Empowered youth leading social change in local communities

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Abstract
Youth participation habits change constantly. Efforts to keep up with new forms of political participation are seen in international organizations, national governments, and the academic community. How do young people themselves regard their participation in these new forms? One alternative form of political participation is youth organizing. This study uses a multi-case research design by interviewing Kenyan and Swedish young people who have participated in one of two youth organizing programs, organized by the non-governmental organization Fryshuset. This study aimed to uncover what youth value with youth organizing as a participation form, what goals they have with their participation and how their self-organized initiatives reflect said goals, by applying theories on empowerment, deliberation, agonistic pluralism and factors affecting political participation. What youth value with youth organizing is personal development, meeting new people and getting the opportunity to make a local impact. Furthermore, the study found that the primary goal of their participation was to strengthen their local community. Finally, the findings show how youth preferred deliberative means to achieve their goals.

Key words: Youth participation, empowerment, Fryshuset, Kenya, Sweden, Youth organizing, deliberation, agonistic pluralism.
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1. Introduction

Youth participation has never been as high on the agenda as it is today. Amongst national states, civic organizations and companies one can find initiatives involving youth, for decision-making processes, in building projects or to tackle challenging issues. This isn’t that surprising. Developed democracies are increasingly met with demands on better democracy while less democratized countries are faced with increasing youth populations. During a time where technological innovations and globalism constantly challenges the conditions for the future democracies it is more than relevant to focus on young people, the citizens of tomorrow.

But what to the youth themselves say? In the United States a young woman speaks against lawmakers and gun advocates (Williams 2018). In Sweden another young woman’s school strike for the environment inspires millions around the world to participate in organized demonstrations (Ekström 2019) and a third young woman pleads for peace in Syria (Alabed 2017). It is safe to say that young people are both highly aware of and highly affected by the challenges of the world. Youth are at the center of several pressing issues such as gender-based violence, suicide, gang-related violence or unemployment. The question is if they feel heard. The increasing growth of alternative forms for participation which youth are part of suggests otherwise. All over the world there is evidence of youth-led initiatives contributing to more peaceful societies. The United Nations recognizes and highlights this with the Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security where youth are described as part of the solution to the many conflicts in the world (Youth4Peace 2017).

In the academic space youth political participation is equally recognized and studies on the issue are not left wanted. Some argue that since the 1990s the decline of youth engagement in electoral participation, political parties or other interest groups is as a matter of young people’s general disengagement in the political life. This is contested by researchers claiming that it is not a decline of participation but rather a shift towards more unconventional and individualistic forms of it (Norris 2002, Dalton 2008). Consequently studies began to take shape focusing on mapping and describing the different forms of political activities that youth
participate in (for example Ekman & Amnå 2012, Checkoway & Aldana 2013). As the examples of the young women above show, young people are still highly engaged in political questions, however not in the same traditional way that previous generations are used to.

Not all political scientists are convinced it is as simple as explaining this shift in political patterns as a mere reflection of an individualism trend (Bang 2010, Furlong & Cartmel 2007). There are other aspects to be considered. Still, when discussing these new forms of political participation, research tends to focus on individual acts instead of the new forms of collective actions. Furthermore the majority of these studies and theories are located in the Global North\(^1\), excluding many young people in their conceptualization and understanding of youth and new forms of political participation. Research on the motives and goals of youth participation are plenty however, there is a lack of focusing on those factors considering new forms of political activity. This becomes relevant as concentrating on the goals of youth participation can highlight and inform us further on why youth are drawn to different forms of participation and thereby nuancing the discussion of the shifting patterns.

One such unconventional and new form is youth organizing. Research on this practice is almost always found in the United States (Christens & Dolan 2011). Youth organizing focuses on young people's identification of a challenge in their local community. Through education and training they then create a local solution in order to build sustainable and peaceful societies (The Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing 2009). This form of participation is particularly useful to study when focusing on the goals of youth participation as it allows them to decide the appropriate actions themselves, creating an opportunity to study the content of the activity to understand the goals of it. Youth organizing is intended to have an impact on a local community often creating collective activities.

This study will focus on describing young people’s own perceptions of the value of youth organizing, the goals they have for participating in it and in what way they use youth organizing to mediate their goals. It will gather young people’s perception from two different contexts. The complexity of globalism in our time has an impact on young people and we

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\(^1\) In this paper I will use the term “Global North” and “Global South” for describing countries known as developed and countries known as less developed respectively. For more information see Therien (1999).
need to highlight youth own understandings, recognizing the problematic ‘one size fits all’ tendency that academic research can have. To understand the value of youth organizing as a new and unconventional form of political participation this study will lean on theories of empowerment. To analyze the goals young people have for participating in youth organizing and in what way they use the form to fulfill their goals, the study will apply theories on deliberation, agonistic pluralism and different factors, identified by research as having an impact on political participation.

1.1 Problem formulation and purpose

Research has long investigated the development of young people’s political participation. Focusing on new and alternative forms that youth are attracted to researchers claim that there is a shift in participation patterns (Norris 2002, Dalton 2008). Critical voices claim that this standpoint fails to account for other factors as well as rests on simplified premises (Bang 2010, Rheingans et al. 2013). Common for several studies is a focus on individual acts, instead of collective ones. Furthermore there is a lack of research on the goals youth have with participating in new forms of political participation. One new collective form of participation is youth organizing. The studies that do exist on new forms of political participation and highlight their value for young people, are primarily located in the Global North. This needs to be remedied during a time where individual acts and local contexts are influenced by global decisions. These gaps in the academic research on new forms of political participation show a need to further the discussion on the development of youth political participation.

This study aims to contribute to the academic field concerning youth and their political participation by studying two cases of youth organizing in two different contexts. The study has three objectives. First, to investigate what value youth see in the form of youth organizing. Second to describe the goals youth have with their participation. Finally the study aims to highlight the youth-led initiatives as a reflection of their goals. To fulfill the objectives of the study and in order to create a clear analytical structure the following research questions will guide the thesis:
What are Kenyan and Swedish youth perceptions of the value of youth organizing?
What goals do Swedish and Kenyan youth have with their engagement in youth organizing and how do their youth-led initiatives reflect these goals?

1.2 Conceptual distinctions

A few conceptual clarifications are in order. Political participation is understood as actions that directly or indirectly affect the policy. Civic participation is instead understood as “voluntary activity focused on helping others, achieving a public good or solving a community problem, including work undertaken either alone or in cooperation with others in order to effect change” (Barrett & Brunton-Smith 2014). In this study both civic and political activities are described as political in line with Dalton’s (2008) reasoning that what political has spilled over social, civic, cultural and economical domains. Furthermore such a political activity without connection to governmental structures is defined “informal or non-institutional” as opposed to activities which are part of those governmental structures becoming “formal or institutional” in line with Pitti (2018). These are the concepts that are frequently used in the study. The next step is to review how they have been studied over time.
2. Previous research and Theoretical Framework

This chapter begins by reviewing different forms of political participation. A presentation of youth organizing and the discussion on the changing patterns of youth participation follows. The chapter concludes with different theories on how to understand youth political participation.

2.1 Previous research

2.1.1 Youth and different forms of political participation

Youth participation has been well studied in the Global North for decades (Verba et. al. 1995, Norris 2002, Tisdall & Davis 2006, Coe et. al 2016). From the 1960-70s when the focus was on youth acts of political protest until today when political engagement is manifested through more individual ways (Pitti 2018). Studies on youth participation in Kenya is more limited. They seem to center around issues of agriculture & ICT (Gichimu & Njeru 2014, Irungu et. al 2015). Research on youth related to peace instead, focuses on the concept of resilience and the role of socialization (King 2018, Kabiru et. al 2012). A recent study focusing on Kenyan and Ghanaian students engagement reports low levels of engagement overall with Kenyan levels being higher. Furthermore the study shows how factors such as political interest and trust play a contributive role to the political participation (Sam et. al. 2019). Initiatives for increasing youth participation are frequent across countries around the world. Yet research on youth participation is mostly conducted in countries in the North.

Efforts to understand new forms of youth participation specifically, are most commonly exercised in the US and the UK (Faulkner 2009, Ausberger et al. 2017, Collins et al. 2016) but examples are also found in other countries such as Ghana (Adu-Gyamfi 2013) and Israel (Nir & Perry-Hazam 2016). In Sweden, research on new forms of participation is rapidly increasing (Gustafsson 2012, Micheletti & Stolle 2005, Pitti 2018). For example Pitti (2018) focuses his research on unconventional political behaviour of the young Swedish and Italian people in the public sphere by applying a generational approach. When it comes to unconventional forms of political participation in Kenya, the research is scarce. Instead
knowledge on these forms can be found in UN’s progress study of resolution 2250, Youth, Peace and Security, for which a report was conducted reviewing the youth-led initiatives found in Kenya (Youth4Peace 2017). In alignment with Punch (2015, p.690) argument for more studies which highlights cross-national dialogue, this study aims to exposure different perspective on the forms of participation that young people engage in.

Defining youth participation can be done in different ways. Some focus on different types of civic engagement and their relation to established institutions (Checkoway & Aldana 2013). Others focus on the actual activity that one engage in for example through formal means such as voting or an informal way such as signing petitions (Zukin et al. 2006). Ekman & Amnå (2012) go further than mapping political action and also include political interest as a form of political participation. These typologies are useful when trying to categorize participation however few models include youth organizing as a type.

Other forms of participation through formal structures are youth councils. They can be described as formal bodies with youth as members advising high-level decision-makers and elected officials and arrange projects and activities for youth (Ausberger et al. 2017). Research on alternative forms of political participation includes, but is not limited to, protests, demonstrations and global movements (Norris 2002, Juris & Pleyers 2009), political consumerism (Stolle et al. 2005), online participation (Vromen et al. 2014, Vissers & Stolle 2013) and everyday politics (Harris et al. 2010, Bang 2010, Riley et al. 2010). What these typologies and participation forms have in common is that they are pre-defined which can erase all other kinds of participation that youth engage in. Instead, to understand youth participation, it is fruitful to focus on a form which encourages creativity but focuses on participation.

2.1.2 Youth organizing as a new forms of political participation
The Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing defines youth organizing as “an innovative youth development and social justice strategy that trains young people in community organizing and advocacy, and assists them in employing these skills to alter power relations and create meaningful institutional change in their communities.” (Christens & Dolan, 2011, p. 529). This form of engagement puts young people in the center and uses training to prepare
young people to take action themselves to work on issues which are important for them. Such issues, amongst many other, can be related to education racial justice, health, gender equality or environmental politics. Studies show how youth organizing helps young people understand their role in the society (Kirshner 2009), can have an impact on a national level (Warren et. al 2008, Conner et. al 2013), has the potential for promoting civic development (Rogers et. al 2012) and has an positive impact on an individual, community and systemic level (Christens & Dolan 2011).

Christens & Kirshner (2011) identifies a set of common elements of youth organizing. It focuses on the development of relationship as a central aspect of building networks that can together work for change. It emphasizes the use of popular education to discuss and understand topics relevant for youth while simultaneously building trust and solidarity across identity differences. Another aspect that is, usually but not necessarily, part of the program is social action and public awareness. Finally, youth are meant to be constantly evaluating their own performances and the results of their initiatives. The impact of youth organizing has many dimensions. The Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing (2009) identifies an increased sense of cultural awareness, recognizing one’s own value and how one can contribute to one’s community. The personal competency is increased as youth develop the ability to identify and solve problem on one’s own. Furthermore there is an increased political understanding and capacity to navigate through different systems. Young peoples communication and analytical skills are developed as well as their ability for decision-making. Finally their social competency is increased as they become more aware of group dynamics, conflict resolution and team building strategies. On a community level youth organizing helps assert youth role in public affairs which in turn has several outcomes. The form generates a respect for youth and their issues among decision-making actors. It decreases victimization, isolation and has the potential to turn youth away from criminal activities. All this creates social change in the community through the engagement of large numbers of young people.

Youth organizing is a flexible yet clear form for youth to engage in the public sphere for their local communities. McCants (2007) identifies the form as integrating both youth engagement in civic formal institutions as well as in activism. In his framework youth organizing follow
aspects of formal civic youth engagement as it promotes cooperation with decision-making actors and other adult partnerships. However at the same time it has characteristics related to activism as youth organizing aims at training youth in critical analysis of power relations in their society and gives them the skills to alter said power relations. Rather than working through traditional institutions it is based on empowering youth to design the ways to create social change however with adult actors of any kind as allies.

2.1.3 Understanding youth participation patterns

With his academic bestseller Bowling Alone, Robert Putnam (2000) began a long-standing debate about the development of civic engagement. He demonstrated that there had been a decline in political participation and argued that younger generations are less engaged than older cohorts. He argued that young people therefore are apolitical and worried for the future of democratic institutions. Another strand of literature, responding to this description, argues that there has not been a decline in political participation in general but that the format of activities instead has changed. These new patterns means that citizens, and above all young citizens, engage in unconventional political participation forms which are not measured to the same extent (Zukin et al. 2006, Norris 2002). Dalton (2008, p. 80-83) separates between political action based on which norms they adhere to. Duty-based citizenship involves political activity which is done as an obligation as a citizen, such as voting. Engaged citizenship involves activities which are based on the individuals own interests and lifestyle such as signing petitions or boycotting. This individualization has then affected participation in the sense that new young generations choose to politically express and engage themselves through forms which to a higher extent adheres to the own, individualized and personal experience instead of through a broad an collectivist context. Research in Germany, the UK and the US confirm this shift with studies (Ausberger et. al. 2017, Sloam 2014) showing how young peoples engagement are defined by horizontal structures, issue politics and individualism.

On the other hand there is a critical perspective on the idea that youth political participation patterns have whole-heartedly shifted towards more individualistic ways. Some research states that it disregards young peoples collective ability to self-organize for social change and that social structures still play a role in youth lives albeit in more complex forms that are
harder to recognize (Rheingans et al. 2013, Furlong & Cartmel 2007). Bang (2010) instead argues that the premise of the idea that individualism has changed the form of political participation, focuses on the wrong aspect. It is less of a reflection on the changing nature of the individual but instead more of an issue of the state and the notion of exclusion.

A lot of research shows how factors such as political trust, political efficacy, perceived effectiveness of institutions, socio-demographic factors and psychological factors are associated with participation (Verba et. al. 1995, Li & Marsch 2008, Pachi & Barrett 2012, Barrett & Brunton-Smith 2014). Describing the shift from collectivism to individualism seem, in light of this, rather one-dimensional. As Harris et. al. (2010) point out it might not be a total shift towards post-modern forms of activism but instead a demonstration of how youth find traditional politics to be unresponsive to their needs and interests while still fully being involved in social and political issues.

2.1.4 Research gap

Reviewing the prior research on new forms of youth participation one realizes that the topic is filled with knowledge. Still some gaps exist. First of all there is a lack of research focusing on the changing patterns of youth participation in the Global South. Furthermore the discussion on individualism and collectivism is a central part of the understanding of youth participation in new forms of political activity. Yet there are a number of critical voices which indicates the need to further investigate the issue. A lot of research has been made on different factors that are associated with political participation, such as political efficiency, political trust and other psychological factors. However as Lilleker & Koc-Michalska (2017) point out, less research is found on what motives and factors are associated with new forms of political participation. Furthermore the research that is found on new forms of political participation tend to focus on individual acts instead of focusing on new forms which promote collective action, such as youth organizing. Thereby focusing on youth organizing can highlight what motives and factors youth have for engaging in new forms which in turn can develop the understanding of young peoples shifting participation patterns. By studying different local contexts, a contribution is made to the academic field which updates theories on political participation, broadens the perception of youth and the challenges they face.
2.2 Theoretical framework

To achieve the three objectives of this study a theoretical framework will be applied. Understanding the value that youth see with youth organizing amounts to studying what impact the form has on their lives. A vast amount of research describes the potential for empowerment through youth political participation with several positive outcomes (for example, Faulkner 2009, Ausberger et al. 2017, Collins et al. 2016, Adu-Gyamfi 2013 & Nir & Perry-Hazam 2016). Therefore this study will similarly apply a empowerment framework to understand the first study objective. Secondly, to understand the goals youth have with youth organizing, I use the conceptualization of psychological, socio-demographic and institutional factors that previous research has proven is associated with political participation. These factors help me uncover what aspects of their lives are relevant for their engagement in political activities. The last objective focuses on the means taken to achieve their goals through their youth-led initiatives. In order to do this the study uses theories on deliberation and agonistic pluralism. The act of deliberation with institutional actors is in this study associated with formal participation while the use of disruptive means or critique of institutions is seen as informal participation.

2.2.1 Empowerment

One well-cited model to understand the potential for individual development is through a critical social theory of youth empowerment, CYE (Jennings et al. 2006). The focus of this framework is not only to showcase the emancipatory processes for the individual but to put focus on the change in communities through the promotion of social justice. Their aim with the theory is “to support and foster youth contributions to positive community development and sociopolitical change, resulting in youth who are critical citizens, actively participating in the day-to-day building of stronger, more equitable communities” (Ibid, p. 40). In their theory they present different aspects which are necessary for true and relevant empowerment. Below is a presentation of factors that creates youth empowerment.

**Meaningful participation**
For youth to truly be empowered they need to participate in meaningful activities. This is achieved when young people are engaged in issues and activities which are relevant in their lives, which make them excited and feels real for them. Furthermore it is important that they achieve the possibility to try different roles and responsibilities.

**Power-sharing**

For empowerment to exist it is important to investigate what power relations are present in an participatory activity. It needs to be clear that power is to be shared equally and in a relevant fashion.

**Engagement in Critical Reflection on Interpersonal and Sociopolitical Processes**

Empowerment for the individual and the society is about becoming aware of the conscious or unconscious constraints they are part of through several processes. Critical reflection therefore is an essential part of participatory initiatives.

**Integrated Individual and Community-level Empowerment**

Critical youth empowerment emphasizes the need to integrate opportunities and results that positively affects both the individual and the community as these two aspects are connected and dependant on each other.

**Participation in Socio-political Processes in Order to effect Change**

Essential to CYE is that youth participation is about creating engagement in sociopolitical processes and social change. It is about creating activities and initiatives which improves the society, thereby not only strengthening young individuals but also making them competent, engaged and responsible. It is only when they have the capacity to encounter and address structures and social values that they are empowered.

**2.2.2 Factors associated with participation**

To understand the goals of youth participation in youth organizing amounts to exposing their motivations. Motivations for engaging in new forms of political participation can be several and are often interlocked. Barrett & Brunton-Smith’s (2014) integrative model is used for highlighting how civic and political participation is rooted in demographic, psychological and
institutional factors. Below is a presentation of the factors relevant for analyzing the results of this study.

**Institutional factors: behavior of political institutions**

On a macro-level Barrett and Brunton-Smith (2014) highlight how the political behaviour of an individual is affected by the activities of political institutions themselves. For example if state actors declines to engage with citizens efforts to communicate a person is less likely to participate in political activities.

**Socio-demographic factors: ethnicity**

In their study Barrett and Brunton-Smith describes how ethnic minorities are more likely to participate in activities which are related to their own or adjacent ethnic communities. Second generation immigrants’ are more likely to participate in different forms of political activities than majority group individuals. They do point out that such results are more likely to be linked with socioeconomic factors and religious affiliations than ethnicity per se.

**Cognitive factors: political capital, political trust and political efficiency**

In their integrative model Barrett and Brunton-Smith (2014) also include different cognitive factors influence on political participation. It is about an individual’s knowledge on the political life, their trust in their own ability in performing politically and their trust in their governmental institutions. For example Pachi and Barrett (2012) demonstrate how youths perception of the effectiveness of different institutions affect their participation in different forms and that this perception differs among ethnic majority and minority individuals.

**Emotional factors: social identification, negative and positive emotions**

Different emotional factors affect political participation. Negative emotions can be anger towards social injustice, perceived discrimination and the desire to contribute to social change, while positive emotions are linked to past participation experiences. Finally the social identification of a person affects their participation in civic and political activities. This is about the sense of belonging one has, either to a social group, a community, a political or social movement, an ethnic group or a national group. Pachi and Barrett (2011) describe how
youth may not be interested in formal politics to the same extent as earlier generations but they do have a strong interest for their social groups.

The results of Barrett and Brunton-Smith’s (2014) study show that young people are more likely to engage in non-conventional forms of participation than in conventional forms and that and ethnic minorities are likely to engage in non-conventional forms but more like to not participate at all. However, they can work as indicators when studying similar questions on political participation. In this study these factors are used to describe the goals of youth participation in youth organizing.

2.2.3 Deliberative theory and agonistic pluralism

To understand how youth organizing is used to mediate the goals of youth political participation one can focus on the form and content of the youth organizing activities. One way to study this is through analyzing what relation they have to formal institutions. Here the deliberative theory and the idea of agonistic pluralism becomes relevant.

Deliberative theory

Jürgen Habermas (1994) work is the main association when it comes to the theory of deliberative democracy. The focus is on deliberation and dialogue as means to improve institutions, decisions and overall become a more democratic society. There are several arguments for deliberative theory. Cooke (2000) describes how the deliberative path has an educative power in the sense that not only is participation in public arenas good in itself but it has personal benefits for the individual of intellectual, moral or practical character. Furthermore deliberation is a way to strengthen the community as through dialogue, people can become part of a collective membership. The deliberative theory puts focus on the use of public arenas and institutions where the most rational argument for a specific issue or perspective will, through just procedures, be implemented in outcomes. It is about creating democracy with spaces where citizens have opportunity to deliberate about common affairs (Fraser 1990). Disagreement is an important part of that and through reasonable and rational arguments anyone can stand for what they believe is right and attempt to convince others the same.
The theory is however not without its critique. Nancy Fraser (Ibid. p.61-62) demonstrates how the time in which the theory of deliberation was conceived also influenced who was meant to partake in the deliberative processes. It was established during a time when the white male was the norm which led to the formal exclusion of citizens of other genders or colors which has prevailed in the modern deliberative institutions. She therefore emphasizes the need to develop and invest in more spaces for deliberation where different norms and characteristics are allowed to exist. By advocating for more creative ways to expand the public arena the state becomes more inclusive, just and democratic (Young 2003, p. 679).

**Agonistic pluralism**
Contrary to deliberative theory, Mouffe (1999) argues for agonistic pluralism as a way for political participation, which, entails using disruptive and coercive means to confront the hegemonic politics. She, and her advocates, insists that deliberative forums are inherently elitist, exclusive and non-public which makes it impossible to avoid discrimination and create democratic change. One cannot deliberate within structures that are unjust from the beginning. The agonistic path focuses on the need to address issues outside the formal and nonfunctional institutions. Activism of the classical kind is connected to agonistic pluralism where individuals mobilize through interests groups advocating for certain rights rather than working within the system. Conflict is the condition for existence of democracy where differences need to be accurately represented in order to avoid unjust politics. Mouffe is however, also faced with critique. Erman (2009) argues that what is at the centre of Mouffe’s theory, the idea of conflict as the very condition of democracy, is in itself conditioned on the idea of deliberation. One cannot find themselves in a conflict without using dialogue and arguments to reveal said differences.

These theories will be used to understand the results of the study. The next step is to further connect the theories to the research questions by creating a analytical framework.
2.2.4 Analytical questions

For analyzing the collected material I constructed a series of analytical questions as a guide in reading the transcripts. These questions are the connection between the research purpose and the chosen theories described above.

What are Kenyan and Swedish youth perceptions of the value of youth organizing?

To answer the research question a series of analytical questions were formed based on Jennings et al. (2006) critical youth empowerment theory. Each aspect of the theory reflects a analytical question:

- Meaningful participation - Are youth engaged in issues that are relevant to their lives?
- Power-sharing - When other adult actors are involved, is power shared equally?
- Engagement in Critical Reflection on Interpersonal and Sociopolitical Processes
  - Are the youth aware of conscious or unconscious constraints?
- Integrated Individual and Community-level Empowerment - Are the initiatives integrated in a way that positively affects both the individual and the community?
- Participation in Socio-political Processes in Order to effect Change - Do they participate in activities for social change (making them competent, engaged and responsible individuals)?

What goals do Swedish and Kenyan youth have with their engagement in youth organizing and how do their youth-led initiatives mediate them?

For the second research question the analysis will study partly how different factors relate to their participation and partly how their youth-led initiatives have more of deliberative or agonistic aspects in them.

- What explicit and implicit goals do the youth express with their initiatives?
- How can they be understood through:
  - Socio-demographic and emotional factors - their background and personal experiences?
  - Cognitive factors - their participation in the youth organizing programs?
- **Cognitive and emotional factors** - their past experiences of informal and formal participation?

- **Deliberative theory** - Are the youth-led initiatives marked by deliberate and cooperative methods?

- **Agonistic pluralism** - Are the youth-led initiatives marked by disruptive and critical methods?

By applying these questions to the data material an analysis is created which can conceptualize the youth understandings. In order to follow the results however, it is necessary to explain how they were collected.
3. Methodology

This chapter describes the research design for this study. It begins by presenting context of the case, the chosen methods and the data material. Furthermore a description of the efforts taken to ensure the validity of the study alongside ethical considerations is given.

To implement the goals of this study a qualitative approach was taken. As the goal was to understand the views of young people with different backgrounds it was necessary to get close to them. Using quantitative data for the purpose of this study would have altered its perspective, offering more data however, on a more superficial level. Instead an interpretative angle is applied which allowed me to deep-dive in a phenomenon and understand it in different contexts. Through individuals own choice of descriptions of their reality we can get an insight of what they view as important.

All studies are based on different philosophical assumptions. For some researchers, reality is based on social constructions (Lapan et. al 2012). These researchers see it as their primary goal to highlight different realities. An evolvement from this is the transformative paradigm. Researchers embracing this perspective claim, like constructivists, that views and opinions about our world differ from each individual based on social constructions. What they add is that some of these constructions can work like barriers against the development of social justice and human rights. Therefore it becomes important for the researcher to adopt culturally sensitive methods when researching issues concerning sensitive groups which considers the experiences of said individuals and confines the occurrence of harmful stereotypes. It is under the transformative paradigm this research is designed.

To understand the value of youth organizing for young people, to describe the goals with their youth organizing efforts and the shape that those initiatives take, a qualitative multiple case study is conducted. The focus is on young people who have completed one of two youth organizing programs at the organization Fryshuset, initiated and completed a minor project or activity for their local community.
3.1 The Case

3.1.1 Kenya and Sweden

In Kenya many young people flee the poverty in rural areas for opportunities in urban cities. Their country faces high levels of unemployment and an increasing need for education (Kararach et al 2011, UNDP 2013). Many of the youth end up living in informal settlements. These are urban areas where houses are constructed largely of temporary materials, the majority of inhabitants have low or very low income, education opportunities are scarce, water and sanitation conditions are minimal or non-existing (Alder 1995). These are factors important to remember considering the peace and security challenges youth face. Such challenges include, but are not limited to, inter-communal violence between non-state actors organized along shared communal identities revolving around issues such as ownership over land and cattle raiding. Another relevant challenge is the recurring conflicts over politics and elections where violence has become institutionalized and instrumentalized through the use of youth militias ordered by politicians intimidating critics (Youth4Peace 2017).

In Sweden there is an increased focus on demographic factors affecting youths living conditions. In their report The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (2018, p. 159) offer a definition on different living areas of Sweden where youth reside in. They differ between urban areas, rural areas, sparsely populated areas and deprived areas of Sweden. Considering the deprived areas they include the locations in Sweden where less than 60 % have a job, where less than 70 % graduate from ninth grade with complete grades and/or where the share of citizens who were entitled to vote and did was less than 70 %. The report described how youth increasingly doubt that they, and their communities, are viewed equally by the government and describe how they find it difficult to impact the society. Youth from the deprived areas as well as the rural parts of Sweden expressed distrust in how public actors do their jobs.

In 2015 the United Nations Security Council adopted the 2250 Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security which recognizes that is “the first resolution fully dedicated to the important
and positive role young women and men play in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security” (UNFPA 2018, p. 11). A progress study on the resolutions presents different positive contributions for peace, from youth all over the world (Ibid). These initiatives are often characterized as non-institutional. It is in this context, where youth challenges in both Kenya and Sweden are tackled by the youth themselves, that this study aims to investigate such different initiatives.

3.1.2 Fryshuset

To understand the context of this case study, an introduction of the organization Fryshuset is in order. Fryshuset is a Swedish non-governmental organization founded 1984. It functions primarily in Sweden but operates a number of projects and activities internationally as well. The focus is on creating possibilities for youth, through leisurement activities such as basketball and dancing but also through school and projects for targeted groups who such as those young people who might be excluded in some sense.²

Youth as capable individuals is the central concept of Fryshuset where the idea of “youth-driven” is part of everything the organization does. Fryshuset is convinced that youth know best what they need and want which means that the focus should be to strengthen and support young people so they themselves can create change themselves. In order to succeed with this but also to ensure that all youth can represent themselves and impact their environment, Fryshuset work with participation primarily by building trust and relations, arranging meetings between youth, empower them with leadership tools and encourage them to do something on their own rooted in their passions. The flexibility and creativity of “youth-driven” matches the theoretical understanding of youth organizing.

The youth organizing program which was conducted in Kenya is called Peace Leaders. This was a five days intensive course where 20 participants were taught on tools and knowledge relating to peace, conflict resolution and management. The second youth organizing program exists in Sweden and is called Mpower. This program is similar in many aspects of the Peace Leaders program however, it is conducted during three separate weekends over the course of

² The information about Fryshuset and the programs was gathered through interviews with the operation managers for Peace Leaders and Mpower at 2019-04-24 in Stockholm.
three months. Both the Mpower program and the Peace Leaders program aim to empower young people into taking action for a better society by first training them on critical thinking, sustainability and leadership. Then the youth are to take what they have learned and organize a minor project or activity in their own local community. The emphasis is, amongst others, on self-leadership, dialogue as a key for change and the importance of cooperation and diversity. This is taught through lectures, workshops, games and discussions. In both programs external people such as police officers or governmental actors can make an appearance. Both programs target young people from different parts of a region or a country where the positive effects of diversity in a society is exemplified through the composition of the youth group. Both programs introduces the same issues and tools and focus on games and activities as a means to strengthen the group dynamic. Where the programs differs is primarily the space of operations and time frame. As Peace Leaders is a global program it is conducted in different areas with participants from several different countries. This also limited the time frame of adopting a cohesive intensive course instead of spreading the days across three months as the Mpower program does. Peace Leaders is also a newly started project, from 2018, while Mpower instead has had years to improve its operations, beginning in 2011. In the end both programs aim to strengthen youth as individuals but also as competent and responsive actors in their local community. This makes each program a case of youth organizing as a form of political participation. A further description of the youth organizing programs can be found in appendix one.

3.1.3 Interviewer and interviewées

When it comes to qualitative research several social scientists press on the importance of reflexivity (Seale et al. 2004, p 214). To reflect on one’s own values, your identity, the choices of theoretical perspectives, the way of conduct and how all of this affects the results of the study. This is to make the study transparent and thereby ensuring the validity of the findings.

The choice of case comes from both a personal interest in, and a professional experience of, youth leadership programs. Deciding to do this study partially comes from previously working for Fryshuset, giving me access to observe the programs in first hand. This factor is important when conducting the study as it inevitably has an impact on it. I have a deeper
understanding of the programs which aided my communication about them when during interviews. At the same time the risk of researcher bias was elevated which created a stronger need to clearly argue for the conclusions based on presented evidence. Furthermore, this did affect the relation between me as a researcher and the participants of the youth programs’ as interviewées. The risk of the social desirability bias increased which is why I made it clear during the interviews that the respondents should feel comfortable to be completely honest with me, guaranteeing them the anonymity when it comes to sensitive topics on the Fryshuset organization. An advantage is that feedback is an important tool in the youth organizing programs. During the interviews I explicitly described how their responses would be helpful to the organization and that the interview could work as a moment of self-reflection for each participant.

Regardless, it is impossible to completely control the perception and behaviour of other people. Beyond my connection to Fryshuset there are several parts of my identity which the participant perceives, interprets and responds to. The fact that I am a young woman from a country in the Global North is likely to impact them in some sense. The fact that I have a white mother and a black father similarly has an impact in another sense. This made me realize how to navigate my social identities while conducting the interviews as well as offer gratitude and respect to the time and knowledge the interviewées offered me.

3.2 Methods

This field study has data collected from two different countries, through interviews and participatory observations. The interviews were semi-structured with the help of an interview guide with thematic questions based on the purpose of the study. Doing the interviews in this form created opportunity for conversation where the respondent could develop thoughts they felt were important while at the same time guaranteeing that relevant themes for the study are discussed. Impact measurement (Parker et al. 1999) is another kind of method which could have been used for this study however, as the aim was not to measure a change between before and after a program it was not chosen. Instead the focus was on highlighting and developing a number of areas which young people claim to be of importance considering youth organizing as a form of participation. The interviews were primarily held individually.
Some interviews were conducted over videophone as the distance to some of the respondents was too far. This could limit the possibility to build rapport and trust however, as social media has become a natural element in many young people's lives many of the respondents seemed comfortable with the communication channel. One interview was done in a group and one was done with two people at the same time. Again this was done because of convenience and circumstances. Regarding the group discussion the disadvantage was not being able to get close to individuals and capturing all opinions. The gain was observing the interactions between the participants of the group discussion and the support they gave each other when trying to formulate their thoughts.

The bulk of the data material was collected through interviews while, for a couple of case examples, secondary material was collected through interviews with external actors and a participatory observation of an activity conducted by the two of the interviewees. The process of the observations was first to study the activity, keep notes on what happened, how it happened and other factual descriptions. The second step was to note the feelings and thoughts and interpretations of what happened. Participatory observations also has advantages and disadvantages. As it is difficult to balance between participating and observing, the social desirability bias becomes relevant with this method. The actors being observed are highly aware of the presence of an “observer” which could lead to them being uncomfortable and trying to act in a way that they think the researcher wants to see. However, this was eased through having held interviews with the observed prior to the activity. With the established rapport and trust, it became easier for them to relax and forget my presence. Furthermore my genuine interest in the activities and lack of knowledge on what was going to happen established my role as “just another participant in the activity”.

Often discussed when considering qualitative methods is the issue of neutrality. Some see it as essential otherwise the data is contaminated, while others see it as bad because it creates hierarchies and invisible power barriers (Seale et al. 2004, p. 19). During this study I aspired to give the interviewees space to form their thoughts while simultaneously being responsive and show reactions when it was deemed appropriate. I found that this was a way to build rapport and trust which in turn resulted in more data material.
3.3 Data material

Individuals who were relevant for this study were primarily young people who had participated in one of the two leadership programs at the Fryshuset organization, Mpower or Peace Leaders, and who have planned and/or completed a minor project or activity. As triangulation is good for establishing validity, a secondary study population was also included to balance the answers from the primary source. They consisted of individuals who were involved in the participants minor projects either from their target group or if they were an external actor involved in the participants activities.

To capture overarching themes the study was designed with multiple examples of the case, that is a project, instead of only studying a single participant and their project. As a strategy for sample selection I chose purposeful and criterion sampling. This means choosing cases based on how much relevant information that can be gathered from them related to the purpose of the study, decided from a number of criterias (Lapan et. al. 2012). The criterias chosen were thus:

1. A young individual who has participated in either Mpower or Peace Leaders.
2. A young individual who has planned and/or completed a minor project (with a defined purpose, target group, who has taken time to plan the project prior to its execution, with more than two meetings and who has involved external actors).
3. A young individual who has planned and/or completed a activity (with a defined purpose and target group, with at least one meeting).

In two case examples, where the first and second criteria were fulfilled, I chose to collect data from the second study population. The only criteria for these individuals was that they were somehow involved in the young leaders minor project. The study site for collecting the material was less relevant than the specific study population. There were several study sites in both Sweden and Kenya which were chosen based on what worked for the respondents. This included meeting them at cafèes and restaurants, travelling to the countryside and the informal settlements where they lived and/or worked. The time for the interview was also up to the interviewees and their schedules. Of course there were aspects disturbing the
interviews such as sounds, friends or other factors. At the same time being in places that made the respondents feel more comfortable was the primary goal.

Overall the data material is based on five Swedish case examples with seven interviews, of which three were connected to the same project. Six of the case examples were projects and one was an activity. Eight Kenyan case examples with 10 interviews were collected. Similarly, one of the Kenyan projects had three of the participants cooperating. Two of the case examples were projects and six of them were defined as one-time activities. For a more detailed overview of the data sources and interview objects see appendix 3. Some remarks are in order when considering the final result of the case example selections. The difference in when the participants joined and completed their leadership program has had an affect on the amount of cases in the different programs’. Individuals’ who attended Mpower did so during the years of 2017 and spring 2018 while participants who attended Peace Leaders did it during late 2018. This made it easier to recruit interviews from Peace Leaders as well as finding secondary data sources. The form of the youth-led initiative also differed in each country where the majority of the Swedish participants did projects while the majority of the Kenyans did one-time activities. This is connected to the local context and the conduction of the programs rather than a reflection of the participants.

3.4 Ethical discussion

Following the Swedish Research Councils Code of conduct (2017) a number of steps were implemented to ensure the safety of the participants in the study. First of all, the respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and what their participation would contribute to. This was followed by gathering their informed consent. If they agreed to participate, and agreed to be recorded I could continue with the interview. I also made sure that all the participants knew that they could dictate the time, place and other conditions for the interview. Furthermore they had the option to not answer questions they were uncomfortable with or simply abort their participation all together without any pressure to continue. To ensure confidentiality regarding sensitive issues, I explained that the parts of the interview which the participant felt were confidential would be anonymously presented in the thesis.
The perception of the Global North studying the Global South can be a sensitive issue for some, which is why it was important to take the time to describe how the result could benefit all involved communities. Learnings from the exchange of experience is meant to be used by actors in both contexts wishing to develop practice or research. Similarly, one can imagine that the “youth from the suburbs” of Sweden have an experience of being studied while not directly seeing the benefit of this. It is important to, with clear communication, build trust and highlight their agency in their participation.

3.5 The interview process

This last section will describe the full process of gathering data material for analysis in order to demonstrate the efforts taken to ensure the validity of the study. The recruitment process was done by contacting the responsible program managers for Mpower and Peace Leaders at Fryshuset. Through them I got access to contact information on the participants that had completed respective program. For the Swedish participants I used the the criterias to choose and contact relevant individuals through email. The goal was to interview ten people but it ended up being seven as three did not respond to my mail. As Peace Leaders had recently done an evaluation of their own I got in contact with the evaluator in Kenya who had information on all their participants. In total they were 20 persons who participated in The Peace Leaders program 2018, 10 of them resided in Kenya and the rest in neighbouring countries. All 10 Kenyan participants accepted to participate in the interviews. The next step was to create the interview guides based on the theoretical framework. I used a tape recorder to record all interviews both those in real life and those over the phone. As expected the interview guide was processed, primarily shifting the order of questions’ and the way they were formulated. With this updated interview guide I travelled to Kenya where I spent two months of gathering data material.
During my time in Kenya I conducted both interviews with the participants and external actors involved with their project. Furthermore I engaged in participatory observation of the interviewees as they lead activities for their target group. Flexibility and openness to changes was key to the success of the time in Kenya. During the last interviews, I found a theoretical saturation in the data I collected. The next step was to transcribe all the interviews and return to Sweden. From the transcripts the analysis process began by first coding the texts and re-reading the transcripts. Afterwards analytic summaries were made of the codings. Using analytical questions the results were further investigated.
4. Results

This chapter presents the main findings from the data collection focusing on the participants’ experiences of the Mpower program and the Peace Leaders program, the youth-led initiatives and their perceptions on informal and formal participation.

The young individuals who participated in either the Mpower program or the Peace Leaders program were between 18 and 31 years old. Some of the participants had an academic education. In Sweden, five out of the seven interviewed, had parents who were born outside of Scandinavia. Several of the participants, in both Kenya and Sweden, lived in socio-economically challenged places, such as informal settlements in Nairobi or deprived suburbs in larger Swedish cities. In Kenya there were also a number of participants who lived or worked in rural areas of Kenya. Many of the interviewed had personal experiences associated with the identified challenges within their communities. Among the Swedish participants there were some that had experienced different kinds of violations and whose friends had gotten in bad company. In Kenya, many of the participants had difficult stories about their upbringing, their family and their environment linked to issues of finances, employment, substance abuse, criminality and gender-based violence. Finally, almost all participants engaged in human and youth rights in some way, either through their employment or by engaging in voluntary associations.

4.1 The Youth Organizing programs - Mpower & Peace Leaders

There are different reasons for the participants choosing to join youth organizing programs. The most common one was because they wanted to develop as a person or as a leader, or because they wanted to work for peace in their local communities. In Kenya the young individuals were curious to gather new knowledge and connections, while in Sweden many had been recommended to join the program by other people who knew about the program.
Overall the participants were satisfied with their participation in each program. Some marvelled over how quickly they got to know the other participants and they were impressed with the level of diversity in the group composition. Many reported on how inspirational they found their fellow participants passion and work to be. Furthermore, many, especially in Kenya, appreciated the actual format of the programs referring to how knowledge was primarily passed through games and activities instead of through lectures. Also frequently noted was the seating arrangement during the sessions:

“...No table, just sitting and discussing. That was different and stood out for me. It provided an easy environment where you felt free to share.” - Woman, 25, Kenya.

Many felt that the group and the programs were characterized by an open and accepting environment, which made them feel safe to express their views no matter what:

“There was no fear in expressing yourself during conversations. They had built a group climate where you dared to speak.” - Woman, 31, Sweden.

On a critical note, one participant in Sweden noted that there was a difference of performance from the participants, which could be distracting. At the same time, she recognized that it was the acceptance of such differences within the group which also was the reason for the open environment. In Kenya, a participant pointed out that it felt that the target group for the Peace Leaders program was a bit off, and that instead of training young people who had administrative roles in their local associations they should work with youth that are more “on the ground”. Others pointed out that the timing of the program was inconvenient while another participant wished for more instructions on the youth-led projects they were to do after the programs. A couple of participants felt that there were some financial issues to their participation and one noted that:

“There are those people from other areas are only given transport up to a certain point, but not all the way home. The only thing they gave us is when you have a receipt you are given compensation, no receipt, no reimbursement.” - Man, 27, Kenya.
In both Sweden and Kenya there were participants who raised a wish for some kind of financial resources which could aid them in the planning and implementation of their projects. Overall the positive aspects were more than the negative ones.

**Trainers and tools**

The trainers of the youth organizing programs were viewed by many of the participants as role models and it was evident that they had played a significant part of the youth experiences. The participants described them as fun, inspirational and engaging, offering the youth a lot of space to engage in critical reflection both in the activities they took part in but also social and political issues in their local contexts. 

One interviewée underlined the diversity of the trainers, that each leader had a different personality adding to the overall sense of accepting differences. In Kenya, the participants especially acknowledged the level of preparation and coordination the trainers had. They emphasized that one could tell that they were organized in every part of the program which would benefit the participants learning process.

> “I really liked the way they planned the whole training. You could see the teamwork, the way they interact. And I love the way they were facilitating. They had mastered their content.” - Woman, 25, Kenya.

During the programs the participants would be trained in different tools to use for their own good, but also to apply when leading other groups. In Kenya the participants really appreciated the tools that could be used for understanding group processes, but also the tools that developed one’s communications skills such as active listening and feedback.

Furthermore, many emphasized the value of a specific tool used to understand one’s own communication style, which focuses on how what you choose to share about yourself has an impact on how people interact with you.

> “When you use the tools you were able to know yourself, your strengths and weaknesses better. So now I always bring these tools with me whenever I do something.” - Woman, 21, Kenya.
Participants from the Mpower program similarly had great appreciation for the tools they were taught. Many were fond of the tools that enabled them to understand group processes better. Furthermore, several of the participants highlighted that they were really affected by some of the lectures they had:

“The part that was most rewarding was absolutely the one on norms and values.” - Woman, 31, Sweden.

**Lessons**

When discussing what they have learned from the programs, there were many different aspects they emphasized. Primarily they centered around leadership skills, how to handle a group and oneself in a group. Below are the most common themes noted from both the Kenyan and the Swedish interviews.

*Organization skills*

A common skill that the participants took from the programs was how to organize activities and events.

“I have learned that action is better than something inactive, because when you do those types of activities instead of just sitting and listening, there is no way that you will ever forget what you did there.” - Woman, 21, Kenya.

*Responsibility for oneself and one’s community*

The participants described how they had gotten a deeper and broader understanding for how their society worked but most of all what role they have in making their community a better place. This is where you can see that there is an increased sense of cultural awareness.

“What I now realized is that I, as an individual, have a responsibility to my community. If a case of violence has happened and I can’t do anything about it I can refer it to someone else, who can handle it so that the wronged people can receive justice.” - Woman, 25, Kenya.
One participant mentioned the importance of taking responsibility of one’s own life:

“I have learned how to handle myself when you are facing many challenges. If I only think about my residence permit and sit at home it is not good. I should go out to the society, to do stuff and maybe I could even find a job.” - Man, 20, Sweden.

Group dynamics, diversity and cooperation
The youth describe how they have learned the value of cooperation and the value of differences. From many of the answers it is clear that there is a newfound, not only acceptance, but also appreciation of the differences between people. They describe that they now have an easier time to be aware of what a group needs or what is necessary to change or develop its dynamics.

“I also learned to appreciate the diversity in everybody, actually that was a missing aspect in our organization. Everybody is entitled to their own opinion, but through the Peace Leaders skills, we can get to know each other deeper.” - Man, 26, Kenya.

Leadership
Finally the concept of leadership was discussed from many different aspects. As one participant said:

“Leadership is not only about leading a group, but also to have the courage to lead yourself, which is about honesty really.” - Women, 26, Kenya.

Their answers indicated that they wanted their way of leading people to be impactful and inclusive:

“It’s not only about being a boss. There is a difference between a boss and a leader. A boss only decides on what they think is best. A leader takes in the opinion of others and tries to work together.” - Man, 18, Sweden.
4.2 Youth-led initiatives, projects and activities

After their participation in the Mpower and Peace Leaders program they had the task to create a project which could meet the needs that they identified in their communities. As noted earlier, there was a difference between the Swedish and Kenyan participants in ambitions, and therefore outcome of the projects. However, this did not show to have any effect in what challenges, lessons and other aspects they described in relation to their efforts. This section describes their process of creating these activities from start to end.

**Identified challenges in the local community**

The participants were tasked with identifying a challenge in their community. This was to make sure that the activities and projects they did were relevant. It is in this stage you understand that the Peace Leaders and Mpower program offer meaningful participation for youth as it is grounded in what is relevant for the youth themselves and the environment which they are located in.

Amongst the identified challenges there were differences between the communities in Sweden and Kenya. In rural Kenya there were more participants discussing the presence of violence in their communities, either in the form of gender-based or sexual and its connection to teen pregnancies. In the informal settlements of urban Kenya there was violence between youth and the police force. This challenge was not explicitly identified but it was also mentioned by two of the Swedish participants who discussed how their communities, as disadvantaged areas, had a lot of criminality. For these youth, as well as the participants living in informal settlements, many discussed the need of occupation for young people, employment is preferable but primarily having something to do in their leisure time. This was also the identified issue for one participant in Sweden who focused on young refugees. Furthermore some of the participants living in disadvantaged areas in Sweden and Kenya discussed the image of their community and how media only focused on the negative aspects. This, they meant, had an negative impact on the residents of their communities:
“Since they come from the slum they think that they have been forgotten, that no one is interested in them.” - Woman, 21, Kenya.

Several participants, in both Kenya and Sweden, discussed how their communities were divided, that there was a “us and them”- feeling leaving many individuals and families isolated.

“In this community we don’t have a “oneness” its like people don’t care about each other. In this community you live your life alone, with your problems.” - Woman, 22 Kenya.

“Because we are raised in this community, we have been brought up with the image of the ‘socially-excluded neighbourhood’. We have lived with the idea of us and them.” - Man, 25, Sweden.

The main aspect of all these challenges is that they are linked to issues of conflict, peace and human rights which severely affects the everyday lives of youth.

**The projects: goals, target groups and preparations**

Not all but many had explicit goals with their initiatives. For a participant from an informal settlement the goal was to create a “sense of belonging”. For another participant in Sweden the goal was to “enlighten, both the young people in the hood but also the public.” Even if most participants goals were not stated they were implicitly there in combating the identified challenges. To a length the youth-led initiatives in Sweden and Kenya had defined target groups, pre-planning and activities that demanded cooperation with external actors. However in Kenya all the participants decided to do a workshop or a session where they wanted to spread the tools and information they had learned during their time in the program. Some focused on specific target groups, but often the sessions were done with those in their immediate vicinity, such as their friends, colleagues or people in their organization.

Common for all participants in both programs was that their intended target group for which the projects and activities were arranged. They were either young people between the age of
10 to 14 years or youth between 15 to 25 years old. Before implementing the initiatives there were few participants who did any research, that is gathered information or similar that went beyond their own experiences and perceptions of the specific focus of the project. One Swedish participant reported doing research for their “Democracy school” (see table below) where they needed more information on gender norms and equality for one of their sessions. Many participants in Kenya did choose to prepare beforehand on how their activities and lectures would go about. Three of the participants who did their project together would meet in preparation, exchanging ideas on what would suit best for the theme of the activity.

The youth-led initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case (Participants)</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Identified challenge</th>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>project</th>
<th>External actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (3 participants)</td>
<td>Mpower</td>
<td>Negative role models, lack of occupation, negative image of community</td>
<td>Children and youth, the public</td>
<td>Organized activities for youth, a campaign against prejudice</td>
<td>Fire department, police, municipality, the local paper, other actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (1 participant)</td>
<td>Mpower</td>
<td>Welfare of refugees</td>
<td>Young refugees</td>
<td>Volleyball training</td>
<td>Coach, youth refugee organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (1 participant)</td>
<td>Mpower</td>
<td>Isolation, invisible alienation, stigmatization</td>
<td>Youth and the public</td>
<td>A book on inspirational people</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (1 participant)</td>
<td>Mpower</td>
<td>Exclusion, lack of social cohesion, lack of occupation</td>
<td>Youth 15-25 years</td>
<td>Democracy school, training on democratic values and issues</td>
<td>Police, politicians, journalist, CSOs, sports organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (1 participant)</td>
<td>Mpower</td>
<td>Emotional wellbeing, lack of social cohesion</td>
<td>Children 11-13 years</td>
<td>Drama- workshop on safety and wellbeing</td>
<td>School principal, teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 (1 participant)</td>
<td>Peace Leaders</td>
<td>Domestic, gender-based</td>
<td>Children 11-13 years</td>
<td>Lecture and workshops</td>
<td>School principal, teacher, director of a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant(s)</td>
<td>CSO Activity</td>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>People Affected</td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7 (1 participant)</td>
<td>Peace Leaders</td>
<td>Gender-based, sexual violence</td>
<td>Children 11-13 years</td>
<td>Lecture and workshops</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Children 11-13 years</td>
<td>School principal, teacher, director of a CSO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 (3 participants)</td>
<td>Peace Leaders</td>
<td>Negative role models, lack of occupation, negative image of community</td>
<td>Youth 15-25 years</td>
<td>Lecture and workshops with different youth groups</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth 15-25 years</td>
<td>Church leaders, CSOs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 (1 participant)</td>
<td>Peace Leaders</td>
<td>Lack of cohesion, isolation</td>
<td>Youth 15-25 years</td>
<td>Lecture and workshops</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth 15-25 years</td>
<td>CSO they volunteered in</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10 (1 participant)</td>
<td>Peace Leaders</td>
<td>Teen pregnancies</td>
<td>Children 11-13 years, adults</td>
<td>Used tools in facilitation of other activities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Children 11-13 years, adults</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 (1 participant)</td>
<td>Peace Leaders</td>
<td>School dropouts, lack of occupation, politicians using youth for violence</td>
<td>Youth 15-25 years</td>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth 15-25 years</td>
<td>Chief, CSO they volunteered with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 (1 participant)</td>
<td>Peace Leaders</td>
<td>Violence against youth, police brutality</td>
<td>Youth 15-25 years</td>
<td>Used tools in facilitation of group activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth 15-25 years</td>
<td>CSO they volunteered in</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 (1 participant)</td>
<td>Peace Leaders</td>
<td>Lack of social cohesion, politicians using youth for violence</td>
<td>Youth 15-25 years</td>
<td>Used tools in facilitation of group activity</td>
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**External and internal cooperation**

A part of creating and implementing a project usually means cooperation with different actors. As the above table will show you a couple of the activities involved working with other participants, while some enlisted the help of a colleague while many worked alone.
Those participants working with others described that open communication and the acceptance of different ideas was key to making the cooperation to work. They also highlighted that it was this acceptance of differences which enriched the projects overall. It could be hard for some as they were used to work alone but they reasoned that it was a good experience which would be useful in future projects. The participants who worked alone they described the difficulties of doing so much work by yourself however, were aware of that such a challenge would force you to get out of your “comfort zone”.

“It gave me a sense of responsibility, it gave me motivation, especially because the projects I am usually doing involves many, many people. This one I felt was mine. You know, you are given a chance and I felt a wanted to show it.” - Woman, 25, Kenya.

When it came to the cooperation with external actors all relevant participants expressed satisfaction and described that the partnerships had worked very well. It was the youth who decided what was going to happen while the adult partners would support, encourage and give them tips on strategies. In one of the Swedish cases with the project called “Democracy school”, a series of workshop sessions were arranged where a group of youth would each time meet a new actor from the public under relaxed circumstances, such as conversations with the police or baking with politicians.

“The youth knows that young people won’t throw stone at the ambulance or fire fighters, but they [fire fighters, paramedics] don’t know that. The youth know that some throw stones at the police though. So we invited these actors to a session where they could meet and discuss the issue of stone throwing. They got to tell their versions and the youth got to tell their stories.” - Man, 25, Sweden.

The participant who arranged this youth-led project was satisfied with the cooperation with political actors but did express a slight scepticism over their motives:

“Evidently we got a lot of politicians to participate in our activities. People would tell us it is because of the election and that they just came to create a positive image of
themselves. This didn’t matter to me because we used them back. Sure they wrote a lot of posts about the visits on social media and in a way this is bad as a lot of youth lose their trust in them. At the same time they got the opportunity to express their thoughts to the politicians which i think is good.”

The participants in Kenya usually cooperated with their bosses and colleagues at their workplace or with the teachers at the school where they arranged their activities. They were all more than happy with how it worked and expressed a gratitude for the support, trust and opportunity they were given in planning sessions on their own.

**Challenges, lessons and insights**

As expected there were a lot of challenges which the participants faced while implementing their activities. Some of them were practical, like finding a time that suited everyone in their target group or that it was vacation times which made it difficult to get in contact with people or find a place to be. For, primarily the Kenyan participants, but also for one person who was involved in Mpower, a problem was the difficulty of carrying out an activity without any financial resources. Another challenge was that there was a mistrust from the target group about what they as leaders were going to do:

“It was difficult because the youth did not think I was helping them for their sake. They taught that I would take the funding for myself instead of using it on them.” - Man, 20, Sweden.

“It is difficult to mobilize people. Some people think you are bad, they don’t understand you, some people feel that you want to change their beliefs from their culture.” - Man, 25, Kenya

Furthermore some participants noted that it could sometimes be hard to keep the patience and motivation to finish the projects. Either because it was difficult not seeing the direct results of what you’re doing or because you have other stuff on your plate.

**Lessons**
Initiating and completing a minor project on their own had an impact on youth in several different ways. This was evident in the interviews with both the Kenyan and the Swedish participants.

**Self-confidence and self-esteem**
Many participants noted that they had gained a new understanding of themselves since they went through the program. Almost all participants had grown more confident in themselves. Some participants described that they now felt confident that their opinions matter for their local communities.

**Patience**
When the participants got to try creating something by themselves, some understood how time-consuming different tasks actually take. They reported an understanding for how patient one has to be.

**Networking**
Many understood that networking is important, but after the projects they thought that they had gained the necessary skills and knowledge to understand which actors were important to talk to, and how to go about to get in touch with them.

**New insights**
In several of the interviews it appears that the young leaders have gone through a personal growth but also learned a great deal about the rest of the society. They have gotten new insights about their local society, their role in it and how intense the needs actually are to create change. One participant in Sweden reasoned on how the adults should instead be the focus of all the change efforts in their community. Another participant in Sweden who began by expressing his frustration about the police, as he believed they focused on stopping the wrong people during demonstrations, later discussed how to deal with this:

“We do work with the police area manager so I contacted her and told her that I wanted to talk to her cops. I told them that it is wrong what they are doing, that they can’t just tackle us. It is good that we can talk to them but at the same time they do
not seem to care about our opinions.” - Man, 18, Sweden.

In another part of Sweden the cooperation with these civil servants had led to an “understanding of the other side”. Meanwhile in Kenya several of the participants realized that they can not do everything but they can do somethings:

“For me things have become much more easy because I understand that I can’t change the whole of my local community, I can’t end crime. I can create an impact tho, through the methods I have been taught, through those little steps, which means so much.” - Woman, 22, Kenya.

They expressed going through an internal change, where one participant describes that she now dares to come out of her shell, while another participant started opening herself up more by communicating her needs to others. A third has found a strength in realizing he can accomplish something on his own, without any demands from the school. In Sweden, a participant described how she challenged herself with her project and it resulted in a new found belief in her own capabilities.

**Local impact**

When the participants reasoned on the impact they believed their initiatives had on their local communities many thought that it had played a role in improving the image the public has about “our kind of young people”. Many expressed that they thought their projects had done an impact on a individual or group level rather than on a societal level. In Sweden it was clear that certain individuals had been affected as one participant described that through his initiative some youth had found somewhere to live while another participant described that she had gotten emails, gratitude and positive feedback from people all over Sweden. In Kenya the participants spread the methods and knowledge to different groups, friends and colleagues which they thought had been positively affected. One interviewée said that new knowledge spreads like a gospel through their communities. On a group level the participants in Kenya reported an improved feeling of unity amongst young and adults in their organizations, in their church and at their workplaces.
4.2.1 Focusing on two of the cases

A couple of participants initiatives in Kenya, I studied more intimately by interviewing the external actors involved in the projects and doing participatory observation of an workshop on gender roles in Kenya two of the Peace Leaders held together.

Supporting adult-youth relations
As the participants themselves had described the external actors had a supporting role in the arrangement of the activities. It was about finding the target group, aiding with contacts and adjusting the content of the activities.

Impact at the workplace
Because both of these participants had introduced the methods from Peace Leaders at their workplace their colleagues would also describe how it had a positive impact on their work. Partly as their is a better sense of understanding for each other but also because they have started getting feedback from the local community on their work.

Impact on individual and school level
In the interviews with the teachers and the principals the impact on the school and their pupils had been noticed:

“The kids could talk about the situations at home and how they solved it. Before I handled a lot of the conflicts in school, these days they are not so many. The kids have begun to handle their conflicts on their own by communicating, saying ‘I wish you listen to me, I wish you do this, do that.’” - Volunteer Teacher, Kenya.

The students became the masters
In the workshop that the two Peace leaders held together many youth from the surrounding villages and communities attended. Initially the youth were shy but after a while they were lively discussing how women and men are supposed to be, domestic violence and healthy relationships. Both the men and women participated and expressed their thoughts. The Peace Leaders who acted as the trainers in the sessions would be clear with what the point of each topic or activity was. They engaged and encouraged people to talk. They used team building
games and they used a lot of their own examples when explaining something difficult.

My perception was that what the Peace Leaders had expressed in their interviews about what they had learned was evident. One of the participants did lead by example. The other participant was highly aware of the chair arrangement, and make sure all felt included. They eagerly worked to create an open space where people were allowed to express all kinds of views.

4.3 Different forms of political engagement

If the first part of the interviews was about how youth organizing has had an impact on the interviewee’s lives and their local communities, this last section presents the second part which was about how the participants viewed other forms of informal and formal political participation and related it to the goals of their youth-led initiatives. Although similarities exist between their reasoning, as the political contexts are different in Kenya and Sweden, their answers became different.

4.3.1 Kenya

**Formal political participation**

The perspectives on formal political participation varied amongst the participants, but all noted that there was corruption in their government. Some participants were interested in becoming politicians themselves and thought that they could spread the positive ideas and values they had learned. They were aware of the risks as one participant noted that as the system is corrupt it demands you have finances to access the system which could lead to yourself becoming corrupt. Another participant discussed the importance of formal participation as it was necessary to have young and female representatives in the political system. Other participants had no trust for the political system and argued that the corruption was too deep. This led them to not wanting to get involved at all:

“I don’t have any trust for the political system, not at all. I would not vie to become a politician, I would not help someone vie. I can vote but that is it.” - Woman, 25, Kenya.
The government, one participant described, was controlled, elitist and unavailable. He implied that it’s easy to not care when the information is so available. He did however, see it as his job to make the information accessible so that it is easier for the people to know what their politicians are doing and hold them accountable. Finally there were those who saw how problematic the state was but still worked to keep a link between the youth and the political system. They did this by educating the youth in how to participate in political activities, what responsibility one has and how important it is to vote but without selling the vote.

**Informal political participation**

The other form of political participation is acting outside the government. Here many pointed out that it was a good way to try to have an impact when the formal institutions fail you. However, many argued that the first step should be to try to make an impact by institutional means and only if that does not work they would turn to informal solutions, such as demonstrations. The problem with arranging demonstrations in Kenya however, was that the politicians and police would stop you:

“One time we organized a demonstration against bad governors in our country parliament with som youth groups. We did that but the meeting did not even materialize as the governor sent their own thugs. Our people were beaten, bundled up in police cars, thrown into the cells.” - Man, 25, Kenya

There were also practical challenges to engaging informally, such as the lack of resources. This could make it difficult to get material for activities and in sometimes make people not engage at all. However, many highlighted the positive force that the informal arena can contribute to. One participant said that it is a good space to strengthen the youth and educate them on their rights. Another said that it is easy to create concern amongst citizens through informal means. Furthermore, the access to social media and other forms of media can help make information on politicians more accessible to the people.

**Youth driven activities as a form of political participation**

When it came to their own participation almost all participants said that what they can do is try to have an impact locally and thereby contributing to a slow change through individuals
and groups. Whether their initiatives was part of formal or informal structures was defined differently by the participants. Some said that because they had to go through the state to be able to have an audience at the school it meant that their work was a formal way of creating change:

“Working with the government, you know even working in schools, you have to involve the government, the ministry of education at the local level must be involved.” - Woman, 25, Kenya.

Others pointed out that their sessions and facilitations were about dialogue, cooperation and conflict resolutions with governmental institutions making their political participation formal. Finally, some participants saw their political participation and their activities as non-institutional as they used their own resources and ways to mobilize people, trying to have an impact on them and making a change.

4.3.1 Sweden

**Formal political participation**

In Sweden there were some participants who expressed a lack of interest in the formal political life, even though they saw that it generally was a good thing. Another participant described how he used to be completely against politicians before, but that after interacting with politicians he could understand them more. By writing articles for newspapers he had also seen the advantages of traditional pathways as he reached target groups he had not reached before. There are those who express frustration over the formal structures, pointing at how the politicians and police officers do not listen to what they say. Other interviewees described that involvement in formal activities, especially voting, was a given. One participant points out that institutional forms of participation is a question about diversity and representation, but also highlighting its connection to the informal arena.

**Informal political participation**

A couple of the Swedish interviewees had participated in demonstrations themselves and could therefore see the advantages of it. For one of them they thought that the demonstration had an actual impact on the policies made while the other described the positive force in
mobilizing so many people for a single cause. Some described the personal value of informal pathways for political participation, either through artistic means or by engaging in different groups. They argued that it can create agency, self-confidence and for some even be a way to engage in the formal part of politics. However there were some who highlighted that demonstrations can also work negatively:

“I actually don’t think that demonstrations are good, they only create more problems and social unease. Alternative for Sweden [far-right political party] was here and I chose not to go demonstrate against them because I was afraid that they would provoke me which would lead to me loosing all that I had built up.” - Man, 18, Sweden.

He was referring to his position as a role model as well as being a responsible citizen, instead of being viewed as a troubled citizen from a disadvantaged area.

**Youth driven activities as a form of political participation**

The participants in Sweden felt that they could impact the society in one way or another. Only one of the interviewed expressed that it was difficult, even though he perceived it as possible. One participant highlighted that change in the community occurs in different ways. Engaging in formal activities was seen as effective but slow while engaging in informal participation created a sense of belonging however it had a tendency to quickly dissolve. Her own project, she argued, had aspects of both sides:

“All the work with the project is informal, as I have done it all on my own. The message however leans more towards the formal as it is about how political decisions have created exclusion.” - Woman, 25, Sweden.

Another participant reasoned on how his project was more informal because he could not remember that there were any similar activities that he could take part of when he was younger. He argued that formal participation are activities that has existed in the society for a long time, and his project was something new. Finally, there was one participant that emphasized that political participation in the form of the Mpower-program was something
completely different from both formal and informal ways of participation, since:

“What is nice is that you harness the positive energy instead of complaining about what is done or not, and say ‘we are the best’. Instead it becomes more of a ‘we want this, we are going to do this, join us’-vibe.” - Woman, 31, Sweden.
5. Analysis

This chapter applies the theoretical framework introduced in chapter two in order to analyze and understand the main findings of previous chapter.

5.1 The impact of youth organizing

A majority of the findings of previous research is confirmed in this study. What is evident is how their participation has affected the individuals on a personal level. Many expressed how they have grown as people, either in gaining self-confidence and self-esteem or by gaining access to several new tools and knowledge on issues important to them. As the Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing (2009) describe the potential of youth organizing for developing one’s personal competency, the participants show an ability to identify and solve problems on their own. In line with previous research on youth organizing (Christens & Dolan 2011) they explain becoming more aware of their social surroundings and their role in the community since their participation. Several of the interviewees describe how they have a new found understanding for group dynamics and how to build teams. Furthermore they express that they used this knowledge and competency when fulfilling their youth-led initiatives. The trainers of the programs were highly praised which could say a lot about the youth themselves. One could understand it as a reflection of personal traits they value. Interesting is that these personal traits were visible in two of the participants during the workshop that I observed confirming that they have developed since the program. Furthermore the practical aspects, such as the lecture style and the seating arrangement, of the projects were highly appreciated. The constructive feedback that the participants had says more about the actual programs than the form of political participation.

When it comes to their projects and activities not one expressed a negative emotion such as disappointment, concerning their engagement. In line with the conditions of the CYE theory (Jennings et. al. 2006) all of the participants initiatives were part of improving sociopolitical processes and their discussion on the importance of their initiatives show that they are engaged individuals who also feel a responsibility to participate in creating social change. In
the cases were adult actors were involved not one participant highlighted limits to their goals. Instead they described how power of decision-making was shared equally, or in some cases was solely reserved for the youth while the adult would play a supporting role. What was evident was the importance of having a network in their local community in order to create their projects. When considering all the lessons they learned from the initiation and completion of their initiatives, as well as their reflections on the impact they had on their local communities it is evident that the projects and activities were integrated in a way that positively affected both the individual and the community.

Interesting is that what was valuable aspects of youth organizing differed among the young people. The Kenyan participants focused on their personal development and the practical tools they gained. The Swedish participants, especially those from disadvantaged areas, appreciated the knowledge on sociopolitical processes, the democratic system and that they developed a trust in their own capabilities. All participants loved the sense of community and diversity in the group that they did the program with. It is difficult to say whether it was merely the participation in youth organizing that had an impact on these individuals lives and affected some parts of their local communities, previous engagements can certainly have played a role. However, when the youth themselves described the impact as a result of their participation in the Mpower or Peace Leaders program, as well as their following youth-led initiatives, it becomes evident that youth organizing does bring something extra to the table. It brings personal development, a sense of responsibility to the society, the opportunity to create something of one’s own and the possibility to be flexible and use your own understanding of the world to make an effort for social change.

Not everyone is attracted to join the Mpower or Peace Leaders program. The youth-led activities that they created were a reflection of the social change they wanted to see. It is evident that these individuals want to make an impact. Both on themselves and their local environment. During the interviews they expressed different personal experiences and often they were similar to the challenges they identified. For many the goal of their initiatives was to create a sense of belonging in the community, to lead young people away from bad activities and to prevent violence. It was clear that the issues that the youth engaged in were relevant in their lives.
5.2 Understanding youth goals

While the participants reasoning on the goals of their youth-led initiatives can be understood through their background and their local contexts differ. Youth explicit goals with their participation were concerned with improving themselves as persons and leaders as well as making a social change in their local communities by creating a sense of belonging. The implicit goals were connected to the challenges in their local communities. All participants wanted to strengthen the residents that lived in their communities or certain social groups, either through education on their human and reproductive rights, on democracy and their role in it, or by building a sense of belonging.

5.2.1 In Sweden

**Experiences of youth organizing**

The youths interest in their own personal development can be understood through the theories on individualism that political scientists refer to when describing a shift in political participation (Norris 2002, Dalton 2008). It was important for these young individuals to get in touch with their inner selves and understand what matters for them. However, as they describe their interest in developing their leadership skills, one can understand it as a way to connect the individualistic preferences to collective actions. Remembering their own personal experiences they want to make an effort for their local community which can be interpreted as a will to act as a responsible (local) citizen. In that sense the premises that Bang (2010) criticize are reflected as the Mpower program made the participants see that they have a responsibility in their society. However, this does indicate that the shift from collective ways to is not as evident as some researchers claim youth indeed have the ability to self-organize for social change (Rheingans et al. 2013) when it concerns something they are passionate about. It just happens that the passion is connected to individual experiences and issue politics rather than structured ideologies. Evident in the results of the study, the participants are passionate for social issues and their local community. In line with what Pachi & Barrett findings (2011) youth are highly aware of the social injustices in their surroundings. What several participants expressed as a key to unlocking their engagement was the realization that even the slightest action can matter. This is why the flexibility that youth organizing allows
and the opportunities they bring suits the young individuals. Given that the youth organizing programs allowed youth to define the solutions themselves youth see the possibility but also the enjoyment of engaging for their community.

**Relation to institutional forms of participation**

The participants perceptions on other forms of political participation such as voting or demonstrating, is partly a result of their own experiences and partly what they see in their surroundings. Concerning formal political activities the Swedish participants had mixed perceptions of them. Half of them expressed, either explicitly or implicitly, mistrust towards institutional actors’ feeling that the police did not “listen to them”, that politicians acted selfishly or that media intentionally describes their local community negatively. One of those participants describe a disinterest in politics and another described how they have gained a better understanding of politicians only after their youth-led initiative (and other engagements). All of this are examples of cognitive factors (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014).

Interesting is that these same individuals are second generation immigrants with parents from other countries. Similarly they all live in areas that are socioeconomically challenged and have a strong emotional connection to these areas. This suggests that previous findings which finds a connection between youth, ethnic minorities and a non-participation in formal political activities (Barrett & Brunton-Smith 2014, Pachi & Barrett 2012, Li & Marsh 2008) can be seen in these results as well. A speculation is that the distance the youth experience from formal institutions reflects their closeness to their local communities which could explain their goals with participating in youth organizing. It gives them the opportunity to have an impact on matters that shape their local community.

One interviewee expressed that voting is a basic activity you should participate in. This participant was a majority group individual and was elder than the other participant. Another expressed that formal ways of participation is important for representation of diversity and ultimately impacts the shape of informal participation. This participant had parents with other ethnicities, and had several past experiences with informal participation and had recently become a local politician. This confirms that socio-demographic factors, as well as political efficiency has an impact on your participation on formal participation (Barrett and Brunton-Smith 2014). These participants valued the opportunity for personal and leadership
development in the youth organizing program.

**Relation to non-institutionalized forms of political participation**

When it comes to the participation in informal political activities some of the Swedish participants had positive perceptions emphasizing that these spaces allowed for the empowerment and creativity of youth development. Two of them were minority group individuals which is in line with Barrett and Brunton-Smith’s (2014) findings. This is also in line with their goals with youth organizing. Two participants who were minority group individuals and lived in a disadvantaged area expressed that some forms of informal participation can be negative, such as demonstrations as it can lead to a negative image of the social group they expressed belonging to.

5.2.1 In Kenya

**Experiences of youth organizing**

As with the Swedish participants, the Kenyan participants valued the Peace Leaders programs focus on empowerment for themselves, but also in order to strengthen their group or their community. Many of the participants had a position of leading activities in their NGO which can explain why they expressed much appreciation for the practical parts of the training. Several pointed out that participating in the Peace Leaders program helped them learn more on how they should communicate and what their goals were. Again, similar to the Swedish participants, this does support the argument that individualism has taken a hold of youth preferences for what forms of participation they prefer. Furthermore there is a strong need to participate in the sociopolitical processes of their local community and many express the importance of spreading knowledge to their surroundings.

Their passion for social change is strong however their perceived opportunities to create it are limited. Many express that they would like to engage in formal political activities or that they try to engage in other informal forms of political participation but that it is difficult, or sometimes even impossible, because of institutional factors such as corruption in the government and violence from the police. This suggests that, unlike the Swedish participants who might prefer youth organizing to other forms which are unavailable because the format suits them better, the Kenyan participants engage in youth organizing because in some ways
it’s their only option. This also has implications considering previous research. As demonstrated there is a lack of studies on new forms of participation and what this study shows is that the discussion on the changed patterns of political participation does not take into account the experiences and the participation of youth in the Global South who face challenges that hinder them from engaging in collective forms of participation in the first place. Youth organizing however, does allow them to refute the government’s lack of initiatives concerning human rights and education and slowly create a change in their local communities. Still, another limit is that of financial resources. Kenya does not have the same structures as Sweden has when it comes to financing the civil society and thereby youth-led initiatives.

**Relation to institutional forms of participation**

The institutional barriers discussed above becomes highly apparent when the participants discuss their relation to formal forms of participations. As the results show, several youth express that they want to get involved in politics or that they previously have been a politician. Almost all of these participants have an educational background, a political interest and express more positive perceptions of the government. This confirms the previous research on Kenyan students political participation (Sam et al. 2019). One participant who was younger than the average in the group and did not have an university degree, described how she had been approached by a political party to see if she had any interest in becoming a politician. She had responded that she would consider it in the future, after fulfilling other aspirations. A speculation is that her engagement in her local community made an impression, which attracted attention from other politicians. Her interest in the political life came from her desire to be a good leader in her local community. However, there was a fear of being corrupt as, according to her, the government is corrupt. The negative perceptions of formal institutions were expressed by other participants as well, from some with a much stronger emphasis. Here the distrust in the government was clear and it was viewed as “elitist and unavailable”. This confirms that institutional factors have a connection to youth participation in formal bodies. One participant described how politicians could harm the development of human rights in order to secure their position in power. This connects to the participants appreciation for youth organizing opportunities where they could spread
knowledge and opportunities for many in their local communities which they have a strong passion for.

**Perception of non-institutional forms of participation**

When they consider informal political activities most people focused on demonstrations and what power they had. Many expressed that one can engage in demonstrations, but only as a second option and only if they are peaceful. One should first and foremost go through formal means if one want to make an impact. Some expressed that through informal ways, such as social media, one can more easily demand accountability from politicians. Disruptive methods were seen as dangerous to several of the participants and they described how they often can lead to violence, or in some cases death. Others pointed out that politicians can hire youth to disturb their peaceful demonstrations and act disruptively, making the public associate youth and demonstrations with a negative connotation. Here the theory of agonistic pluralism becomes relevant as conflict is centre to understanding of how to achieve social change (Mouffe 1999, Young 2003). However what is evident here is that conflict is not the preferred way for youth to achieve their goals.

**5.2 How youth-led initiatives reflect youth goals**

As previous research argues (McCants 2007) the youth-led initiatives integrated aspects found in both engagement in formal institutions and activism. Therefore the projects have characteristics in line with both deliberative theory and agonistic pluralism. First of, the programs are structured in a way to promote dialogue, cooperation with decision-making actors and creating other partnerships. However, the content on the program also encourages critical thinking and identifying challenges in their local societies which evidently the governmental institutions have not remedied. As McCants argues, these programs do encourage youth to create their own social change rather than working through traditional forms however, seeing actors in those institutions as allies instead of adversaries.

The youth strive for social change in their local community. In Kenya, it seems that deliberation and cooperation with governmental bodies is difficult and disruptive means for social change is in some cases dangerous. The theories on deliberative theory and agonistic
pluralism as such seem therefore to be valuable analytic tools only when the conditions in a nation are appropriate. However, considering the youth-led initiatives described in this study there are aspects which are aligned with both theories. Many of the projects and activities focus on discussions on different aspects of the society, such as peace and violence, democracy and reproductive health. The participants either explicitly or implicitly describe how dialogue, cooperation with governmental actors and deliberation are necessary means for social change. What differs from the theoretical descriptions is the goals for using said means. While deliberation is seen as way to improve institutions (Habermas 1994), these participants used it as a way to empower their local community. Cooke (2000) does highlight that the deliberative path has an educative power and can strengthen the community and this is evident in the form and content of some of the youth-led initiatives. Their projects and activities also reflect, agonistic pluralism as they create new forums outside the formal spaces to work for social change. This suggests a criticism of the formal spaces that already exist. However, as mentioned before, they do prefer the peaceful means to create change, both in Sweden and in Kenya, instead of the coercive and disruptive ways. In relation to their goal to strengthen their local community and those within it it can be interpreted that they see conflict as a negative development for their community and their people. This suggests that the agonistic pluralism relies on that all individuals can participate on same conditions while the participants, in reality, perceive that they will be judged differently if participating in coercive actions. Their own reflections on their youth-organizing activities show how many believe them to be both formal and informal, while some see it as completely formal or informal. This highlights the flexibility of youth organizing as a form of political participation. It can be what the young individual wants it to be in order to fulfill their goal.
6. Concluding discussion

This chapter concludes the thesis by first answering the research questions and discussing the methodological limitations of the study. Finally, a reflection is made on the potential implications for further research.

6.1 Conclusion

This research study set out to investigate youth organizing as a new form of political participation. It was based on an identified gap in prior research where new forms of participation tended to be one-dimensionally explained as the result of a shift from collectivism to individualism, as well as where research on youth engagement in new forms of political participation rarely focuses on youth living in contexts outside of the Global North. This gap led to a focus on Kenyan and Swedish youth own experiences and perceptions of participating in youth organizing. The concerns were regarding the forms value to them, the goals they wanted to achieve through youth organizing and the content of their youth-led activities as a reflection of said goals. Through semi-structured interviews with participants in two youth organizing programs as well as interviews with other involved actors the results were analyzed with the help of theories on empowerment, deliberation, agonistic pluralism and factors affecting political participation.

When it comes to the value of youth organizing the results show, not surprisingly, that different participants value different things. The empowerment framework showed how youth organizing impacted them through personal development, access to new knowledge and tools as well as an opportunity to create social change in their local community. All participants valued the group which they did the program with and appreciated the role the trainers had in their experience. They highlighted that they had gained leadership skills which were valuable in their everyday lives. In Kenya particularly, youth appreciated the format of the program. Swedish participants appriciated the knowledge on sociopolitical processes and how the democratic system works. All the participants appreciated the knowledge on how to
go about creating a minor activity or project on your own. They understood the value in making small but important efforts to contribute to a social change in their local community.

There were three primary goals of the all the interviewees participation in the youth-organizing programs. The first goal was to empower themselves and develop their leadership skills. As the above section shows how the youth organizing programs did this. Their youth-led initiatives mediated the goals in the sense that they not only got to learn new skills they also got to exercise them. Furthermore the activities were based on their own passions making them meaningful for each individual. The second goal was that it gave them an opportunity to contribute to a social change in their local community. As many of them did not see a possibility or the effectiveness of participating in other forms to create social change, they engaged in youth-organizing. Furthermore the youth-organizing program meant that they could use their creativity and their past and personal experience to create customized solutions to the challenges they identified. Finally, the third goal of their participation in youth organizing was to create social change by empowering their local community, rather than changing governmental institutions. By using deliberative and peaceful means their youth-led initiatives made a small, but meaningful impact on their local community.

6.2 Limitations of study

As the results might present, there were some methodological limitations to fulfilling the purpose of the study. First of all there was an uneven number of case examples. Concerning the cases that did exist there was an uneven division where many of the Swedish cases were projects and the Kenyan cases were single activities. If there would have been more case examples from Sweden which for example were less “ambitious” in their format it could have nuanced and balanced the discussion. Furthermore the participatory observations were only made in Kenya and not in Sweden. The inclusion of data material where external actors in the Swedish cases had been interviewed would have further strengthened the study. Furthermore the difference in how long the programs have operated, having an impact on the chosen cases was also a weakness. Finally, however, this is more a reflection on the research field, the difference between what value youth organizing as a political form had versus what value the
organization Fryshusets Peace Leaders and Mpower program as types of youth organizing had, was difficult to separate in this study.

6.3 Implications for further research

Concerning the academical field of new forms of participation and youth engagement this study shows us that young people have become more individualistic when it comes to their political participation. However they have also become more localized and the way they prefer to participate is through deliberative manners. The analysis shows us; that youth identify more with and have a passion for their local community; that they perceive obstacle to participating in forms that are connected to governmental institutions and that they want to do what is best for their local community, using peaceful instead of disruptive methods. This confirms that youth political participation preferences have changed to become more individualistic but that the goals of their participation can them to participate in collective forms.

A number of areas deserve to be further investigated. As evident the debate on young peoples new ways of participating politically needs to be further researched in relation to different factors which prior studies have identified as impacting their lives. Another issue is the lack of research on the different forms of, and conditions for, political participation that young people in Kenya face. As youth seem to be more focused on their local societies a question can be raised on what implications this has on representative forms of democracy on national and regional levels. Furthermore, do today’s youth want to be responsible citizens or is their primary goal their own self-interests? Is there a difference between the concerns of youth in the Global South and the Global North? Using quantitative measures, another area to further investigate is new forms of youth participation and their connection to young people's inclination to use agonistic and deliberative means for social change. Finally, there is a need to conduct research on the long-term impact of youth-organizing initiatives to understand the value of the form for the society overall. All of these issues and areas can be investigated in order to deepen our understanding on youth in new forms of political participation, and ultimately on the future of political participation itself.
List of references


## Appendix 1 - About the youth organizing programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Program</th>
<th>The Peace Leaders program</th>
<th>The Mpower program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim</strong></td>
<td>“To create strong individuals who take responsibility for the society and during crises to create social sustainability”</td>
<td>“To empower young people who are most affected by violence and marginalisation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time frame</strong></td>
<td>Five days intensive course.</td>
<td>Three separate weekends, one per month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Space for operations</strong></td>
<td>East Africa (Kenya), Latin America (Brazil), MENA-region (Jordan)</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mode of recruitment</strong></td>
<td>Through cooperating local NGOs in the different regions globally</td>
<td>Through the different local Fryshus-organization across Sweden and the internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target group</strong></td>
<td>Around 20 youths between the ages of 18-29, from across the world in East Africa, Latin American and the MENA-region who want to create peaceful communities.</td>
<td>Around 20 youths between the ages of 18-26, from across Sweden who want to create safer local communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content (topic and tools)</strong></td>
<td>Diversity and norms, values, effective communication, group processes, active listening, conflict resolution, feedback, SWOT-analysis, oral presentations, games and exercises.</td>
<td>Diversity and norms, values, effective communication, group processes, active listening, crisis response, feedback, SWOT-analysis, oral presentations, games and exercises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of trainers</strong></td>
<td>Four-five</td>
<td>Four</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2 - Interview Guide

Background information
- Tell me a little about yourself.

The leadership programs

Motivations for project
- why did you choose to do the leadership program?
- One of the tasks in the program was to identify a challenge in your local community which you would then solve with a project. Which challenge did you identify?

Leadership Development
- How do you think the leadership program worked?
- What did you think about your trainers (what was good: guiding, feedback, help to focus)?
- Was there anything you felt was missing?

Developmental Outcomes
- What have you learned from the leadership program?
- You worked with different parts during the program such as values, group processes and so on. Was there something in particular you preferred and in that case what? Was there anything you feel that could have been left out?
- What tools and personal traits have stuck with you since the program?

The youth-led initiatives

Motivations for project
- Have you completed a project since the Mpower/Pace Leaders program?
If no:
- How come?
- What would you have needed in order to accomplish a minor youth-driven project
- What was/is your plan to do and for what purpose?
- Do you see any challenges with undertaking this project?
If yes:
- Who were you specific target group to be included in the project

Cycle of organizing
- What did you decide to do?
- How did you decide the shape of the project (time, place)/why this specific time and place?
- Did you have to do any research for the project?
- What actors/stakeholders were involved in your project (school, decision-makers, companies)
- How did the cooperation with the actors work?

**Leadership Development**

- What challenges did you face while going through the process of your project and how did you solve them?
- How did it work leading a project with other youths/other actors/alone?

**Developmental Outcomes**

- What have you learned from initiating and completing a minor project like this?
- Now that you fulfilled the project do you have a different or enlightened view of the issue which you formulated at the beginning? How?
- In what way has the leadership program as well as your own minor project affected your personal growth?
- If you would create a new project, what would you focus on and what would you remember from having done this project?

**Organizational Outcomes**

- Do you feel that your initiative has contributed to your local community?
- Who in your community do you think have been affected by your program and in what way?
- Can you see that your project has led to any new initiatives?
- How do you think decision-makers have been affected by your initiative?
- How do you think other people in your community view youth when you do projects such as these?

**Other forms of participation**

- Do you participate politically in other ways in your community?
- What are your thoughts on engaging in other forms of participation?
  - More traditional forms (such as voting, becoming a politician and engaging with the government)
  - More alternative forms (such as demonstrations, activism)
- How would you position your project in relation to these other forms of participation? Hur skulle ni positionera ert projekt i relation till dessa andra former av deltagande?
- Now that you have done this project, how do you view your future when it comes to engagement?
Appendix 3 - Detailed overview of data sources

Primary target group - Youth Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mpower</th>
<th>Peace Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method: Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completed projects</th>
<th>Completed projects</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Interviewee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Woman, 18, city, suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Woman, 18, city, suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Man, 18, city, suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Man 20, city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Woman, 25, city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Man, 25, city, suburb</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completed activity</th>
<th>Completed activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Interviewee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Woman, 28, city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Woman, 23, informal settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Woman, 20, informal settlement</td>
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<td>Woman, 20, informal settlement</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Woman, 23, countryside</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Man, 25, countryside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Man, 28, informal settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Man, 28, informal settlement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Secondary target group - Actors involved in minor projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Colleague of youth leader</td>
<td>Group interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>External actor involved in minor project</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>Participants of youth leaders’ activity</td>
<td>Participatory observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Colleague of youth leader</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Colleague of youth leader</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>External actor involved in minor project</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>