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Summary

Citizenship as a craft
Youth Councils in the Netherlands
For several years citizen involvement has been the focus of politics and science. Policy officials have undertaken several attempts to increase citizen involvement but these have demonstrated little success according to a study conducted by the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WWR) (Knottnerus et al., 2012). Based on this study, the government was advised to expand existing initiatives, and to renew and welcome new initiatives.

Youth councils are broadening practices for policy participation, so that young people can also participate in decision-making processes alongside adults. Furthermore, youth councils can contribute to the innovation of practices that involve the citizenship of young people as a central priority. Citizenship now receives a prominent place in the school curriculum, while impact studies on the effect of citizenship programmes to date are inconclusive (Geboers et al., 2013, p.158). However, research shows that group meetings in the Netherlands (Verhoeven, 2012, p.191) and school councils in Denmark (Print et al., 2002; Giroux, 1989) are of importance for the formation of a democratic community and the citizenship of young people. This is reason to investigate whether citizenship of young people also have a place in youth councils. At the same time, local youth councils now relate more to creating and securing participation opportunities for young people and hardly to youth citizenship. The manner in which youth councils can become relevant to youth citizenship is still a knowledge gap. To fill this gap is the main question of this research: what is the significance of youth councils in the citizenship of young people? This main question is divided into three sub-questions:

1. To what extent are youth councils representative of young people living in a municipality?
2. Which objectives connect youth, counsellors and policy officials to youth councils?
3. What working style is applied by young people in youth councils?

Multiple case study

This research represents a multiple case study. A type of research design that lends itself to the analysis of multiple relationships within and between cases (Swanborn, 1996). The cases are selected via the snowball method. In the first instance, it began with 11 experts in the field of youth participation in the Netherlands. They were asked which youth councils, in their opinion, were significant to investigate and whether they know people to whom these questions can also be proposed. The snowball method eventually resulted in 85 youth councils, which was reduced to 24 by applying four inclusion criteria (a. a youth council is...
mentioned twice by respondents, b. a youth council is active, c. a youth council is localised within a municipality and d. a youth council is initiated by a municipality).

In the second instance, interviews were conducted with stakeholders involved in these 24 youth councils. During these interviews they spoke about the daily affairs of youth councils, paying special attention to the themes that emerged from exploratory talks, namely representation, influence, competence, responsibility and policy involvement. Using a content analysis, six cases were selected. These cases combined show the greatest possible diversity of function in relation to these themes. Every case is followed for six months. During these six months meetings were observed, stakeholders were interviewed and documentation was collected.

Data collected within this multiple case study was analysed in the light of four citizenship interpretations, namely the communitarian, liberal, republican and neo-republican citizenship views. Within each of these views is a specific way of supporting the rights of a citizen, the obligations that a citizen has to fulfil and the way in which a citizen relates to the community around them.

**Youth councils**

In this thesis the results are presented in four main chapters. Chapter 3 describes what youth councils are and who participates in them. Chapter 4 shows the extent to which youth councils are representative, in Chapter 5 is the description of the objectives that connect the stakeholders and youth councils and in Chapter 6 is shown that youth have a specific style in which they organise themselves in youth councils.

In Chapter 3 it is first made clear what youth councils are. On the basis of a dataset of 123 youth councils a description is presented of which young people participate in youth councils, the duration that youth councils are active within a municipality, the frequency of meetings held, the degree to which young people are guided during their participation and the facilities that young people can use.

The analysis shows that youth councils are more often than not organised in the same manner. In youth councils 10 to 15 young people aged primarily between 15 to 20 years meet together on a monthly basis. Almost all young people receive guidance during their participation in a youth council but seldom have their own facilities at their disposal, such as a private working space, computers, printers and telephones. There is little variation of the term duration of youth councils. In 2008 the majority of them functioned 1 to 3 years.
In addition, this analysis shows that municipalities talk about ‘youth councils’ and so called ‘alternatives for youth councils’, such as youth ambassadors, youth panels, youth forums, youth groups, youth debates and youth think tanks.

Chapter 4 addresses the first sub-question that is the core of this research and looks at the degree of representation in youth councils. Representation in youth councils has not been previously studied in the Netherlands, but diverse studies conducted in the United Kingdom show that few representative opinions are expressed (Matthews & Limb, 1998; Van Lieshout et al., 2007; Barnes et al., 2003; Wyness, 2001; Freeman et al., 2003; Freeman & Aiktken – Rose, 2005; Lowndes et al., 2001; MacNaughton et al., 2007; Perkins et al., 2007; Cavet & Sloper, 2004; Oliff, 2003). Young people in youth councils are similar in age, education level and cultural background, which is scarcely indicative of the youth that they represent. Youth councils provide a platform mostly for older, highly educated, native youth.

Through questionnaires that were distributed to 24 youth councils, data was collected about 766 young people. These data are compared with data from the Statline database from the Dutch Central Agency for Statistics (CBS) for the same calendar year. From this comparison it could not be said that young people in youth councils resemble the young people from the corresponding municipality. Young people in councils are predominantly native girls within the ages of 15 to 20 years in secondary school, in other words, one of the types of young people who live in a municipality.

However, this is but one form of representation. Pitkin (1967) distinguishes three forms of the total activity of representation that she calls substantial representation, namely descriptive, formal and symbolic representation. Considering descriptive representation alone, in other words the degree to which youth council representatives are similar to the young people they represent, is only considering one component of substantial representation. To prevent an incomplete picture of representation, 58 meetings held by six youth councils and interviews with 77 young people, supervisors and policy officials were analysed in relation to substantial representation. There is in fact scarce substantial representation because in youth councils there is hardly any mention of both descriptive and formal as symbolic representation. Also, the separate meanings that fall under substantial representation remain absent from the different youth councils.

Because representation remains limited in youth councils, there is little significance to citizenship for young people who do not participate in a youth council. The absence of contact between participants and these young people means that they cannot express their opinions and needs, and participants do not represent their ‘voice’ in the decision-making
processes. The two empirical chapters that follow dwell upon two other aspects that are distinguished in this research on citizenship, namely pursuing the objectives of the stakeholders in relation to youth councils and the style in which young people operate within youth councils.

Chapter 5 makes clear what objectives of the young people, supervisors and policy officials are connected to youth councils. The objectives of these stakeholders have not been previously investigated in the Netherlands. Experience in the United Kingdom suggests that young people participate because they like to (Perkens et al., 2007; Borden et al., 2005).

Analysis from this research brings forth the fact that young people, supervisors and policy makers pursue different objectives. For policy makers, youth councils are a place where young people can quickly be asked for their support of policy development or implementation. In addition, they see youth councils primarily as a way for young people to feel a sense of developing and undertaking social responsibility. Supervisors see youth councils primarily as a means for young people to exercise their influence on processes of municipal decision-making. Additionally, they view participation in youth councils as a means for further development of young people. Young people themselves primarily want pleasure and thereby do not differ from the young people involved in the research of Perkens et al. (2007) and Borden et al. (2005). They want to have fun together and to be involved in something enjoyable.

Stakeholders thus strive for support, social responsibility, influence, fulfilment and enjoyment. They do not know what each other’s objectives are, which can result in mutual struggles and frustrations. The realisation of the one objective may stand in the way of realising another, for example when young people want to organise an event within the municipality, but instead the policy makers direct them to write an annual report.

Chapter 6 discusses the style with which young people organise themselves within youth councils. As was to be expected based on earlier research, young people in Dutch communities do not manage well with advising the municipalities and organising activities. Young people have very different ideas, but infrequently succeed in translating these ideas into concrete advice or activities.

This study differs from other studies in that problems in the structure of the local government (Freeman et al., 2003; Matthew & Limb, 1998; Allen, 2002; Wright, 2004; Barnes et al., 2003) or youth councils (Horgan & Rodgers, 2000; Perkins et al., 2007; Franklin & Sloper, 2008; Lowndes et al., 200; Freeman et al., 2003) are localised, but are also associated
with the style in which young people organise themselves within youth councils. A style that is characterised as *ad hoc* and *introverted*.

The style is *ad hoc* in that young people are willing to fulfil tasks and undertake certain responsibilities, but the exchanging of tasks and responsibilities between young people is absent. Young people address these at the start of a meeting, and then usually let them go again when the meeting is finished. At times when one young person may be absent for a long time, or has stagnated in implementing a task and responsibility, none of the other young people jump up to take over these tasks and responsibilities.

The style of young people is also *ad hoc* because young people want to disperse all kinds of advice and to organise activities, but do not effectively oversee how these can be realised within the municipality and tend to get to work on things at random. Young people can take weeks to think about delivering an opinion or organising an activity. As they begin to manage they often don't know how to direct who should do what, and when. For example, attempts become stranded when activities cannot be achieved within the available budget or when deadlines for requesting a budget, permits or advice from within the municipality are not met.

Furthermore, the style of young people is *introverted*. This comes across in two ways. On the one hand, this introversion can be seen in the themes that young people speak about. Youth are mainly concerned with internal matters, such as whether or not to perform tasks and responsibilities, or to attend meetings, etc.

On the other hand, introversion can be seen in the way in which young people discuss themes. During a meeting, one young person might introduce an issue, bring this issue to light, ask other young people for input and then make a decision themselves. The remaining young people rarely take part in this process. And if they do take part, the input they offer does not appear to provide incentive for further dialogue about this issue.

**Crafting citizenship**

Youth councils are of significance for the citizenship of the young people in a youth council but seldom for the citizenship of young people who are not represented in a council, because they are barely considered in *substantial representation*. Youth councils are quite significant for the citizenship of young people who participate in a youth council, which gives it a liberal interpretation here. Young people primarily make use of the right to participate that is included with the status of being a citizen. They spend their free time thinking about the way in which a municipality can make it attractive for young people to live there and
advise the municipality about this. These same young people look first and foremost for enjoyment. They also really want to learn something or to exercise their influence in the decision-making processes, provided that they find it enjoyable to do so.

This is but one of the interpretations of citizenship distinguished in Chapter 1 of this thesis. The remaining interpretations (communitarian, republican and neo-republican citizenship) are not reflected in the way in which young people participate in youth councils. Young people do not place their priority on serving other young people within the municipality. In addition, they tolerate differences in perspective, but they do not speak to each other about this tolerance beforehand.

That these remaining interpretations of citizenship have been absent to date relates to the shiftlessness that shows up in the way young people function. Young people want to provide all kinds of advice and organise all sorts of activities, but mostly do not accomplish this. They don’t know exactly where to begin or they struggle to distinguish between the important and less important issues.

That the communitarian and neo-republican interpretations of citizenship fail to appear is not only due to this shiftlessness of young people during their participation in a youth council. Even adults are somewhat ineffective in guiding these young people. They are certainly willing to work together with young people, where adults in other countries are sometimes unmotivated and blanch at this (Kjørholt, 2002; Jupp, 2007; Aubrey & Dahl, 2006; Horgan & Rodgers, 2000; Freeman & Aitken-Rose, 2005; Lauwers & Vanderstede, 2005; Lowndes et al., 2001). They have just not yet found a way in which to provide guidance that is in line with the needs of the young people themselves.

The lack of effectiveness of adults appears in three ways. Firstly, adults have not succeeded in explicitly distinguishing the differences in the objectives of young people and those of themselves. Secondly, adults have not been able to reconcile their way of providing guidance with the needs of guidance of young people. Finally, the lack of effectiveness of adults is shown in the importance they attach to representation within youth councils and the fact that they fail to realise substantial representation.

What can be done now to ‘redeem’ the lack of effectiveness of young people and adults involved in youth councils, so that young people give not only a liberal interpretation to their citizenship but also a communitarian or neo-republican one? As explained in Chapter 1, citizenship can be a result, or in other words a set of competencies that a person has obtained for themselves and thus what makes them a citizen (Lawy & Biesta, 2006; Biesta,
Citizenship is thus a *post* (Van Gunsteren, 1992). This research shows, however, that citizenship is not only a position. Similar to Hurenkamp et al. (2012) it also appears that, on the basis of this research, citizenship is a *craft* (Sennet, 2008). A craft that citizens can only learn through practicing in the presence of artisans.

Crafting citizenship in youth councils turns youth councils into a craft workshop and young people into craft students. This research shows that young people are able to implement a liberal interpretation of citizenship. A more communitarian interpretation whereby they set shared objectives in the character of their activities with other young people, or a more neo-republican interpretation whereby they deliberate over different perspectives around a specific theme, are not effectively implemented by young people. Interpretations of citizenship that, more than within a liberal interpretation, require specific craft skills, including listening to other people’s opinions and the ability to work with differences.

The study also shows that the crafting skills within youth councils requires of young people a *curious, inquisitive* and *critical attitude*. Curiosity from young people about knowledge and skills that they, at the present time have not yet (fully) mastered and inquisitiveness as participation in a youth council requires them to develop their own knowledge and skills. Citizenship as a craft asks young people above all to have a critical attitude, whereby they ensure that the quality of citizenship and the associated competencies remain a central priority during their participation in a youth council.

Youth councils as craft workshops require, apart from craft students, also artisans, to be curious, inquisitive and have a critical attitude. This study also shows, however, the need for *ability, dedication* and *proximity*, from the adults. Artisans must be skilful. They are the ones who put citizenship into practice and maintain a critical view of the quality of this practice, so that young people can, by interacting with them, make these crafts themselves. Artisan citizenship also requires dedication from adults. Young people, whilst practicing this craft, will not all learn it for themselves in the same manner or at the same speed. Artisan citizenship is not a linear learning curve, but is unruly and requires of adults that they nevertheless hold the practice of citizenship central and that they do not make concessions on the quality of this practice. Above all, artisan citizenship asks adults for prolonged physical proximity. Guidance of young people should not be done from a distance, sporadic or ad hoc. It is recommended to be present as much as possible at the meetings of young people.

At the same time, having inquisitive, curious and critical young people, or skilled, dedicated and physically close adults, are not enough. The moment that municipalities have noted the importance of youth participation, or are willing to commit to the recommendati-
ons of the WRR to expand, renew and welcome (Knottnerus et al., 2012), then they will have to make available the necessary resources. Otherwise youth councils will remain a sham.

Also resulting from this study are four pragmatic recommendations. Firstly, this study demonstrates that a broad conception of representation is desirable over a narrow view, in relation to youth councils, which is what has been used up until now. Within this broad view not only is the degree to which representatives resemble their constituents vital, but also the way in which the constituents authorise the representatives, the representatives’ responsibility for their constituents and the degree to which the voice of the constituents are repeated in the voice of the representatives.

Secondly, this study shows that representation within youth councils requires a structure through which representation can take shape. Young people do not find themselves represented in youth councils. This is where they need the help of the adults in finding young people that they may represent.

Thirdly, this study demonstrates that adults should be able to explicit the different objectives of those involved in youth councils and to encourage negotiations. In this way they can avoid any disputes that may arise from pursuing different objectives.

Finally, it is recommended that adults explain to young people why they have chosen a particular method to use, and to keep an eye out for the changing positions of the young people as well as themselves within these methods. Sometimes, for example, adults can be at the forefront in cases when young people are not aware of where to begin, sometimes they can stand back when young people can confidently proceed with a particular activity and sometimes they can proceed alongside young people when shared efforts would provide a better quality result. What is certain is that the position of adults in guiding young people is not a fixed position but rather, it is dynamic. A position that varies according to a specific youth, the activity that is central and the contextual factors that are in play at the time, such as standards for quality and deadlines that must be met.