KAPITTEL 13

Egalitarian Ideals, Conflicting Realities: Introducing a Model for Thick Youth Participation

Aina Landsverk Hagen
Work Research Institute (AFI), Oslo Metropolitan University

Years of researching youth participation within urban development processes in Norway have shown us the immense potential of innovative youth involvement for solving societal challenges on a local level (Hagen et al., 2016; Tolstad et al., 2017; Vestby, 2020; Hagen & Osuldsen, 2021), but also the many pitfalls of such democratizing processes, like participation fatigue, disengagement or resistance, particularly when young people are not taken seriously as cogent citizens with experience, knowledge, a high level of reflection, compassion and extensive collaborative skills. Despite the progress made in many countries in focusing on youth in laws and regulations through newly established arenas for participation, young people still occupy too few positions to make an actual impact (Bessant, 2004), also in urban change processes (Hanssen, 2019; Mansfield et al., 2021). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) states in Article 12 that children have the right to express their views "freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child". Participation is,

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at least in theory, an important mechanism in international as well as in Norwegian urban planning, and it includes information exchange, idea development, communication and media dissemination, as well as extensive and long-term involvement and participation. Yet, the ideal of participation, particularly as it is seen within the context of the Norwegian welfare state and its ideology of sameness as equality (Gullestad, 1989; Haukelien et al., 2011), often collides with the conflicting realities of planning phases as practice (Cele & van der Burgt, 2015; Andersen et al., 2020).

In this chapter, I will discuss youth participation in relation to the legal framework and the actual practices of planning before I look at the particular situation of the unorganized, the marginal and the "quiet" or "troubled" youth participating in site development and urban planning processes. "Youth" is clearly not a homogeneous group, although often treated or perceived as one, hence a multiplicity of identities and subject-positions will inform both agency and practices in urban development. I will then present a new model or framework for *thick* youth participation developed over the years in collaboration with researchers from social science and humanities, and practitioners of architecture, art and design. An important aspiration in our work on youth participation in urban development processes has been to experiment with and share techniques and methods from a variety of disciplinary fields, like social anthropology, art didactics and architecture. Empirically, I will draw on action research projects and socio-cultural site analyses conducted in various districts in and around the municipality of Oslo in Norway.

Youth participation is regulated through the ratification of the UN convention and, in the Norwegian context, also in Article 5 of the Norwegian Planning & Building Act (2008). Here it states that "the municipality has a particular responsibility to secure active participation from groups that require special facilitation, including children and youth" (author's translation). The word *active* here is meant to reinforce the responsibility to engage youth in planning processes beyond the bare minimum (Kommunerevisjonen, 2019), and the fact that children and youth are explicitly mentioned emphasizes that they are particularly important interest groups. In addition, there are a number of

official guidelines that explicitly mention the state regulations on participation (Kommunal- og moderniseringsdepartementet, 2014), and both research on planning and the Norwegian national policy guidelines for children and planning (Rikspolitiske retningslinjer for barn og planlegging, 1995) argue for the importance of participation (Amdam, 2019, p. 282), also early on in the planning process (Kommunerevisjonen, 2019). The national policy guidelines emphasize that although it is important that *representatives* for children and youth are given the opportunity to convey their opinions, this shall not replace the possibility for children and youth to participate and directly express their views (Rikspolitiske retningslinjer for barn og planlegging, 1995). The welfare state of Norway can be characterized as a collection of *welfare municipalities*, where the citizen's experience of being able to influence the development of their communities through the political infrastructure is as important as being a recipient of welfare services (Haukelien et al., 2011, p. 11). Following Bessant, we argue that Norway, like most Western governments, "now advocates enhanced youth participation as part of a discourse about modern citizenship, so much so that it has become a policy cliché to say 'increased youth participation' will 'empower' young people, help build community and remedy a range of social problems" (2004, p. 387).

Enablers and barriers

Despite this enthusiasm on behalf of the youth population and its potential to influence their communities and their own lives, there is a lack of knowledge on what topics or activities spark youth involvement, what the best context-driven strategies are for engaging youth in their participation, and on how youth can insert themselves in decision-making and participation spaces (Crowley & Moxon, 2017). Mansfield et al. (2021) point to the need for further research on the enablers and barriers to children's participation in urban planning in vulnerable settings. Their semi-systematic review of the current literature on this topic reveals that there is general agreement that participation is desired but rare, and that the barriers and enablers vary in nature (Mansfield et al., 2021, p. 172). There is a lack of clarity about whether addressing the conditions that enable

or hinder participation will result in change, and the understanding of what constitutes meaningful participation is much debated (Alparone & Rissotto, 2001; Wilks & Rudner, 2013). Also, the literature on "successful" methods for children's participation tends to focus on specific components or stages of urban planning (Carroll et al., 2019; Malone, 2013; Xu and Izadpanahi 2016; Alarasi et al., 2016; Christensen et al., 2015) and, despite the numerous methods or frameworks presented (Knowles-Yánez, 2005; Horelli, 1997; Beckett & Shaffer, 2005; Ziervogel, 2019; Lozanovska & Xu, 2013; Magnussen & Elming, 2015; Horelli, 2007; Nordström & Wales, 2019; Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013; Freeman et al., 2003; Severcan, 2015; Bridgman, 2004), there is limited evidence of these being used in the field (Mansfield et al., 2021, p. 173). The complexity of children's and young people's multiple realities and backgrounds is also largely absent from the literature according to this review, while some studies include minority groups such as migrants, ethnic or racial minorities (Sutton & Kemp, 2002; Nordström, 2010; Laughlin & Johnson, 2011; Torres, 2012), the socially excluded (Wilson & Snell, 2010), people with diverse backgrounds (Percy-Smith & Burns, 2013; Beckett & Shaffer, 2005; Alarasi et al., 2016), and low-income earners/people living in poverty (Laughlin & Johnson, 2011; Ellis et al., 2015; McKoy et al., 2015; Torres, 2012).

Several trends within science are remedying this knowledge gap. The incentives to include children and youth in research through participatory planning research, co-production and participatory action research (PAR), has increased over the past few years (Raanaas et al., 2018; Hagen & Lyng, 2019; Ataol et al., 2019). Another rapidly emerging trend is to involve youth in knowledge production as *citizen scientists*, together with other stakeholders (Vohland et al., 2021). Citizen science (CS) is broadly defined as "voluntary participation of the public in the scientific process" (Hecker et al., 2018). It has recently been launched by the European Commission (2016) as an open science priority. Ambitions to include young people as partners in research processes is integral to enhancing practice-oriented knowledge development, strengthening youth rights in decisions that affect them and contributing to youth-driven change (Jacquez et al., 2013; Bonney et al., 2016). The EU has been asking lately for more knowledge on citizen *social* science (CSS), with a particular emphasis

on how youth can contribute throughout the research process (Sis.net, 2017). Yet, CS is less developed in the social sciences (Albert et al., 2021), and evidence of the actual outcomes of CS in social science research is still scant (Heiss & Matthes, 2017).

Previous studies have shown that young people who participate in Youth Participatory Action Research (Y-PAR) have an increased capacity for skill development, especially those from marginalized communities (Anderson & Masocha, 2017; Bautista et al., 2013). The knowledge of the potential benefits (or limitations) and effects of Y-PAR and Youth Citizen Social Science (Y-CSS) is limited (Shamrova & Cummings, 2017), and a recent literature review on Y-PAR and participatory planning research shows that both approaches have a tendency towards tokenistic consultation processes, manipulation and lack of empowerment on behalf of the youth involved (Ataol et al., 2019). Also, the digital practices of young people have led to increased attention towards new forms of engaging young people through technology (DeGennaro, 2008) and, with the COVID-19 pandemic, innovative digital and hybrid participation practices have inevitably become a major focus in our experimentational strategies leading to methods development within this field of action research (see Chapter 6 in this volume).

In sum, there is a strong push towards more transdisciplinary and innovative research on youth participation, in particular to address the knowledge gaps on the effects and outcomes of such participation practices (Malone, 2013). Despite Norway's established structures for formal youth participation in national schemes such as the Norwegian Planning and Building Act (2008), we see a lack of *meaningful* participation, as most "regular" citizens have little, if any, influence on regulations, planning and development (Falleth & Saglie, 2013; Percy-Smith, 2010; Hanssen, 2013; Ringholm & Hanssen, 2018; Cele & van der Burgt, 2015). In the literature on urban planning and children's participation, we find barriers predominantly in the form of structures that influence urban planning processes, while enablers are identified as processes demonstrated through isolated, situation-specific projects (Mansfield et al., 2021, p. 174). Among the structural barriers we have identified through our research on youth participation is a *lack of documentation* on both the processes

and products of youth engagement in planning, as well as an ignorance of the contextual and situational factors that are at play when youth are invited to "voice their opinions". This is mirroring Bessant, who describes recent government enthusiasm over youth participation in the Australian context and how "it fails to recognise the significant obstacles that young people currently experience when trying to participate socially, economically and politically" (Bessant, 2004 p. 387). A second barrier we have identified is *the adultocentric view on youth as becoming*, not-yet-grown, and therefore not to be taken as seriously as other actors (Freeman & Aitken-Rose, 2005; Passon et al., 2008). Simultaneously, participation is the applauded way of becoming a citizen-as-worker, with the authorities seeing youth participation as extended training or schooling (Coles, 1995; 2000), supporting their integration into adulthood (Bessant, 2004 p. 390). This is a helpful view when we grasp to understand the professional adults' celebration of *the performance of youth participation*, rather than the actual ideas, knowledge or critique the youth put forward (see Chapter 11). A third barrier is *the lack of incentives,* both to responsibly communicate back to the youth throughout a planning period the outcomes of youth insights and contributions, and to reflect the demand for youth participation in budgets and allocations (see Chapter 10 for more on this topic). Other missing incentives are the lack of the right to vote for young people under the age of 18 and, in line with Dewey (1916), the undemocratic institution of schools that denies the students' right to freedom of speech and movement, thus failing to acknowledge them as full citizens (Bessant, 2004 p. 392). A fourth barrier is that participation activities are not allocated for in the budgets of development projects in the same way that public art is, for example, and therefore the need is easier to ignore or minimize. A fifth barrier, that we will not investigate further in this chapter, is the neo-liberal policies that make urban planners and local authorities less powerful in the face of private real-estate developers (Andersen & Skrede, 2017; Mete, 2021) and, thus, practically incapable of halting development processes that lack the involvement of the voices of youth.

In the literature on children's participation in urban planning there is, according to Mansfield et al. (2021), a general view that a top-down

"technocratic" approach to urban planning decision-making persists, and that there is reluctance to relinquish this power (Horelli & Kaaja, 2002; Cele & Van Der Burgt, 2015; Percy-Smith, 2010; Ellis et al., 2015; Tsevreni, 2011). There is a total lack of literature on children or young people driving urban planning agendas and processes, and the barriers and enablers that children themselves identify, such as processes being boring, tiring or restrictive, are discussed in the context of taking precautionary measures in future participation processes – not as incentives to allow children to design and determine processes of participation (Mansfield et al., 2021, p. 177).

Cities are expanding across the globe,[1] inhabited by the majority of the 1.8 billion people in the world who are now between the ages of 10 and 25 (UNFPA, 2020). Youth can be seen as both potential co-creators of urban social spaces and co-producers of knowledge on the interchangeable cultural conditions of urban belonging (Bauder, 2015), change agents (Malone, 2013), as well as architects of social change (Bastien & Holmarsdottir, 2017). The past decades of studies on youth, participation and urban development have changed the focus, from children and youth not being heard (Frank, 2006; Santo et al., 2010) to becoming integral partners when *meaningful* participation is achieved (Tisdall, 2017) and considered as important assets in the development of their communities (Richards-Schuster & Checkoway, 2009; Derr & Kovács, 2017; Lúcio & L'anson, 2015) and transforming cities (Nordström & Wales, 2019). Yet, like Kettunen (2020), we argue for better recognition of and support for young people's everyday participation practices, and for youth participation as a way to spark wider social, cultural and political change. How can this take place?

The main aim of the involvement of youth in our research was, from the outset, to contribute to reflection, expanded understanding and dialogue in the preparation, analysis and interpretation of co-produced research results (Krane, 2017), and to facilitate a sense of empowerment when youth experience how they can provide valuable contributions to

1 By 2030, which the UN Sustainability Goals are aimed at, about 5 billion people will live in towns and cities (UNFPA 2020).

change processes (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012; Mayer & McKenzie, 2017). As we began experiencing and identifying the barriers of meaningful youth participation, we shifted our focus from solely developing new methods and tools to looking at the enablers and potential impacts on systems and structures hindering youth involvement in policy change, and their explicit ideas on how to improve the lives and future of the inhabitants of all ages in their urban communities. Throughout the past decade, we have experimented with and co-created tools for active and long-term involvement of young people from all backgrounds in concrete, physical, digital and social planning of public places (Tolstad et al., 2017). We have asked ourselves questions like: How can children's and young people's personal stories and reflections be an integral part of the knowledge foundation of an area development process? How can all groups of citizens become premise providers in the design of new, functional and inclusive spaces? Our approach has been to always start with the simplest, most mundane of questions: Where do you feel good? From there, we have endless possibilities of venturing into dialogue about places, sense of meaning, preferences, emotions and memories; in sum, narratives that can be transported into the design of new places (Hagen & Osuldsen, 2021).

The creative potential of youth

What happens when youth go from being objects of change, a disturbance we want to fix or make adjust, to becoming *agents of change* (Bastien & Holmarsdottir, 2017), actors that are empowered enough to challenge the systems and power structures as we know them (Jupp 2007)? What factors are at play when adults acknowledge the powerful contribution that urban youth can make in reaching the UN Sustainability Goals of creating more socially, environmentally and economically sustainable cities? Based on extensive experience of co-researching and co-creating together with youth from different areas in Oslo, we acknowledge how their ideas about how to enhance their own neighborhoods are the first step towards making inclusive places, communities and cities. Instead of viewing youth as binaries, either within the dominant traditional disengaged

paradigm as passive, devoid of political interest and naturally inherently delinquent (Bessant, 2004) or within the critical traditional engaged paradigm, as actively political in new forms (Farthing, 2010), we ask: How can we better tap into the creative potential of youth, on their own terms?

> The first time I approached youth as a professional researcher, I was terrified. And with good reason, as it turned out. We had gathered 40 kids from the ages of 10 to 18 years old, to ask them what they wanted in their neighborhood as a means to make it a better place to live. It was not a success. One young boy just looked at me and said "are you saying that Tøyen isn't a good place to grow up?" I immediately realized I had asked the wrong question. And then he told me a story that was repeated, time after time, whenever we met kids from the eastern parts of Oslo. "People ask me where I am from. When I say I am from Tøyen, they say, 'no, where are you really from?' And they won't give in until I say Somalia. Or Iraq. Or Pakistan."
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> So, these are kids that grew up in Oslo, in Norway, in these neighborhoods and yet they are not allowed by others to belong here. And then we as adult researchers or planners come in on top of that and ask them how they want to change their neighborhood, to make it a better place to live, to grow up. No, they want to change the world that refuses to let them belong. That's what they want.

I made three important realizations that day, although it took me a while to formulate them in a simple enough manner: resources, creativity and diversity are everywhere. The many youths that have crossed our paths over the past decade have helped us to shed light on what this insight means – and why it is important for city planners and researchers alike.

After that initial conversation with youth in Tøyen, we started to ask different questions. Questions that were not about ticking a box, as adult professionals tend to do (a lot). Our questions were now aimed straight at the heart. No "B.S.". So, we asked: where do you feel good? What places do you carry in your heart? We call it "splotting" (Vestby, 2020; Hagen & Osuldsen, 2021), because we needed a goofy name for it. We needed it to be simple and intuitive, as most people get scared just being asked to draw a circle, even professional architects (Hagen, 2017). And we know

that very few people belong to one place, even though a lot of people are asked by their surroundings to do so (Rosten, 2015).

The areas of Oslo where we are working to engage youth in innovative participation practices are, despite being part of wealthy Norwegian society, characterized by child poverty, lack of employment, and communal housing (Thorstensen et al., 2021). We know from other studies that the growth of poverty amongst children and young people has ensured that many thousands of young people are routinely denied opportunities to participate (Harding et al., 2001). Lacking safety measures and financial or social resources can mean that exclusion rather than participation occurs, because young peoples' ability to engage freely in social, economic and political exchanges is impeded (Jones & Smyth, 1999, p. 14; Mansfield et al., 2021).

So, what we aim to do with all our engagements and collaborations with youth is to see where they are at the moment, who they are and who they want to become – before we ask them to join us as "youthnographers", young citizen social scientists that provide their own knowledge about their neighborhoods (Tolstad et al., 2017). Like Abdi, one of the first youths we worked with in a high school setting, who expressly did not enjoy being in a (forced) learning environment, but during the project discovered he was really good at interviewing people. He liked it. He became a resource and, as time passed, he became integral in a youth-driven initiative to start a youth club in the area of Tøyen. He was not the last seemingly disengaged yet inherently passionate youth we have encountered in our projects.

> A year later we met a group of five girls in the same high school. They carried out observations in parks near their school to provide a knowledge base when developing ideas for improving these places. We provided them with creative tools that we had recently tested on journalists in another project.[2] The group had lots of ideas on how this particular park could be a place for families and the elderly, a place where all kinds of people could meet over food. One of them stated after the workshop – "I didn't know I had ideas. I never worked with ideas

2 OMEN: Organising for Media Innovation (2016–2019), see Clegg, Bygdås & Hagen (2019).

> before." It nearly broke my heart. She was seventeen years old, and this was the first time she realized how amazing it can feel to work creatively. We thought, what a waste of resources if that is what we teach our kids, that they don't have ideas of their own.

The team of girls won the competition for best ideas and the prize was to present these to the vice mayor of public health, the politician with responsibility for the groups they wanted to include in the park. They went to Oslo City Hall for the first time in their life. They were welcomed and their ideas were heard for half an hour. Yet, there was no follow-up from the City Hall, the school, the district or from the research project – so we do not know how or whether these youths gained anything from their idea work. Now, in 2021, that same park is still under planned renovation and, as far as we can tell, the groups' insights and ideas have not been taken into account, and the area is still seen by the local authorities and the parents as a less safe place to grow up in (Kadasia et al., 2020).

Ingrid is another youth we met during the project *Alternative Spaces: Youth Participation* in 2018. She was part of a large group of teens that were carrying out youthnography on an old, listed property in their neighborhood in St. Hanshaugen, which was to reopen as a youth club by the next summer – and we were given permission to tour the interior, which was raw like a shell. She was given the task of writing down all the questions the youths had for the planner, and then she asked one herself: "Can we keep the original brick walls?" The planner grinned and answered, "that will make the planning authorities very happy". She and the other youths surprised the planner by recognizing the beauty of the original, rather than wanting to change the interior into what one thinks of as "youthful" design. Four years later, the process of choosing the style of interior design is ongoing, as the renovation stalled for financial and logistical reasons (see Chapter 10 and 11 in this volume for more information on this process). The municipal developer decided to paint the walls after all and invited a group of youths to work with the architects on commission on color choices. It was decided by the district municipality administration that the walls would be painted white at the reopening, so that the youths can paint it themselves in the colors they

prefer. After a group of local youths painted the walls as a summer job, the interior is now *very* colorful, according to the municipal employees involved.

What these youths we have met throughout the years of researching youth participation in urban planning have taught us is that they can rapidly become *close to professionals* in at least four different areas important to urban development: they are eloquent in recognizing acts of social belonging, inclusion and exclusion. They are caring to the degree that they have ideas about how all generations can co-exist and thrive together in urban spaces (Horelli, 1997). They are exemplary models for how to be citizens that live and move around without creating pollution, and they expressly want to live sustainably (Nordström & Wales, 2019; Chawla, 2015; Wilks & Rudner, 2013; Wilson & Snell, 2010; Beckett & Shaffer, 2005; Spencer & Woolley, 2000). They can simultaneously recognize beauty and quality, like Ingrid did, and be explicitly sceptical when it comes to the utopian ideals of design and physical structures that tend to mesmerize and seduce adults into copying concepts without critical thinking (see Chapters 5 and 9 in this volume). Thus, we argue that recognizing *the worth of the insights and the ideas of youth* are the first step towards making inclusive places, instead of applauding their performance as engaged, soon-to-be-citizens, or making them "hostages" of the implementation of changes and already-made decisions resulting from their participation (Listerborn, 2007, p. 65).

What have we done with these insights? The youths we meet tell us again and again that they just want a place to hang out in their neighborhoods. The planners and municipal workers we meet tell us there are houses, lots of spaces that can be used for just this purpose. They just do not know how to approach young people to get them to participate. With funding from the Norwegian Research Council and their new program for innovation in the municipalities, we designed the Y-House (UngHus) project with an ambitious aim to "fix" the issue of youth participation in development of youth clubs, once and for all. We collaborated with five districts in Oslo, three municipalities in other parts of Norway: Moss, Drammen and Tromsø, several NGOs such as Save the Children, and a neighborhood incubator for social entrepreneurs, Tøyen Unlimited. The

three years since it began have been both exciting and challenging, as the journey towards better understanding was accompanied by an unexpected pandemic in our midst. But the crisis, repeated lockdowns and suspended activities involving young people also gave us the privilege of taking one step back, to see how we can translate our experiences into a model and conceptual framework for what we call *thick youth participation* (see also Chapters 1, 2 and 7 in this volume).

Experience from other action research projects has shown us how *thick participation* equals organizational change, as established actors within different sectors have to find new ways of planning, working, collaborating and processing experience-based knowledge from the citizens. This might remedy what Mansfield et al. (2021) refer to as the top-down technocratic approach of planners and authorities not willing to give up power. The experience of the stakeholders involved is therefore valuable data for gaining a deeper understanding of the relational aspect of participation processes, and of the effects of invited *and uninvited* acts of participation (Wynne, 2007).

Models for participation

So, why the need for a new model? Hart's Ladder of Participation (1992) (Figure 13.1, left-hand side) was an adaptation of Arnstein's "Eight rungs on the ladder of citizen participation" from 1969, and it is a very common framework to refer to, particularly when one approaches participation in planning for the first time. Hart's model, although still widely used, is criticized for being too "linear" in the steps taken from tokenism towards youth-initiated involvement, for its subjective nature when applied in a group setting (Kara, 2007) and for missing out on the details of the most common participation practices. Yet, it is a profound contribution to the increased awareness of, and efforts to eliminate, types of non-participation practices and mechanisms of involving youth (Shier, 2006), through the description of the first three steps on the ladder: manipulation, decoration and tokenism. The next steps describe degrees of participation, including how children are either assigned and informed or consulted and informed in participation processes; these processes

can be "adult-initiated shared decisions with children", "child-initiated and directed" or "child-initiated, shared decisions with adults" (Shier, 2006).

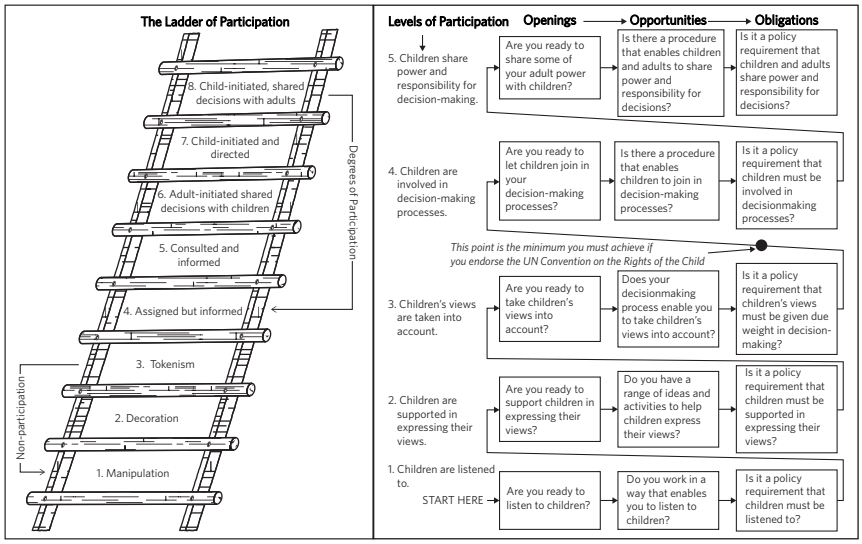

Figure 13.1. Hart's Ladder of Participation (1992) (left) and Shier's Pathways to Participation (2006) (right) are two influential and criticized models of youth participation in community planning and development.

While Shier (2006) partly praises the Ladder of Participation, he rightly introduces a more complex framework for youth participation, namely the Pathways to Participation (Figure 13.1, right-hand side). The model is comprised of 15 questions one should ask oneself when initiating a process of participation involving youth, categorized by three stages of commitment at each level: openings, opportunities and obligations. In this way, Shier (2006) is able to distinguish between initiatives of participation that are well-meant, but less realizable (openings), drivers for participation (opportunities) and policy or regulatory framework that enables youth participation and ensures that it is built into the system (obligations). At Level 1, children are listened to, followed by "children are supported in expressing their views", "children's views are taken into account, "children are involved in decision-making processes" and, finally, "children share power and responsibility for decision-making" (Shier, 2006).

The fourth stage of commitment, outcomes, where one should ask questions pertaining to the traceability and evaluation sides of the participation efforts of youth, is a critical component in Shier's model. Yet, a missing piece in that model is the preparatory and knowledge-building efforts of ensuring that children are enabled to express their views, the building blocks that we call "youthnography". As Lansdown (2001) and Bessant (2004) rightly argue,

> There are also equity issues concerning the resourcing of the young people selected as "youth participants". The capacity to influence policy often depends on whether young participants are fully equipped with the skills and knowledge and versed in the debates about which they are deliberating. It depends on the availability of information and one's ability to research issues thoroughly. The data and expertise available to young participants are typically not enough to support them in ways that facilitate full participation or a serious challenge to the official agenda. (Bessant, 2004, p. 401)

Another critical point in Shier's model is that only children's *views* are explicitly mentioned, not their *ideas* or *knowledge* – something which very much reflects the common design of participation processes for all age groups. The reflective mode of this model is a factor that Shier (2006 p. 116) himself mentions as a challenge, but it is also potentially a very productive pathway to discussion and debate: What if one's answer is "no" to these questions, e.g. "Are you ready to listen to children"? (Level 1). In our research, we have seen time and again how planners express in words that they salute and even encourage youth participation, but in practice they act in ways that effectively stop the ideas of youth from traversing the network (Strathern, 1996). The literature on children's participation in urban planning demonstrates that they lack effective agency in any stage of the process or structure that influences urban planning, as the ultimate control over both these structures and processes lies with adults, yet the studies also show that youth have the *capacity* for agency (Mansfield et al., 2021, p. 180).

Both Hart's and Shier's models imply what Listerborn (2007) identifies as the "ideal speech situation," inspired by the notion put forth by Habermas, where one assumes that by merely inviting children and young

people into the conversation, a democratic space is carved out. Rather, power relations are embedded in all communicative situations and socio-cultural practices (Flyvbjerg, 1998), making dialogue between adults and youths by-products of existing cultures (Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones, 2002). A valuable contribution that brings forth nuances of participation efforts is Kara (2007), who identifies three main barriers to youth involvement in decision-making: "sentimentally stalled", "subtly squelched" and "subconsciously subverted". Kara (2007) discusses a case from what was intended to be meaningful youth involvement in the Olympic bid process for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. Both the definition of "meaningful" and the expectations for how youth would be involved, either as supporting or critical partners, differed between the organizers and the youth groups and their adult allies. The main conflict revolved around the demand of the youth activists originally intended to participate to set the parameters of their involvement themselves (Kara, 2007, p. 568). This experience led Kara to reflect on the fact that Hart's highest step on the ladder of participation, of child-initiated, shared decision making with adults, might very well be met, if one involves only inexperienced and enthusiastic youth eager to participate for the first time, regardless of its tokenistic nature. Lastly, Kara emphasizes the need to involve youth in the evaluation processes and design of audit tools, much in line with the concept of participatory evaluation or co-evaluation as a part of citizen science (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003; Richards-Schuster & Checkoway, 2009).

Despite the policy and legislative emphasis on youth participation in planning that has been put in place during the past decade, "children's participation in urban planning processes is still poorly understood, and they remain marginalized in this field" (Mansfield, 2021, p. 170). In 2008, Hart published his reflections on the use and abuse of the participation ladder model (Hart, 1992). Among his many well-argued clarifications, the one about the metaphor of the ladder and the sketch drawing itself resonates with how we have previously engaged both practically and analytically with generative metaphors and metaphorical work (Schön, 1993; Bygdås et al., 2019). From action research on the media industry, we have seen how common metaphors like "deadline" stand in the way of

organizations' attempts to change the workflow and mindset necessary in a digitalized everyday working life (Hagen et al., 2018). We argue how metaphors have performative qualities as enablers for transformative change, through creating new temporal structures and possibilities for action not previously imagined (Bygdås et al., 2020). Generative metaphors also have the ability to hinder action and change. The Ladder of Participation, as Hart (2008, p. 24) argues, has been viewed by many as a scale of performance, not competence as he intended. He admits that the term "scaffold" (Gauvain, 2001) lends itself more suitably to visualize these kind of structures for learning, as it implies multiple routes to growth (Hart, 2008, p. 21). Also, a metaphor like scaffolding would help readers envision participation as a mutually reinforcing structure between *all* people of different abilities (Hart, 2008), not only relations between adults and children, as the ladder indicates. Like us, Hart's concern is to argue that "children's potentials as citizens needs to be recognised to the fullest and, to that end, children ought to be able to participate at times at their highest possible level" (Hart 2008, p. 24), and also invite others to join in the participating activities, as fellow-citizens. He argues that this is morally superior to children being "in-charge" (Hart, 2008, p. 24).

Introducing the Thick Participation Model

These reflections and conceptual outlines combined with our own experiences of testing and developing methods and tools for thick, long-term youth involvement and participation, have led us to draft the first design of a new model of youth participation, the Thick Participation Model (Figure 13.2).[3] We have chosen the metaphor of the pyramid, to indicate precisely that participation is a process, not a performance and that it is all about collective competence-building, laying the foundations for qualified participation efforts by all the parties involved.

3 The author is indebted to colleague and fellow social anthropologist Monika Rosten at NOVA, OsloMet, for introducing the notion of "thick participation", building on Geertz' notion of "thick description" (see Chapter 2 in this volume).

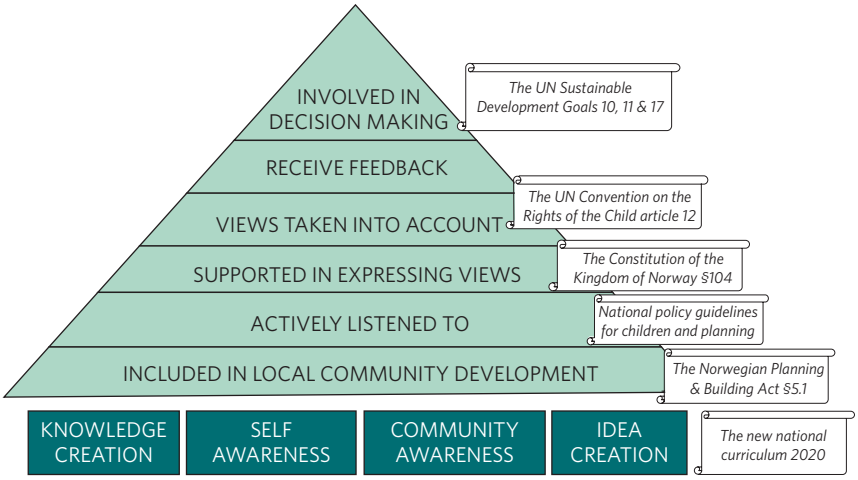

Figure 13.2. The Participation Pyramid.

Here, the first building blocks are crucial to the successful implementation of the following phases, designed directly to ensure meaningful youth participation in ongoing community development processes: Self-awareness, community awareness, knowledge creation and idea creation. Every building block or component reflects current legal or regulatory frameworks, particularly in relation to Norwegian law and policy regulation on education and planning.

Another important element of youth participation in municipal or local planning, is the "idea surplus" that results after meaningful and knowledge-based involvement. Most youth participatory devices are not initiated by young people (Bessant, 2004, p. 400; Hart, 2008). This is significant, because as Matthews et al. (1998, p. 24) note from their studies, the success of youth participation depends on the conditions in which it is initiated and the reasons for doing so (see also Matthews & Tucker, 2000, p. 135-44). Not all ideas fit the needs of the planners at the time, and there is a striking lack of structures that keep and nurture young people's ideas over time and for other purposes than initially intended. Consequently, young people experience that they are asked over and over again for the same viewpoints but by different adult representatives, and also that none of these seem to remember, recognize or value their

ideas outside of the particular development project they are in charge of, nor do they keep the youth updated. These recurring experiences led us to further pilot, test and develop the participation model together with the social entrepreneurship organization and neighborhood incubator Tøyen Unlimited in Oslo, on how to secure and support youth to harness their idea surplus themselves, through the establishment of social enterprises with a social mission, connected to their local neighborhood's needs and challenges.

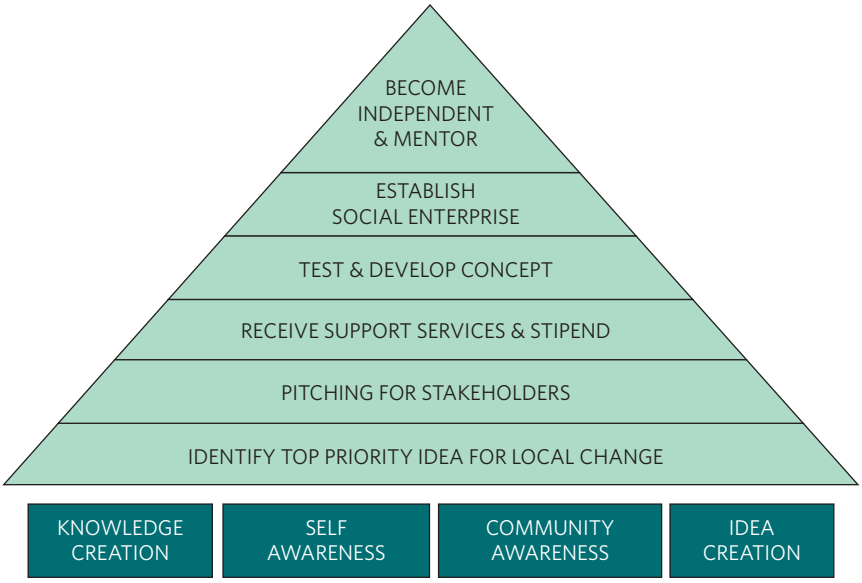

Figure 13.3. The Social Enterprise Participation Pyramid.

The Social Enterprise Participation Pyramid (Figure 13.3) consists of the same foundational building blocks as the Participation Pyramid (Figure 13.2), but by adding a diverging pathway from there on, we open up the quite narrow concept of participation, allowing creativity, youth-led initiative, self-confidence and passion take their serendipitous turns (see Chapter 7). Another route towards youth agency in urban planning is to provide the same foundation of youthnographic training, but then include them as co-researchers in specific, actual research processes on topics of interest to them (see Chapter 2).

Figure 13.4. The Co-Researcher Pyramid.

The main aim of introducing this multifaceted model is, of course, to better reflect the complexity of participation processes, but also to enable youth and youth allies in their pursuit of meaningful engagement closely connected to their own local situation, needs and challenges that they care about and are, for the most part, inherently passionate about improving. This may tap into their intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1983), but is in no way a barrier to engage politically, culturally or socially in supra-local topics of urgency, like the structural discrimination of colored people, the national debates on gendered violence or the global emergency of the climate crisis. These topics are closely connected to the role of citizenship, whether it be ecological, cultural or political citizenship. In the Norwegian National Curriculum "Kunnskapsløftet 2020", the cross-disciplinary subjects of citizenship and democracy, sustainable development, and public health and life mastery, are currently being introduced and integrated in all subjects in lower and upper secondary education (see Chapter 4). This provides an opportunity for establishing the foundational building blocks of *thick youth participation* as a future taken-for-granted mode among both students and teachers and, maybe in the long run, planners, municipal and government officials. This allows for

youth to become co-researchers, social entrepreneurs or active participants in local urban development processes, as they choose. How young people are conceptualized by adults also dictates the urban planning and design processes, and as Ataol et al. (2019) show, when youth are thought of as citizens and bearers of skills, they can adopt roles of mediation and action.

The thick participation pyramid model may also be an entrance point into what Mansfield et al. (2021, p. 182) identify as a crucial finding in the literature on youth participation in urban planning, namely the need for a transformation of thinking and mindset among adult individuals on both the macro and micro levels, to understand the nuances of children's experiences and the interpretation of their actions when participating. As Ataol et al. (2019) show in their systematic literature review on children's participation in urban planning and design, young people are frequently treated as both learners and educators, meaning that there are mutual benefits and learning opportunities for both children and adults (Derr & Tarantini, 2016; Wilks & Rudner, 2013), thus potentially transforming the participation of youth in adult-initiated processes into a collaboration between youth and adults.

Discussion

So, where do we venture from here? We follow Bessant when she asks, "If policy-makers are serious about improving opportunities for young peoples' democratic practice, then why do they so easily ignore the barriers encountered?" (2004, p. 397). The conceptual question of *why* we should include youth in city planning is fortunately not up for debate as frequently as it used to be just a few years back – yet we often meet the need to explain the benefits of meaningful youth participation to adults who have other concerns and priorities. The question that is on most municipality workers' radar at the moment is, *how* do you do it? What does it take to get youth hooked on planning and, we would like to add, to stop the planners from being terrified and start to listen to one of the greatest resources we have in city planning, youth? Planners are required by law to hear what children and young people want and need in

every development project – yet most planners struggle with this and end up doing a minimum – just ticking off the box and moving on. Leaving young people often in confusion, as they seldom receive updates on the fate of their contributions. We argue that it is time to stop ticking off that box and bring in our adult hearts in our work. It is our greatest resource. And it will pay off, for all of us.

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