last, in terms of repertoires of action, Oceanview participants use counter-conduct and scene-switching as a source of power, while in Hilldale dissonance is mainly displayed through rebellious differentiation (Willis 1978:63) and by reverting to the position of bystanders. Additionally, while most proposals at both field sites can be described as technical solutions to everyday problems, proposals dealing with structural injustice and community are exclusively voiced in Oceanview.

In two consecutive years, participants from Hilldale mainly directed their efforts towards creating a youth café in Hilldale. The café engaged a committed group around a shared objective with wide support among their peers. In Oceanview, the locals were less enthusiastic; participation was low, and without much coherence in ambition or style between the various steps of the process. As Oceanview is a neighbourhood connected by all sorts of public transport to the city centre, with close access to a myriad of options for free-time activities, the youth centre does not connect young people in the area; if anything, it singles out the individuals that engage with the local youth workers. Naturally, the significance of having a say on what the youth department should do is greater in locations where the youth centre is the primary site for spending free time. If one does not spend one's free time with youth workers, the incentive to plan youth events with them is limited.

In both years of fieldwork, the most popular suggestions in Oceanview proposed cheaper fees to the young. Both this proposal and the one for a youth café in Hilldale proved to be difficult to expedite. The only initiatives that were likely to become reality through the process of participatory budgeting were small ones that could be

18 A gathering of people with the purpose of playing multiplayer video games together.

realized within a €3000 budget at the local youth centre. Anything else was sent to some other branch of administration to masticate perpetually.

In Hilldale, the scene style is marked by close communal bonds, with locals describing their place of residence as villagelike. Their neighbourhood forms a boundary and moving outside of it requires negotiations with different authorities. Their interaction in the budgeting process is mostly defined through a humble and solemn attitude of purposeful civic action. On the other hand, in Oceanview there is insignificant coherence of action within the process, largely due to a low cohesion of participant voices from the area, and perhaps exacerbated by the wide geographical boundaries of the participants. The significance of one's own neighbourhood decreases if access to everywhere else is easy and fast. Additionally, a tense boundary exists between locals and the youth department. The school is not as supportive of the process as the school in Hilldale, and few young locals are youth centre regulars. Participants propose silly things such as Scooby-Doo bouncy castles or eating competitions, and unilateral decisions to neglect or oppose work done in prior steps of the process are common. This is possibly only because participants in Oceanview usually do not stay committed to advancing anything beyond one meeting.

The participatory budgeting process in Helsinki is an inclusive opportunity for young people to improve their neighbourhoods. This is explicitly a more pluralistic participatory initiative than youth councils with their 'elite' youth and party cadres. Participating in mass events does not require the courage needed to run for public election; reducing the expected length of commitment from years to hours lowers the threshold for engagement; and focusing on tangible, local issues, rather than the general and abstract, increases the number of people that can envisage a project within the framework for participation. Fluid, short-lived commitments do seem to attract more interest among young people today than the more traditional alternatives for civil society engagement. On the other hand, limiting real influence to small adjustments in the local budgets of the youth department, and relying stylistically on an approach of youth empowerment, does not heed the changing aspirations and identities of contemporary youth (Harris 2015:66–69).

A central understanding of democratic participation is that participation is an empowering experience that transforms individuals into active citizens (Pateman 1970; Mansbridge 1999; Ferree et al. 2002), giving them the capacities needed for adequate public functioning (Bohman 1997). Participation functions as a school of democracy in which individuals gain the capacities needed for adequate public functioning and become better, more public-spirited citizens (ibid.; Elkin & Soltan

1999). Empirical evidence shows that many of the projects that are labelled participatory are not, when those participating are not able to affect the outcomes of the processes. Criticism formulated by deliberative and constructivist approaches suggests that participation does not always give room to a plurality of voices, leading to cynicism, resistance and the reproduction of oppression (Berger 2016; Ferree et al. 2002; Hill et al. 2004; Meriluoto 2018a; Talpin 2011). The empirical findings presented in this thesis recount experiences of transformation and capacity-building, but also tales of cynicism, counter-conduct and the reproduction of privilege. However, digging through these superficial layers reveals deeper insights about institutional youth participation. The next chapter concludes this thesis by casting off onto the sea of interpretation.

8 CONCLUSION

What are young people doing and learning when they engage with institutional youth participation? What motivates their actions? How does participation affect them, and does it socialize them into competent and active citizens with democratic ideals? These are some of the themes touched upon in this thesis. Centrally, this study has recognized two scene styles of engagement, although other scene styles can certainly be found in different contexts. The empowerment style (Eliasoph 2011) was mostly present in the process of participatory budgeting, while an individualist style (Harris 2015; Bennett 2012) was prominent in the youth council. The first was shaped by an ethos of training young people to become active citizens, while the second was formed by the societal shift towards individualized political participation. In the youth council, this style of participation was coupled with a confidence in civic repertoires, a knowledge of ongoing discussions, claims and movements occupying the public sphere, and a sensitivity to the recognition of discursive opportunities. Participants regarded their engagement in the youth council as one choice in the larger context of life aspirations, and their individualist style of engagement was characterized by the dynamic identities, involvement in individual rather than collective action, and fluid commitments described by Harris (2015:88) as characteristic of the new biography of citizenship.

Over the course of my fieldwork, it became apparent that individual commitment to a scene style was dependent on finding the right one. A method of participation that works well for some people will make no sense to others, and vice versa. When the scene aligns with personal traits, repertoires and ambitions, it resonates, leading to a sustained interest in participation. The resonant quality of a scene is not the same across neighbourhoods, cohorts or socio-economic classes; nor are the styles in which these scenes are engaged in.

The participatory budget is designed to engage latent, previously unheard voices by corralling young people in schools to participate in a predesigned, youth-friendly invitation to have a say. According to Eliasoph (2011:2-8), empowerment projects promote civic engagement in a safe, family like atmosphere of intimacy, transforming the identities of the participants by giving them a sense of competency and confidence. Consider the contrast with the youth council, with its bottom-up

organization, elected representatives, formal procedures and exclusive conception of home. Youth council members were not figuring out that they could be engaged in civil society, but rather how they wanted to engage in a scene style motivated by a spirit of self-actualization and personal development. While the two styles – empowerment and individualism – largely defined interaction in the scenes of participation studied here, individuals regularly engaged in these scenes with digressive styles, either due to misrecognition or as a strategic move in the continuous renegotiation of the established scene style.

A common understanding of successful versus unsuccessful participation is the dichotomy between transformative, empowering and influential participation on one hand and tokenistic, disenchanting externality on the other. However, this dichotomy of outcomes turns a blind eye to individuals who have a high capacity for civic functioning to begin with. It is also a simplification that disregards some features of institutional youth participation that are decidedly undemocratic. When someone with a high capacity of public functioning finds an institutional youth participation opportunity that resonates with their interests, the participatory policies end up strengthening their accumulation of political, cultural and social capital. On the other hand, when these individuals find themselves in a scene that does not resonate with them, it does not make them feel external to the public sphere. On the contrary, this study found them leaving the scene to find another one with a better fit while remaining loyal to the general style of engagement, in this case liberal democracy. Unfortunately, this tendency of people to enjoy the calm waters of safe havens, or the confinement of their metaphorical homes, leads to the loss of social cohesion and empathy for those whose situations differ from one's own, and a polarization of the civic sphere.

By considering the influence of scene style on participation, this research proposes that outcomes of democratic participation and the variance in engagement can be categorized according to the following figure.

Table 4. Alternative outcomes of participation.

	Strong scene resonance	**Weak scene resonance**
Individualist style of engagement	Accumulation	Exit
Empowerment style of engagement	Transformation	Externality

The above table illustrates how the interrelation between styles of engagement and the resonance of a scene brings about four different outcomes, each affecting participants in a different way. Scenes refer to the institutional practices of youth participation and the meanings they are given. Style denotes the way participants expect, or are expected, to engage in those scenes. Hence, scene styles are situated styles of interaction, informed by the framing and structures of the scene, and shaped by cultural rules of interaction. The dominant scene style of the participatory budget can be characterized as that of empowerment projects; many participants, particularly in Hilldale, aligned with this style without much coaxing. Nonetheless, some participants, most notably in Oceanview, switched their style of engagement into the individualist register. Likewise, the general scene style in the youth council was individualist, but some participants entered the scene with the expectation of engaging in an empowerment style; a share of them had a transformative experience, and consequently appropriated an individualist style of engagement.

Externality refers here to the role of a spectator described by Rancière (2007), quoted in the introduction of this thesis. Externality implies the Kafkaesque circumstance where an actor is separated from the capacity of knowing just how they are separated from the possibility of acting. Empowerment projects are supposed to counter feelings of externality, but when their resonance is lost, they end up strengthening the feeling of externality. Making participation available is not enough; it has to be useful too. As Schudson (1989:162) posits, *'a cultural object or cultural information is more economically retrievable if it is cheaper for people to retrieve'*, implying that commitment to something like participatory budgeting or youth councils comes at the price of omitting possible side bets – that is, the benefits of participation need to outweigh its drawbacks.

A resonant scene of empowerment is likely to bring about a transformation of civic skills in participants. But as Goffman (2018) sets out, individuals have unequal access to the momentous occasions that may function as turning points in life. This underlines the oft repeated idea that humans have differing skills, capacities, family circumstances, life situations and the like (e.g. Bohman 1997; Hill et al. 2004), affecting their capacity to act in various ways.

Apart from unequal access to turning points, institutional youth participation produces alienation from the democratic ideal through the over-involvement of some actors and the under-involvement of others. Youth councils, with their close adherence to parliamentary procedures and reliance on the self-actualization of their members, are excessively resonant for groups of people who participate for individualistic reasons and have the capacity to engage in the public sphere.

Meanwhile, the under-representation – because of insufficiently resonant empowerment projects – of groups with a marginal voice in society enforces their externality. This is problematic from a normative viewpoint of democracy, because these policies seem to systematically reinforce a structural bias in political participation that popular inclusion is thought to resolve.

Youth councils and participatory budgets correspond to two opposed conceptions of democracy: one in which stakeholders advocate the interests of a group they represent, and another where participation in public decision-making is the right of everyone. The youth council is an adaptation of existing political structures – an arrangement that has been criticized for producing the political elites and disinterested citizens that plague Western democracies. In contrast, participatory budgeting is touted as a model of best practice, giving those with little previous influence over public spending a place in a process of deliberation that is thought to instil them with empathy and respect for the needs and wishes of others.

Both these approaches are intended to provide compliance with the legal requirement to provide youth with opportunities to participate in matters that concern them. This study has found a youth council closely aligned with the normative criteria for representative democracy, rather than those of participatory and discursive practices based on popular inclusion (Ferree et al. 2002). It allows participants to hone their practical skills in doing politics, but a certain capacity for public functioning (Bohman 1997) – a combination of knowledge, attitudes, skills and resources – is needed to reach this opportunity. While the participatory budget is organized in a spirit of popular democracy, its actual influence is largely limited to directing youth workers in how to spend small amounts of money on projects in the youth centre. Considering the high share of technical solutions to everyday problems produced by both of these approaches, it appears this is the way young people expect and/or are expected to engage in institutional youth participation.

This study has shown through ethnographic description what young people engaging in institutional youth participation do, and what kinds of lessons about democracy they learn. In addition, it has shown how scene styles in youth participation guide interaction and impact on societal conceptions of democracy. Finally, the culturally informed meanings young people ascribe to scenes of participation have been operationalized through the concept of resonance.

This research fills a knowledge gap by demonstrating that the binary between an individual with low skills and capacities and a transformed individual with adequate capacity for public functioning is a simplified understanding of what triggers life-altering experiences. Participation alone will not produce Tocqueville's active

citizens. Nonetheless, by adapting the approach to analysing transformative experiences suggested by Goffman (2018), this research has identified characteristics of youth participation and background variables that make these life-changing moments more likely. Likewise, this study has shown that the outcomes of institutional youth participation cannot be organized on a scale from the marginalized to the empowered: the actual societal effects are more multifaceted. By recognizing four outcomes of engagement, and how they relate to styles of interaction on one hand and the resonance of the scene on the other, this research has provided a novel heuristic for the study of interaction. Further, this study has developed the notion of scene styles by utilizing the tools and approaches developed within frame analysis to improve our understanding of scenes and the meanings people give them.

This study was conducted in the Helsinki metropolitan area of Finland, and the case selection was designed to offer the widest selection of practices and circumstances that was practically achievable within the geographical limits, time and resources that were available to me. It does not make any claim that institutional youth participation looks like this everywhere in Finland, or anywhere else in the world for that matter. In addition, the evident strength and weakness of participant observation is its reliance on the gaze of the researcher for the empirical data collection upon which the interpretation is built. Nevertheless, it has been the intention to provide the reader with sufficient detail in the description to make a fair assessment of the claims.

Over the course of working on this project, I identified two issues in need of further research. First, perceptibly disabled participants were never observed over the course of this fieldwork, and disabled students were repeatedly obstructed from participating in one Neartown school. It seems that disabled youth are rarely offered the same opportunities for civic engagement as their peers, and further research should be carried out on the topic. Second, an intersectional analysis of institutional youth participation would help us to better understand the disadvantages faced by those categorized on the basis of their class, race or gender. Both are challenges that need to be faced and solved before current legal ideals can become practice.

Considering the global moment in which popular democracy has become a de facto paradigm of public governance, it is important not only to rethink institutional design from a normative point of view, but also to reflect on how participants make sense of the offer to participate. Likewise, if participatory opportunities are seen as gateways to transformative experiences, they should be designed in ways that make this more likely. All the same, one should not lose sight of the primary objective of

citizen participation: increased influence on policies and decision-making. The takeaway is that people will find different participatory venues relevant for their own interests. The common policy objectives that call for participatory democracy – inclusion, political efficacy and social cohesion – will not be achieved through one opportunity to participate, but through many.

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