What is the enabling environment for local level youth participation? A comparative study of youth councils in the Australian state of Victoria and Estonia

Martti Martinson

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Applied Research

Institute for Sustainable Industries and Liveable Cities

Victoria University

Melbourne, Australia

2020

ABSTRACT

At a time of rapid change in the political involvement of young people, the creation of structures to facilitate the participation of young people in decision-making processes has been on the rise globally (Badham & Wade 2010; Farrow 2015). Youth councils are often created with the aim of representing the interests of young people in the community through advocacy, lobbying and provision of advice to decision-making bodies. At the same time the landscape of youth councils, particularly at a local government level, is varied and often lacking the evidence of best practice, an enabling environment and coordination.

This mixed-methods comparative case study research analysed the current environment and context in which youth councils are operating, and the experiences of former and current members of youth councils and the professionals that support their work, in the Australian state of Victoria and in Estonia. Semi-structured interviews and an online survey across the two countries and in two languages were employed from 2016 until 2017 to map the experiences and identify youth councils' successes, gaps and potential for improvement. Qualtrics software was used to collect, analyse and code the survey data; data from semi-structured interviews was coded manually. The coding process identified key nodes and sub-nodes.

The results revealed that local level youth councils in Victoria and Estonia share many similarities, particularly in their aims, commonly undertaken activities and aspirations; however, there are also noticeable differences which can largely be attributed to the relevant legislative framework, policies, coordination mechanisms and resourcing for youth councils that exist in Estonia but not in Victoria. Through the results of this study, a framework for an enabling environment for youth councils was identified and conceptualised, using the Enabling Environment Index developed by CIVICUS (2013), the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, as a guide. The findings of this research also sought to provide an understanding of how the work of local level youth councils can be better supported and organised by policy,

organisational and legislative measures to increase the effectiveness and benefits of these structures for young people and the community.

STUDENT DECLARATION

"I, Martti Martinson, declare that the Master by Research thesis entitled 'What is the enabling environment for local level youth participation? A comparative study of youth councils in the Australian state of Victoria and Estonia' is no more than 60,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work[1]."

Signature  Date: 9 March 2020

[1] Sections of the literature review, presented in Chapter 2, were published as a following book chapter: Martinson, M 2017, 'Conceptualising Youth Participation: the Example of Estonia and Australia', in T Dibou & IE Rannala (eds), *Teadmine ja praktika noorsootöös. Noorsootöö artiklite kogumik*, Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia, pp. 51-64

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Reaching this point of submitting my thesis has not been an easy or straightforward road and has only been possible as a result of the influence of many people surrounding me during this journey. What should have been a PhD ended up being a Masters thesis and although I know that my supervisor, Professor Robyn Broadbent, did and most likely continues to believe that it should have been a PhD, and she is to be thanked for encouraging me on this road of self and academic discovery. Thank you, Robyn, for having been an Enabler with a capital E for me and for the tireless advocacy and believing in me even if I did not. Greatest respect to you also for putting up with a lot of excuses from me and for mobilising yourself and freeing up some time at short notice in the end to facilitate a faster than usual sprint to the finish line.

To my other supervisor, Dr Cathryn Carpenter, without whom I would have given up a long time ago – thank you for the enormous amount of patience with me and for the intellectual tickle and endless inspiration, for hosting me in your lovely home and providing a safe and inspiring environment for life and academic discussions, for visiting me in Europe and in Melbourne and for never, ever being cross or patronising with me. From you I learnt the human side of academia and research and the attitude that almost everyone is capable of undertaking research. Even pesky Estonians!

To Professor Maureen Ryan, who was part of my supervisory team in the middle of my journey – thank you for your experienced eye and for bringing in a wealth of knowledge and a perspective outside the youth bubble.

I would also like to thank my critical friends. First, Dr Ilona-Evelyn Rannala, who was strict with me when I needed it but who also provided encouragement and helped me create a bridge between the Australian and Estonian contexts that put things into perspective. Aitäh for inspiring me on so many levels! And to Associate Professor Tim Corney for being an academic

mentor and a critical friend whose influence is also clearly evident in this thesis and whose friendship and advice I highly value.

To other friends and colleagues, particularly Jane, whose kind-heartedness to offer exactly the right help when the situation was calling for very practical measures – your presence has always been felt, appreciated and will be remembered. To my family, who have never embarked on a similar academic journey themselves, but whose consistent encouragement and support was also felt – thanks a lot!

And finally, to Adam Finlay – thank you for your professionalism and guidance in proofreading and editing my text.

> *"In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."*
>
> Martin Luther King, Jr

May I always remain the one who speaks out and writes and never become the one that stays silent.

CONTENTS

TABLES AND FIGURES

APPENDICES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Youth participation is defined as “a process where young people, as active citizens, take part in, express views on, and have decision-making power about issues that affect them” (Farthing 2012, p. 73). This particular definition is central to understanding how I have approached youth participation in the context of this thesis. Whereas an array of other definitions for youth participation exist, it is the combination of conditions outlined in Farthing’s definition, as well as its emphasis on the importance of power that many other definitions lack, that makes Farthing’s definition worthy for this research.

This chapter is a preface to understanding the approach that I take to youth participation throughout this thesis. It outlines my experiences as a young person in community as well as in youth participatory structures. It explains how my lived experience has shaped the way I view youth participation and assists in understanding the lens through which this research has been undertaken.

Knowing my story is not complementary but necessary for understanding the choice of methodology, research questions and findings of this research. My story is an example of an enabling environment for meaningful youth participation and this research attempts to fill a gap in the literature about the longitudinal, rather than the immediate, experience of those of us whose lives have been significantly shaped by the overwhelmingly positive participation experiences gained as a young person.

1.2 Researcher’s biography as an important impetus for the study

In order to understand the true meaning of my story, it is necessary to understand the centrality of the concept of power in the discourse about youth participation. Farrow (2018) notes that youth participation in decision-making is always about the sharing and distribution of power –

from and between those that typically control the process to those they seek to engage. Being entrusted with power and, on many occasions, actively seeking to be given more power, has accompanied every element of my experience described in this chapter. A process where no power (such as power to make or influence decisions) is being sought, transferred or shared cannot be labelled as youth participation. It is widely agreed that young people are, compared to adults, powerless and this stems from their social, economic and political marginalisation – most young people are disenfranchised from mainstream society and are not treated equally by virtue of their age (Corney 2014).

Community engagement

I grew up in a 1990s newly post-Soviet Estonia where people had resisted the Soviet occupation for decades and yearned for the end of the illegal invasion to restore a free, democratic and independent country. This meant that during my formative years, community activism and grassroots democracy was as popular and widespread as ever in the modern history of the country. After five decades of living under totalitarian regimes, people were finally free to establish community groups and non-government organisations (NGOs), hold free elections on all levels – from school student representative councils and village elders to local councils and parliament – all to take back power in every aspect of their lives.

That newly found power and freedom ignited a rediscovered passion and motivation among Estonians like my grandmother to become leaders in their local communities. Of course, many communities were also active, particularly in preserving cultural traditions such as singing, folk dancing or handicraft during the Soviet times. The difference however was that at the time of the occupation, all activities were subject to censorship and, consequently, any activism that was not considered in line with the policy of the Communist Party was banned. As such, the motivation for and the meaning of being ‘active’ and having ‘power’ over something was vastly different.

Having a trusting grandmother who worked in a position in which a large variety of different tasks had to be performed – from dealing with budgets, keeping official records, organising events and projects, to human resources management – enabled me to teach myself a number of skills. One of those was how to read, interpret and apply legislation and by-laws. Being an official legal entity in its own right, the community centre where my grandmother worked was required to have all sorts of different policies and procedures. In practice, this was one of the weakest professional qualities of my grandmother, which could in part be due to her age and limited computer skills. I started reading legislation, policies and procedures of other similar organisations for the purpose of contextualising and drafting them for my grandmother's community centre.

After having produced a number of policies and procedures I realised that I had developed many documents, such as an application process for joining community groups, reporting and record management requirements and others, and gained valuable skills and experience in doing so.

In order to provide legitimacy for all of the work that I had been doing, I came up with a proposal to the local council (which was submitted under my grandmother's name) to amend the constitution that governed the community centre for the purpose of establishing an advisory structure – a council – for the community centre. The council would serve in an advisory role to the director (my grandmother) on issues such as approving the annual work plan and setting the strategic directions of the centre, but also participating in the recruitment process of the position of director in the event of a vacancy.

In 2004, the councillors of Jõelähtme parish endorsed the proposal which established the advisory council and subsequently appointed three other local residents as well as myself as council officials to serve as the members. During the first meeting, I was elected as the chairman. I was 15 years of age at the time.

There were a number of other significant experiences during my teenage years that intrinsically influenced the power dynamics between myself and the adult-dominated society around me. One of these was becoming an editor-in-chief of the local newspaper.

Formal youth participation

My first experience with traditional structures of youth participation dates back to 2002. Known by my peers at school as an efficient organiser and politically-minded sixth grader, I was elected to my school's student representative council (SRC). I was 12 years old at the time. The sixth grade was the earliest opportunity to become involved in the SRC at our school according to the rules. The SRC was led by much older students than I was at the time – the president was in year 12 and all the other board members were considerably older than me.

Although being appointed as a member of the SRC was a somewhat measured decision which was influenced by the work I was doing in my local community, I had very little idea about what I had gotten myself into. Whereas the SRC was to a large degree student-led and independent from the school board, the hobby coordinator (youth worker) played a crucial role in the everyday work of the SRC. She attended each meeting and often acted as an advisor, mediator and messenger between staff, management and the SRC. She was also the gatekeeper for funds allocated to the SRC, which in practice meant that she kept the money in her office, but it was up to the board of the SRC to decide how to spend it.

This experience led me to the opportunity to become a member of the youth advisory council of the city government of the capital of Estonia. The feelings of achievement, self-actualisation and fulfillment resulting from representing other young people and communicating our stories, aspirations and vision to decision-makers led to yet another opportunity – to represent my school on a national level. It was again by a coincidence that the president of our SRC was unwell and I was asked at the last minute to represent my school at the annual general meeting (AGM) of the Estonian School Student Councils' Union (ESCU) – the national peak body of school and vocational students, and also the biggest youth organisation in Estonia.

Student representatives from all over Estonia gathered for this two-day meeting to discuss and adopt policy positions and elect a new board among other business. I immediately knew that I was in the right place. I signed up to become a member of the policy committee soon after attended my first meeting. When the next AGM was fast approaching, some board members were announcing their resignation and I was approached by the board to stand as a candidate for vice-chairmanship. It was a big thing to become a vice-chairman of the biggest youth organisation in Estonia after only having been associated with it for a short six months.

The power to effect change

A further six months later I was elected president of ESCU. The array of extraordinary opportunities during these years have been life-changing in many ways – there is arguably no other context or situation than youth participation when a 16–17 year old young person gets woken up by phone calls from journalists asking for interviews; attends a meeting with the Estonian Minister for Education; presents the views of 100,000 members at a parliamentary hearing about proposed changes to the national curriculum; and ends their day by conducting job interviews to employ adults who in any other situation would have power over us. Yet this was what my days looked like as a student leader. The range of topics that I had to deal with as president was very broad. Among the youth rights and new curriculum issues was also the ever-exciting question of how to change the final exams.

My career choices, personal and professional values, strengths, weaknesses and the feeling of being recognised as fully human are a direct consequence of the achievements, unique opportunities and competences acquired through youth participation. I proudly call myself a product of youth participation. In addition to my experience in the youth sector in Estonia as described in this chapter, I have also had a long and close association with Australia and in particularly with the state of Victoria and its youth sector. I first arrived in Australia in 2007 as a young backpacker. After my initial departure from Australia in 2018 to pursue further professional opportunities in Estonia, I returned to Australia in 2011 with an initial aim to undertake tertiary studies in youth work which later also resulted in working in the youth sector

in Australia in two local governments in Victoria, undertaking research, creating ongoing connections between the youth sectors in Estonia and Australia and contributing to the training and teaching of youth work students at Victoria University.

This story is as much about myself as it is a reflection and acknowledgement of the impact that opportunities to influence and lead decisions have had on many young people across the world with whom I have crossed paths. More than a decade of representing young people in committees and organisations locally, nationally and internationally has led me to seek better understanding of youth participation and how the environment for it can be enhanced so that more young people can be a part of it.

1.3 Justification for the study

There is a growing body of knowledge around the benefits of youth participation, particularly across the democratic world and within Western cultures (Forde & Martin 2016; Cushing & van Vliet 2017; Collins, Augsberger & Gecker 2016). The evidence overwhelmingly supports the importance and multifaceted benefits for young people and society at large of enabling and supporting meaningful youth participation.

There have been various studies on the role, outcomes and impact of local level youth councils in countries such as Sweden, Spain, Ireland, United Kingdom, the US, Turkey and elsewhere (Forde & Martin 2016; Cushing & van Vliet 2017; Collins, Augsberger & Gecker 2016). These have mostly focused on researching youth councils within a single country and to date there is little comparative, particularly cross-cultural and cross-continental, research to determine the enabling conditions for one of the most common structures through which youth participation is implemented – youth councils (Kassman & Vamstad 2019; Gökçe-Kızılkaya & Onursal-Beşgülb 2017; Forde & Martin 2016; Cushing & van Vliet 2017; Sant & Davies 2018; Matthews 2001; Collins, Augsberger & Gecker 2016). There appears to be even a larger gap in the research that builds on the combined experience of similar structures operating in

politically similar yet geographically distant environments, such as the case of Estonia and Australia.

The majority of research into youth participation focuses on the individual aspects and conditions required for meaningful youth participation to take place. This is widely evidenced through a multitude of various models for youth participation that have been developed over the years. Very few studies have focused on the structures and identifying an enabling environment for youth participation. This study aims to fill that gap by:

a) providing a cross-cultural comparison between local level youth participation in Estonia and Australia – something that has not been done before
b) identifying the enabling environment for local level youth councils as structures, as opposed to focusing on individual or participatory processes/activities.

1.4 Research aim and research question

This comparative research examined the work of local level youth participatory structures – youth councils – in Estonia and in the state of Victoria, Australia, and the political, legislative and organisational environments these structures operate in. The research aimed to:

- outline the similarities and differences in political, legislative and organisational environments in which local level youth councils operate in Victoria and Estonia
- identify gaps in current political, legislative and organisational environments related to the work of local level youth councils
- identify the enabling conditions for local level youth councils.

As such, this study sought to answer the following question:

What are the enabling conditions for local level youth councils in the Australian state of Victoria and Estonia?

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters: introduction; review of the literature; research design; findings and discussion (Australian data); findings and discussion (Estonian data); enabling environment; and finally, conclusions and recommendations.

The first chapter contextualises the research through defining youth participation, providing an impetus for the study through presentation of my own experience and through demonstrating the need for this study.

The second chapter provides an overview of the existing body of knowledge through a review of literature that relates to the social construction of young people; definitions, relevance, structures and policy context for youth participation in Australia and Estonia; emerging ways and trends for youth participation; the meaning of an enabling environment; the role of local governments; and power and agency.

In the research design chapter, research aims and questions, the design of this study, methodology and processes for data collection and analysis, ethical considerations and limitations of the study are discussed.

In the two findings and discussion chapters, qualitative and quantitative data will be combined and presented and discussed separately for Australia and Estonia in order to compare processes.

The enabling environment chapter compares the similarities and differences of the findings between the Estonian and Australian data and proposes an enabling environment framework for local level youth councils. This framework identifies the dimensions and sub-dimensions of the work of youth councils that together form an enabling environment for meaningful youth participation to take place within these structures.

The conclusions and recommendations chapter outlines the significance of the findings, makes recommendations for future research and for decision-makers and practitioners for the creation of a more enabling environment in which local level youth councils can reach their full potential.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

With the significant decline of the involvement of younger generations in traditional political mechanisms and structures, the past two decades has seen a rise in the number of structures, organisations, policies and events focusing on young people's participation and the promotion of youth as a specific social category (Sukarieh & Tannock 2015; Forbirg 2005). This trend has also resulted in the promotion of young people's participation in the provision of public services in government structures as well as the community sector, particularly at local and community levels (Badham & Wade 2010).

This chapter discusses the social construction of young people, concepts of power and agency, and provides an overview of the policy context for youth participation in Estonia and Australia. The enabling environment, role of local councils, contemporary concepts and approaches and emerging ways for youth participation are explored through a review of the literature. The literature discussed in this chapter includes book chapters, journal articles, legislation and policy documents but also manuals, essays and research reports by think tanks and knowledge centres from around the globe but with a focus on European and Australia contexts.

2.1 Social construction of young people

Exactly what is meant by 'youth' or 'young person' is open for discussion, though central to the concept is the notion of it being a stage in life between childhood and adulthood. The period in life that is defined as 'youth' is on one hand a social construction but also a period of individual change and development (Hine & Wood 2009). There is little disagreement amongst scholars about the existence of multiple layers of the concept of 'youth'. The meanings attributed to constructs like 'youth' can also be described as culturally determined impositions rather than attributes of the data (Chisholm et al. 2011). However, no legal definition for 'youth' or 'young people' exists at an international level or in many domestic contexts (Farrow 2015).

In pre-industrial Europe, there were no clear distinctions made between childhood and other pre-adult phases of life. The introduction of the concept of 'adolescence' by American psychologist G. Stanley Hall in the late 19th century constructed the shift away from childhood to the onset of puberty. Hall's work provided an impetus for emerging notions about young people and society in general, reflecting ideological, economic and political changes in Western societies at that time (Gillis, Gett, cited in Griffin 2004).

In general, the significant body of research on young people that has been emerging during the last 80 years assumes that young people constitute a separate and significant category of people: as non-adults (Wyn & White 1996). Wyn and White (1996, p. 8) further elaborate that "a central and recurring theme in these studies is a problematic notion of being a young person and the even more problematic notion of becoming an adult".

In the last two decades of the 20th century and first two decades of the 21st century, youth as a social category has drastically increased in relevance, not just for middle-class young people in the global North, but for young people across social classes, nations and racial and ethnic groups in the global North and South alike. This phenomenon has not been universal: for young people growing up in poor families in some parts of the global South, in particular, who remain outside of formal education or labour markets, the identity and concept of youth, as understood elsewhere, continue to have limited relevance (Sukarieh & Tannock 2015).

It is clear from the literature that what is meant by 'youth' is largely dependent on cultural and historical contexts. The 'deficit view' of young people which, although increasingly challenged and contradicted lately, seems to be still present in policy and human rights discourses where young people, particularly those under the age of majority, are not treated equally with adults. Corney (2014) argues that most young people are disenfranchised from mainstream society and are not treated equally by virtue of their age. He provides examples such as lack of voting rights, compulsory education and different rates of pay to illustrate how society treats young people differently from adults (Corney 2014).

2.2 Policy context for youth participation in Estonia and Australia

Estonia and Australia, although having very different histories and being geographically distant, have a range of values in common. These shared values include the rule of law, democratic governance, respect for fundamental human rights and liberties, citizen participation and the empowerment of young people. These common values and similarities in agreed goals and visions provide a basis for comparison, despite the geographic distance and modest collaboration to date between Australian and Estonian professionals in youth fields and other areas.

For policy purposes, both Estonia and the Australian state of Victoria have defined the age range of who is considered a young person. In Estonia, paragraph 3 of the Youth Work Act (2010) defines a young person as "a natural person between 7 and 26 years of age". This definition of a young person is used in Estonia to determine the target group for youth programs, youth policies and youth work activities. In Victoria, there is no definition of a young person in legislation, however, the Youth Sector Code of Ethical Practice defines young people as between the ages of 12 and 25 (YACVic 2007) and Victorian Government in its Youth Policy states that the policy "reflects our commitment to engage with young Victorians aged 12 to 24 years in a new way and includes principles to guide youth engagement and participation. It will be used to influence practice across government to give young people a stronger voice in shaping the way services, policies and programs are designed and delivered" (State of Victoria DHHS 2016).

Youth participation is a compulsory element and guiding principle of youth work both in Estonia and in some states of Australia, such as the state of Victoria (*Youth Work Act 2010* [Estonia]; YACVic 2007). Outside of youth work, in the policy arena, the participation of children and young people is supported locally, regionally and internationally by various policies and programs, international treaties and legislation, most notably by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). UNCRC Article 12, which outlines the duty

of governments to ensure the rights of children to be involved in the decision-making processes affecting their life, has been dominating the academic discourse on children and young people's participation (Farrow 2015; Percy-Smith & Thomas 2010).

Youth and child participation in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives is seen as fostering a democratic environment that improves services and outcomes and furthers a 'social justice' agenda. As such, in recent decades the focus has been on the promotion of young people's participation in the delivery of public services in government, organisations and institutions, particularly at local, community levels (Badham & Wade 2010).

This coincides with the Australian context where local governments are seen as playing a crucial, and often dominant, role in the provision of services for young people as well as building young people's civic engagement and leadership. Providing opportunities for young people to voice their opinions and concerns, and promoting young people's positive contributions to their communities, are seen as essential (YACVic 2015a).

Likewise, in the Estonian context, local governments are one of the main actors in the planning and delivery of services and activities for young people, including in the areas of youth participation and civic engagement (Bart et al. 2013).

There are similarities in some participation-related trends in Estonia and Australia, such as comparable objectives and implementation mechanisms including ratification of the UNCRC and other international conventions. Despite participation being the guiding principle of, and strongly linked to, youth work activities, there are also some notable differences in the political agendas of the national governments in these two countries. In the last two decades the Estonian government has consistently increased expenditure towards youth participation and civic engagement (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium 2015). However, in Australia, changing policy priorities caused by changes of government cut the national youth engagement budget by 80% in the 2015–2016 federal budget and by 100% after that (Australian Youth Affairs Coalition 2015).

The national government in Estonia has also introduced various legislative measures to support youth participation, such as:

- legislating youth participatory structures in local governments and schools (Bart et al. 2013; *Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act 1998* [Estonia]; *Youth Work Act 2010* [Estonia])
- lowering the voting age from 18 years to 16 years of age in local government elections (Riigikogu 2015)
- providing continuous support for youth-led organisations, including youth participatory structures in educational institutions, local governments, and at regional and national levels (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium 2015).

By contrast, in Australia national systems are at odds with state systems. The national peak body for youth affairs and the Australian Youth Forum lost their funding in the 2014–2015 federal budget and as of 2020 are still defunded. However, the Victorian state government announced an increase in funding for youth engagement in its 2015–2016 budget and has continued that trend in later years. Victoria has also released a new youth policy that aims to increase youth participation in policy, program and service design and to build the capacity of government and service providers to actively involve young people in decision-making (YACVic 2015b, 2018, 2019; Victorian Government 2015 & 2016).

The Estonian government's *Strategic Plan for the Youth Sector 2014–2020* similarly outlines the involvement of young people in the implementation of the policy as a way to ensure the quality and impact of the proposed measures. In addition to being one of the three pillars of Estonian youth policy, increasing support for young people's participation is listed as one of the four main areas of action within the strategic plan. The plan stresses the need for increasing the motivation and opportunity for young people to participate, which should consequently contribute to the coherence of society and develop a stronger civil society,

prevent radicalisation and minimise young people's relocation to other countries (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium 2014).

2.3 Defining youth participation

In academic literature as well as in political discourse, participation is mostly associated with the involvement of young people in decision-making processes at various levels of governance and within organisations. The original focus was on young people having a representation in political processes and decision-making (Lentin & Ohana 2008; Fleming 2013). Farthing (2012, p. 73) defines youth participation as "a process where young people, as active citizens, take part in, express views on, and have decision-making power about issues that affect them." This definition links participation with democratic society and the concept and desire of young people being 'active citizens'. The meaningful participation of young people can also be conceptualised as a practice of "working with" young people, rather than "working for" young people (Eureka Strategic Research, cited in ARACY 2012).

Kirby (cited in Comrie 2010, p. 11) considers the public and private nature of youth participation that "focuses on involvement in decision-making within the public sphere (government and organisational policy), self-determination in the private sphere (e.g. personal decision-making in families) and in its simplest form through integrated daily participatory approaches (e.g. encouragement of democratic thought in curriculum)". Holdsworth (2001) further expands on that definition, suggesting that participation is "a way of approaching our work, of looking at the ways in which society functions, of perceiving a desirable construction of 'young people' within that society".

In recent decades, definitions that emphasise the process of participation and the importance of structures have been dominating the academic literature. However, the tendency to interpret youth participation as the involvement of young people through a structured and formalised mechanism has been met with some criticism. Bell, Vromen and Collin (2008)

argue that research demonstrates that young people from diverse backgrounds are unlikely to be involved in these types of mechanisms and that informal approaches can be more appealing to young people.

Brodie et al. (2009, pp. 4-5) identify three dimensions of participation:

- **public participation,** meaning "engagement of individuals with the various structures and institutions of democracy", such as voting, membership in youth councils, other formal organisations and committees
- **social participation** as "collective activities that individuals may be involved in as part of their everyday lives"; for example, community organisations and volunteering
- **individual participation,** which "covers the choices and actions that individuals make as part of their daily life and that are statements of the kind of society they want to live in".

Brodie et al. (2009) also note emphasise the fluidity of these broad categories of participation and their dynamic interactions and overlaps. Another categorisation is offered by Bell, Vromen and Collin (2008), who identify that youth participation can be either **universal**, aimed at involving the general youth population in decision-making, or **targeted**, involving only young people from a particular background or with similar experiences.

2.4 The relevance of youth participation

The concept of youth participation is closely linked with the principles of democratic governance. Hart (1992) notes that a nation is democratic to the extent that its citizens are involved, particularly at the community level, and for this reason there should be gradually increasing opportunities for children and young people to participate in any aspiring democracy, particularly in nations already convinced that they are democratic. However, Yakovlev (2003) somewhat widens the discourse and argues that the treatment of its children is a litmus test of any government, however it may describe itself.

Cleaver (2002) argues that participation can be justified as a means to other outcomes (such as skill development or policy outcomes) or as an end, where the process itself is seen as a right or to be benefiting someone. He views participation to be a "good thing" for young people, and argues that, because of the inherent goodness of participation, the most crucial part is getting the methodology right.

According to Hoffmann-Ekstein (cited in ARACY 2012) the concept of participation exists across a continuum comprising service participation, community participation and civic participation, with youth participation strongly linked to concepts of social inclusion and social capital (Collin, Hoffmann-Ekstein, cited in ARACY 2012). Hine and Wood (2009) further argue that opportunities for participation, contribution and engagement enable young people to address developmental needs such as sense of mastery, sense of generosity and belonging. Lansdown (cited in ARACY 2012) points out that civic and political processes often fail to recognise the unique needs of young people.

Farthing (2012) suggests that four typologies of justifications for participation can be drawn from the literature:

- **rights-based**, which argues that young people are fully human and possess participation rights as citizens, and takes into account the existence of international treaties such as the UNCRC
- **empowerment**, which suggests that "participation, as a process that requires power sharing, can shift the balance of power between the generations and redress young people's marginalisation" (p. 76)
- **efficiency**, in which youth participation is viewed as desirable and a source of knowledge for practitioners and policy-makers, and which emphasises the views of young people as citizen-consumers
- **developmental**, which suggests that participation can encourage positive youth development, such as learning new social skills (Sinclair & Franklin 2000; Warshak 2003;

Cleaver 2002). Although the developmental argument lacks a specific underpinning developmental theory, it is supported by a range of theorists, such as Erickson, Kholberg, Piaget and Vygotsky (cited in Farthing 2012).

A more simplified classification is offered by Bell, Vromen and Collin (2008), who argue that youth participation strategies are often focused on either **youth development** or **youth involvement.** Youth development models generally view youth participation as a key strategy in enabling the development of skills and competences (Jarrett, Larson, Catalano et al. cited in Bell, Vromen & Collin 2008). The youth involvement approach puts less emphasis on change in young people themselves but argues that through participation young people are able to change policy-making, organisations and society (White & Wyn 2008). Social justice outcomes of youth involvement, such as the capacity to strengthen democracy and engage young people through civic participation, are emphasised.

The importance of including young people in political process has also been recently demonstrated through the 2011–2012 Arab states popular uprisings and various Occupy movements. Bruter and Harrison (2014) agree that participation of young people can be identified as a distinct characteristic of many demonstrations and movements, such as the Georgian and Ukrainian revolutions in the early years of the 21st century and demonstrations leading to the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989–1990.

Transitioning countries can benefit from fresh ideas and new leadership, which can also assist them to overcome authoritarian practices (UNDP 2013). In Tunisia and Egypt, the uprisings in 2011 also led to an explosion of aspirations and expectations for political and social inclusion and engagement of young people in particular. These have been fulfilled to varying degrees but have also been the source of considerable disappointment and frustration. Tunisia in particular has witnessed a surge in the establishment of youth engagement initiatives; however, it has also been faced with many obstacles and shortcomings that have prevented effective engagement on policy issues. These shortcomings are largely related to human

resource capacity-building: training and expertise have often been identified as inadequate (Aldouri & Spencer 2016).

2.5 Structures for youth participation

Despite young people under the age of majority generally being regarded as fully human, in most countries they do not possess the rights of full citizenship that enable them to fully participate in the decision-making structures of their society or benefit directly from participation in these structures (Corney 2014). In the last three decades there has been a proliferation of youth policy across the globe. This has resulted in an increased focus on creating structures such as youth parliaments, youth councils, student councils, youth forums, young mayors and others at local, regional and national levels worldwide (Sukarieh & Tannock 2015).

In the broadest terms the literature identifies two categories for implementing youth participation: **formal participation,** which means a more structured and usually longer-term approach to involving young people in decision-making, typically executed through formal policies; and **informal participation,** which uses mechanisms that have no or a 'loose' structure, are 'casual' in their tone, require limited planning and resources, are quite often short-term and are usually not executed through formal policy (Bell, Vromen & Collin 2008). These categories are also visibly present in Estonian and Australian contexts; however, formal participation appears to be more prevalent and better resourced in Estonia compared to Australia.

At the global level, a number of high-profile youth events have taken place in recent years and formal participation structures, such as the Commonwealth Youth Council, have been created (Farrow 2015). Nevertheless, it is the involvement of young people in decision-making processes at a local level that tends to dominate the academic debate, predominantly because it is seen as improving service delivery and outcomes, contributing to a "social justice" agenda

and fostering a democratic environment (Brodie et al. 2009; Farrow 2015). According to Collin (2008), services and programs are also more likely to be effective and achieve their desired outcomes as a result of the involvement of young people.

Youth participation has been on the agenda for governments in Australia for many decades. Irving, Maunders and Sherington (1995) argue that student protests of the 1960s and 70s, which also saw a number of school and university participatory mechanisms being established in Australia, forced the society and governments to pay more attention to the views and opinions of young people. Bessant (1997) further argues that youth participation was a popular focus of youth work from this time onwards.

On the local level, student councils and youth councils are prominent structured mechanisms for participation (Perry-Hazan & Nir 2016). They are seen as essential to providing opportunities for young people to get involved in public decision-making. Local youth council models of operation can vary significantly, as they depend on regulatory frameworks, institutional and organisational structures, and demography, politics and local traditions (Collins et al., cited in Perry-Hazan & Nir 2016). Studies in Scotland, which shares many similarities around the implementation of youth participation with Estonia, have also identified that being a member of the local youth council is a pathway into other participatory structures locally and nationally (Percy-Smith & Thomas 2010).

Participatory structures can often be supported by legislation that permits and ensures the inclusion of certain groups and organisations in the participation processes (Hickey & Mohan 2004; Farrow 2015), of which Estonia is a good example. In Estonia, the rights and responsibilities of youth participatory structures, such as local youth councils and student councils, are set out in five different acts of parliament and in numerous other legislative instruments, including in federal government regulations and municipal by-laws.

These regulations describe the principles for electing members to these structures. They also grant them specific rights, such as the right to receive information and support, nominate a

representative of the youth or student council to specific committees, make propositions and so on (*Youth Work Act 2010* [Estonia]; *Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act 2010* [Estonia]; *Universities Act 1995* [Estonia]; *Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act 1998* [Estonia]; *Vocational Educational Institution Act 2013* [Estonia]).

In Australia, there are no universal acts of parliament at federal or state level to regulate the work of youth participatory structures. However, legislatures in certain jurisdictions, such as the State Parliament of New South Wales and the Norfolk Legislative Assembly, have adopted legislation to establish specific youth advisory committees (*Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014* [NSW]; *Youth Advisory Council Act 2000* [NI]; *Youth Advisory Council Act 1989* [NSW]). Unlike in Estonia, where the legislation universally applies to all similar participatory structures, the examples of Australian legislation only regulate the work and functions of a single youth participatory structure. The functions of these structures are somewhat similar in Australia and Estonia, yet Australian legislation lacks the mention of foundation democratic principles and there is no requirement for elections to be held to establish membership.

However, youth participatory structures have also attracted some criticism, particularly as being seen to privilege a relatively small group of well educated, already empowered young people, often missing the needs of disadvantaged and disenfranchised young people, and replicating failed adult structures of representative politics (Yamashita & Davies, cited in Percy-Smith & Thomas 2010; Cairns 2006; Comrie 2010).

Participation structures have also been described as “having little impact on public decision-making” (Kirby & Bryson, cited in Farrow 2015, p. 25) and failing to devise or support structures that offer meaningful opportunities for youth-led decision-making and provide feedback (Davis, cited in Farrow 2015). The right of young people to participate in the work of student and youth councils is also often hindered by the low worth that adults tend to ascribe to children’s positions (Perry-Hazan & Nir 2016).

Despite the existence of an extensive body of knowledge on the benefits of youth participation for young people (Farrow 2015, 2018; Farthing 2012; Perry-Hazan & Nir 2016), their communities and society as a whole, there is a lack of systematic comparative research not only on youth policy structures but also on the relationship between national structures and policies at local levels. To date any comparative analysis of structures, meaning and forms of youth participation has been limited by a lack of sufficient and solid data (Loncle et al. 2012).

2.6 Meaningful versus tokenistic youth participation

Hart (1992) argues that adults often tend to underestimate the competence of young people while at the same time using them in processes to influence some cause. It is important to differentiate between meaningful youth political participation and tokenistic, pseudo-participatory activities, as many activities claiming to foster youth participation do not effectively give young people a voice and influence in decision-making (UNDP 2013). Hart (1992, p. 9) describes tokenism as "instances in which children are apparently given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions".

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) characterises effective and meaningful youth political participation with three attributes:

- **consultative**, where young people's voices are heard in an adult-assigned consultation process
- entailing **youth-led** participation, where young people have a direct impact on decision-making within their own youth communities
- involving **youth collaborative** participation, where young people effectively take part in regular political decision-making processes (UNDP 2013).

Over the years, a number of frameworks and models have been created to support organisations, adults and young people to conceptualise youth participation. In much of the

literature and discourse on youth participation, one model has been uniquely influential: Roger Hart's 'Ladder of Participation', first published in 1992 but reproduced many times since (Shier 2011). The ladder provides an eight-level model for children and young people's participation that consists of:

- **non-participation levels:** manipulation, decoration and tokenism
- **participation levels:** assigned but informed; consulted and informed; adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people; young people initiated and directed; young people initiated and shared decisions with adults.

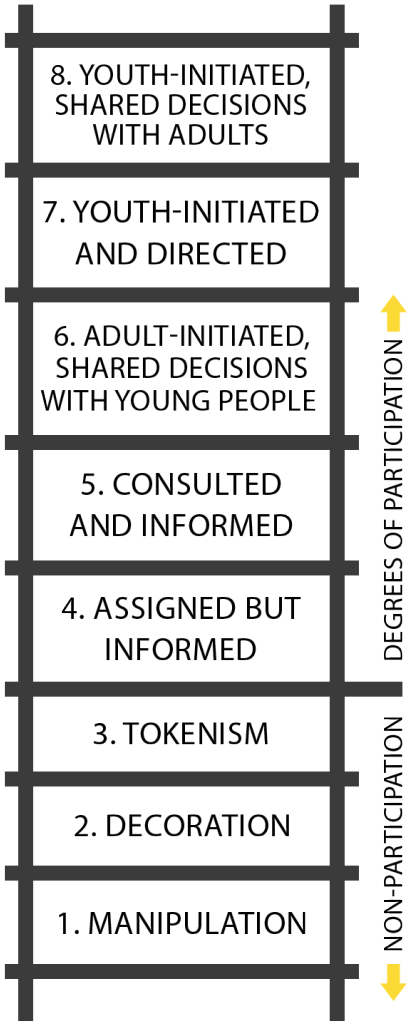

Figure 1: Roger Hart's ladder of young people's participation (Hart 1992)

Another model, introduced in 2001 by Harry Shier, sees youth participation as a continuum consisting of five levels: (i) young people are listened to; (ii) young people are supported in expressing their views; (iii) young people's views are taken into account; (iv) young people are involved in decision-making processes; and (v) young people share power and responsibility for decision-making. This model builds on the work of Hart (Shier 2001).

Lundy's (2007) influential model stems directly from UNCRC Article 12 as it sees the article comprised of four elements:

- **Space:** young people must be given the opportunity to express a view
- **Voice:** young people must be facilitated to express their views
- **Audience:** the view must be listened to
- **Influence:** the view must be acted upon, as appropriate.

This model is grounded on the premise that young people's participation requires respect for children and young people as rights-holders, as well as providing a sense of warmth and a shared purpose (Perry-Hazan & Nir 2016).

Further to the three models mentioned above, many more have been developed over the years. Karsten (2012) collated 36 models originating from a range of institutions, academics and practitioners, including participation models developed for different spheres, such as community organising, citizen engagement, international development, the policy cycle and rights-based approaches (Farrow 2015). A majority of the models focus on individual or group (but nevertheless person-centric) aspects of youth participation, identifying conditions for greater and more meaningful involvement; however, there is a gap in models and frameworks for youth participatory structures. Similarly, most of these models are lacking a solid theoretical underpinning which makes them vulnerable to critique, particularly within academic discourse. Whereas some of the existing participation models can be useful for adults and decision-makers to evaluate existing participatory practices or to design new ones, they are mostly not

useful for young people themselves as they are not intended to be used for guiding the everyday work of youth councils.

2.7 Power and agency

Many scholars have attempted to define the concepts of power and agency and the relationship between these concepts. Giddens (1984, p. 14), in his seminal book *The Constitution of Society*, talks about power as "having a capability to 'make a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events". He explains that to be an agent is to be able to deploy a range of causal powers, including that of influencing those deployed by others (Giddens 1984, p. 14). Burridge et al. (2010, p. 26) build on Giddens' structuration theory and define agency as "the individual capacity to take intentional action. The capacity of those actions to influence the current state of affairs and structures is a measure of power". They note that "when actors knowingly cause an event, they are said to have acted with agency, and Giddens sees all human actors as agents" (Burridge et al. 2010, p. 26). Giddens also coined the concept of the duality of structures and links social structures with human actions, arguing that human interactions and actions create social structures, and that those social structures influence the actions and interactions of humans (Giddens 1983; Burridge et al. 2010).

Concepts of power are also changing and evolving and a notion of 'old power' versus 'new power' is emerging in the discourse. Farrow (2018) notes that young people are increasingly despondent with democracy, particularly with the traditional forms and structures through which democracy, notably representative democracy, is implemented. He further elaborates this and offers a possible explanation for this phenomenon in young people:

> Technology provides access to information, opportunities and spaces to personalise their lives, immediately voice their opinion, and develop solutions to problems with little need for approval from others. At the root of this is the

> abundance of power and control that individuals now have over their own lives and their communities. (Farrow 2018, p. 18)

Farrow makes a distinction between **old power** values – which are typically characterised by traditional models of governance being based on concentrated power that is "closed, inaccessible and leader-driven" (Timms & Heimans 2018) and in which involvement of decision-making is permitted in ways that are pre-defined and approved by the institution – and **new power** values, which include mobilisation, participation and channelling of people (Farrow 2018). Examples of youth social movements that are driven by new power values include the #MarchForOurLives movement that "responded to a wave of events and outrage in the USA over high school shootings" (Farrow 2018, p. 20); the Indignados Movement in Spain; #BlackLivesMatter in the US (Farrow 2018); and #SchoolStrikeforClimate around the world.

Power and agency are central concepts in the youth participation discourse; however, these elements are frequently absent from research and practice (Manning & Edwards 2014). Bessant (2004) argues that it is common practice in youth participation programs and processes to merely pretend to give young people decision-making power; in reality, such processes fail to include young people in democracy – a notable example of which is the fact that young people under the age of 18 do not have the right to vote. There appears to be consensus amongst many researchers that in the absence of addressing the concept of power and without the aim of shifting power relationships to benefit young people, no meaningful participation can happen.

2.8 Emerging ways of youth participation

While traditional youth participatory structures that often replicate adult structures, such as youth and student councils, have been in existence for decades, there are a number of trends that influence youth participation.

One of the emerging discourses around youth participation is the inclusiveness of participation opportunities. Pirvulescu et al. (2019, pp. 4–5) define **inclusive participation** as “ensuring that young people from all backgrounds can influence decision-making. This means that taking account the social, economic and cultural backgrounds of young people who get involved in participation activities and then taking additional affirmative measures to promote the participation of those groups who are frequently excluded from getting involved”.

More than a decade earlier, Couch (2007) made a note that, in Australia, despite the enthusiastic championing of the idea of youth participation, most of the work regarding participation for young people focused largely on Anglo-Australian young people and there were far fewer participation-based projects with other more marginalised young people.

One of the most notable examples of inclusive participation emerging on the policy agenda worldwide is the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, which singles out “youth risking marginalisation” as a special category and calls on member states to promote the “inclusive democratic participation of all young people”. Furthermore, it incorporates inclusion and non-discrimination as principles and states the intention of promoting “activities and policies that are inclusive for all young people, especially those with fewer opportunities and/or whose voices may be overlooked” (EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, cited in Pirvulescu et al. 2019, p. 3).

Another theme emerging from the literature about emerging ways and innovative forms of youth participation is related to the **use and influence of technology**. Farrow (2018, p. 22) states that “digital opportunities have created new spaces for adolescent and youth rights, beyond their political participation”. Some authors see this trend as a distinct feature of the new forms of youth participation (Willems, cited in Crowley & Moxon 2017) while “others argue that while expanding the means by which young people can participate should always be welcome, online participation is not a panacea. The most successful strategies for influencing

decision-making at local, regional, national and European levels actively link up offline and online participation" (Crowley & Moxon 2017, p. 17).

The terms 'eDemocracy' and 'eParticipation' have emerged across the literature to refer to participatory processes relying on the use of technology. Maier-Raubler and Neumayer (2008, p. 2) describe eDemocracy as "the realisation of political processes, using digital information and communication technologies, particularly the Internet". The International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany (IJAB) talks about youth eParticipation as interactive online policy-making in action (IJAB 2014). It distinguishes direct eParticipation, where "political decisions are influenced directly and structural links to political decision-making processes are enabled", and indirect eParticipation in which initiators of eParticipation processes "reach out to internet users and encourage them to support certain issues and positions" (IJAB 2014, p. 4). There appears to be a consensus across the literature that the use of technology to enable eParticipation of young people can only be successful if online and offline methods are used in conjunction (Crowley & Moxon 2017; IJAB 2014; Rupkus & Franzl 2018).

The principle of **co-management** was introduced in the youth sector in 1971 by the European Youth Centre and in 1972 by the European Youth Foundation (Hansen, cited in Dibou 2015), which proclaimed that young people should be taken into account as youth policy-making actors (Dibou 2015). Crowley and Moxon (2017) also talk about co-management and co-productions as forms of youth participation, characterised by young people and adults jointly taking decisions about the running of a public organisation or project. In co-management, "a group of young people and adults work collaboratively, sharing power to manage and run an institution or organisation on an ongoing basis" (Crowley & Moxon 2017, p. 23).

Co-production, **co-creation** or **co-design** refers to young people and adults working collaboratively, sharing power to undertake a specific task until that task is complete – for example, writing a strategy, conducting research, evaluating a public service, or running a project (Crowley & Moxon 2017). In practice, both of these methods or principles have gained

popularity in recent decades, including in the youth field. The Victorian Government, for example, placed co-design principles at the centre of its youth policy (State of Victoria DHHS 2016).

2.9 Role of local government

In Victoria, the interconnectedness of local government and young people is diverse: “local governments promote young people’s health, social inclusion, skill development and leadership, and provide young people with opportunities to engage in arts and culture, community strengthening and civic life” (YACVic 2016, p. 5). The Victorian government has introduced the *Local Government Bill 2019*, which places a strong emphasis on community engagement by local councils. It does not specifically distinguish between youth and citizen participation, but it is evident that involving community members in the business of local government is a core function of local councils in Victoria (Local Government Bill 2019). This argument is supported by the Victorian Government Youth Policy, which states that local councils often provide “the most immediate experience of being part of a democratic process and provide opportunities for young people to participate in their communities through funding for youth workers and support for youth councils” (State of Victoria DHHS 2016, p. 37).

In Estonia, local governments have more autonomy and responsibility compared to Victorian local councils. This autonomy is protected and guaranteed by the European Charter of Local Self-Government (1985), the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia (1992) and the Local Government Organisation Act [Estonia] (1993), which all grant significant rights to autonomy for local governments in Estonia and protections from the unilateral removal of these rights by other levels of government.

Unlike in Estonia, local governments in Victoria are not signatories to international treaties protecting the rights of local self-governance, nor are local governments mentioned in the Australian Constitution. In Estonian law, one of the functions of rural municipalities and city

councils is to “consult with the youth council, in case it exists, upon planning, implementation and assessment of youth work” (Youth Work Act 2010 [Estonia]).

However, local governments in both jurisdictions (Victoria and Estonia) have a similar overall purpose, and play a significant role in enabling young people’s participation. Youth Councils that are operating within the structure of a local government in both countries often mimic the work and composition of elected councils as decision-making and representative bodies of local government areas. The core assumption of youth councils in both countries is that they should represent the voice of young people to the local council and provide advice to the elected council on matters concerning young people. Often youth councils are endorsed by the elected council as their advisory committees and they have their own Terms of Reference or constitution that guides their work. Local-government affiliated youth councils are an example of a formal youth participation as opposed to non-formal or informal youth participation where there is no formalised relationship or endorsement by the official council.

2.10 Enabling environment

The use of the term ‘enabling environment’ has gained momentum in multiple fields and sectors. Whereas there are numerous definitions on what constitutes an enabling environment in different fields, there is little research into enabling environments in the context of youth participation, and particularly youth participatory structures.

For example, in early childhood, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) defines an enabling environment as one in which “the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children’s development and learning. Within these environments there should be opportunities for children and adults to foster relationships, to develop their thinking and ideas, to grow emotionally and spiritually, to contribute to the culture of the learning community, and of course to develop physically” (Selbie & Wickett 2010, p. 75). The EYFS also states that “the

learning environment involves both the people and the space in which children develop and learn" (DCSF 2008).

Save the Children Sweden's report on capacity building in children's participation notes that an enabling environment not only encourages children to participate but also enables adults to change their assessment of the participation capacity of children (Beers, Chau et al. 2006). This definition somewhat connects two dimensions that are also present in youth participation practice – motivation and encouragement to take part in something; and sharing of power with young people by adults to enable participation to be meaningful and change-oriented.

CIVICUS, the World Alliance for Citizen Participation – a global alliance of civil society organisations – in 2013 developed and launched an Enabling Environment Index (EEI), which aims to assess the key conditions that shape how civil society operates. It defines civil society as "the arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests" (CIVICUS 2013, p. 5).

As such, all action undertaken by civil society — whether by individuals, movements or organisations — is affected by the enabling environment. CIVICUS defines an enabling environment as "a set of conditions that impact on the capacity of citizens (whether individually or in an organised fashion) to participate and engage in the civil society arena in a sustained and voluntary manner" (Youth Policy Labs 2015, p. 14).

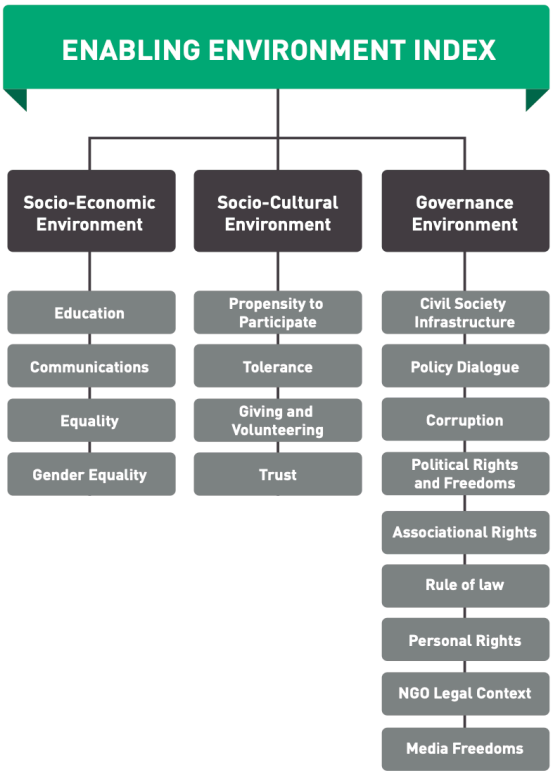

Figure 2: Enabling Environment Index dimensions and sub-dimensions (CIVICUS 2013)

Given the similarities in aims and operation of youth councils and civil society organisations, the EEI can be contextualised for youth participation and used as a guide to develop local level youth participatory structure-specific enabling conditions and domains. The original EEI of CIVICUS:

> is made up of 17 sub-domains, representing both the supply side and the demand side of the environment. The supply side refers to governance and policy measures directly having an impact on action, and is covered in the **Governance Environment**, which includes sub-dimensions such as corruption, the rule of law and media freedoms. The demand side relates to the readiness of individuals and organisations to take action, and is covered in the **Socio-Economic Environment**, which includes education, communications and equality, and the **Socio-Cultural Environment**, which includes propensity to participate, tolerance and trust. (CIVICUS 2013)

The Case for Space research project, which sought to understand and strengthen the conditions and environment for child and youth development in three focus areas – youth participation, child protection and youth livelihoods – applied the EEI to its research design and analysis. The project further adapted the CVICUS definition of an enabling environment and (for the purpose of their research) defined it as "a set of conditions that impact on the capacity of citizens (whether individually or in an organised fashion) to participate and engage" (Youth Policy Labs 2015, p. 15).

2.11 Conclusion

Young people as a distinct category is a social construction that in most Western cultures has historically been viewed as a period in life characterised by transitioning; but young people have also been viewed from a deficit perspective. In recent decades, research about young people that views them as assets (rather than non-adults who are lacking something or on the journey of becoming fully human) has started to proliferate, and concepts such as youth participation, the human rights of young people and empowerment have emerged.

In the literature, youth participation can be seen as a concept, a guiding principle for working with young people and a contributor to young people's development, but also as a policy objective for governments as well as a fundamental human right. Youth participation is closely associated with principles of democratic governance and thus is practiced predominantly in liberal democracies. However, it is not limited to interactions between the public sector and young people and, as a concept and principle, it is relevant to various sectors and spheres of society.

Various models have been developed for conceptualising youth participation – the most prominent being Hart's Ladder of Participation, Shier's Pathways to Participation and Lundy's model. Similarly, some countries, including Australia (and the state of Victoria) and Estonia, have created policies and legislation to enable and support youth participation. Central to

youth participation are the concepts of power and agency, which are inseparable elements of meaningful (not tokenistic) youth participation. Concepts of power are also changing and there is a body of knowledge about ‘new power’ values emerging from the literature.

Traditional methods, structures and processes for implementing youth participation are also changing, with advancements in technology and disappointment by young people in traditional democratic structures providing the biggest impetus. From an institutional side, local councils both in Victoria and Estonia play a crucial role in introducing and enabling youth participation to young people and society at large. The review of the literature and the discussion presented in this Chapter show how this research is ripe to make a contribution to this field.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the design of this study and the research methods and processes used for data collection and analysis. It will also discuss the benefits of this research, the ethical considerations and finally the limitations associated with this study.

3.1 Introduction

Whereas the literature suggests that numerous studies have investigated youth councils as structures in countries such as Sweden, Spain, Ireland, the UK, the US, Turkey and elsewhere (Kassman & Vamstad 2019; Gökçe-Kızılkaya & Onursal-Beşgülb 2017; Forde & Martin 2016; Cushing & van Vliet 2017; Sant & Davies 2018; Matthews 2001; Collins, Augsberger & Gecker 2016), there appears to be a gap in comparative cross-cultural research related to the work of youth participatory structures in local governments.

Furthermore, another gap in the research emerged through literature review: there has been little analysis of the combined experience of similar structures operating in politically similar yet geographically distant environments, such as the case of Estonia and Australia. Such comparisons are needed to improve knowledge about the conditions and environments that youth councils as structures need to reach their potential. Through the use of a mixed-methods comparative case study approach, this research aims to meet this gap.

3.2 Research question and aim

This study sought to answer the following question:

> *What are the enabling conditions for local level youth councils in the Australian state of Victoria and Estonia?*

In order to answer this question, the research examined and compared the work of local level youth participatory structures – youth councils – in Estonia and in the state of Victoria, Australia, and the political, legislative and organisational environments in which these structures operate.

The research aimed to:

- identify the similarities and differences in political, legislative and organisational environments in which local level youth councils operate in Victoria, Australia and Estonia
- identify gaps in current political, legislative and organisational environments related to the work of local level youth councils
- identify the enabling conditions for local level youth councils.

3.3 Research design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach as a comparative case study (Yin 2003) in which both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003; Stake 1995, 2005). The research process involved data collection through first conducting semi-structured interviews in order to inform the design of the quantitative survey. For the purpose of the research design, it was decided to first collect the qualitative data, which in combination with the literature provided the opportunity to confirm and complement the initial themes, which then informed the survey questions. The choice of the qualitative to quantitative sequence also enabled the initial findings from the semi-structured interviews to be confirmed with a larger a population sample through distribution of the survey online.

Creswell (2014) defines mixed methods as an approach to inquiry involving the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms. The core assumption of this type of inquiry is that the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of the research problem than either approach alone. A mixed-methods approach is considered by many to be a third methodological movement in

educational and social research (Johnson et al. 2007), which rejects the “either-or” need to choose between quantitative and qualitative approaches (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003) and, in fact, explicitly calls for the integrated use of methods from diverse inquiry traditions. According to Creswell (2014) mixed-method approaches have gained momentum in the last two decades, predominantly in social research.

It needs to be acknowledged that mixed-methods research is also subject to ongoing debates and criticism from those who are concerned about the purity and legitimacy of the traditional stand-alone qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2009). Similarly, there are some concerns in the research community related to case study research that most often relates to the presumed need for greater rigor, inability to generalise from case study findings and unclear comparative advantage compared to other research methods (Yin 2014).

This research project was seeking the ‘bigger picture’ knowledge that quantitative research surveys with large populations across countries can provide, as well as the rich, in-depth and personalised perspectives of young people accessed through open-ended qualitative interviewing. The approach also enabled the verification of qualitative interview data with larger quantitative survey responses. As Yin describes, “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin 2014, p. 16). The research contextualised Estonian and Australian data as individual case studies. This enabled the datasets to be considered in their own ‘real-world context’ as well as being a basis for comparison.

Yin (2014) also notes that a case study inquiry “relies on multiple sources of evidence with data needing to converge in triangulating fashion” (p. 17). The semi-structured interviews employed in this study, alongside the quantitative research data and literature review, offered an opportunity for in-depth empirical investigation and the chance to rely on multiple sources and triangulate data.

3.4 Data collection

3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

An opportunistic approach was used to determine the number and availability of youth council participants, and semi-structured interviews were held with participants associated with the work of three local level youth councils: two youth councils from Estonia and one from Victoria. The aim of the interviews was to examine the local context and environment for the key people associated with these youth councils, as well as the organisational structure, activities, challenges and other factors impacting their outcomes, in greater detail and to produce case studies. The interviews allowed the researcher to gain a more personalised insight into the work of these structures, which was required to identify the enabling environment for local level youth councils before confirming these insights with the broader community through the use of the survey.

The **interview questions** focused on:

- What are the factors affecting the work of the youth council? (e.g. political, resources, regulatory, internal, other kind of support)
- How do each of these factors influence the outcomes of the work of the youth council?
- What is the significance of the relationship with the local council and its officers? (e.g. councillors, youth workers, other public servants)
- What is the significance of the relationship with external stakeholders? (such as peak bodies, not-for-profit organisations, mentors, other tiers of government)

For each of the three youth councils, at least three people were interviewed (including current and recent members of the particular youth council and internal stakeholders such as a youth worker, councillor, council officer, and mentor that had been associated with the work of the youth council). Interviews were conducted in Estonian and English, depending on the location and the language of the participants. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were

transcribed by the researcher (Estonian interview transcripts were partially translated to English, for comparative coding and inclusion of the interview data from Estonia in the report).

In Estonia, there were 85 youth councils operating within the structure of a local government in 2014 (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium 2015) but there was no available data about local level youth councils in Victoria; this needed to be determined by the researcher during the course of this project. It was anticipated, however, that the population size was smaller for Victoria due to a number of factors:

- there were 79 local government areas in Victoria in 2016 (Municipal Association of Victoria n.d.) in comparison with 213 local government areas in Estonia in 2016 (Estonian Ministry of Finance n.d.)
- there is no legislation nor a peak body in Victoria that coordinates the creation of youth council structures – in Estonia the legislation has been in place since 2010 and there is a peak body and a national program to coordinate the funding and work for local level youth councils.

Together, these factors imply that the number of local level youth councils operating in Victoria should be much smaller than the number of youth councils in Estonia.

For interviews, conducted during the second half of 2016, the total sample size was 15 participants, associated with three different local councils / youth councils: one council from Victoria and two from Estonia.

3.4.2 Survey

The quantitative data collection was done through a de-identified anonymous online survey which was conducted in order to identify the environment in which local level youth councils operate in Victoria and Estonia. The design of the survey questions was guided by the literature review, and the initial responses of people interviewed. The survey was also informed by indicators developed by CIVICUS in its Enabling Environment Index (EEI),

capturing socio-economic, socio-cultural and governance dimensions (CIVICUS 2013). The EEI aims to assess the conditions under which civil society operates. The Index allowed the researcher to ask, in which of its 17 dimensions are the necessary conditions for local level youth councils most noticeably absent or curiously inefficient? The survey questions also tried to identify, through the lens of these dimensions, possible causes and causations (Farrow 2015). The EEI was modified and then used to identify the most relevant components of the enabling environment for local level youth councils.

The survey was distributed online to all of the known operating local level youth councils in Estonia (estimated to have been 85 youth councils at the time of the survey) and in Victoria (estimated to have been 38 youth councils). The instructions asked for the survey to be filled out by individuals currently or recently associated with the work of a local level youth council. Assistance from relevant peak bodies and organisations (such as the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Estonian National Youth Council) was sought to distribute the survey, in addition to approaching each local council directly via email and social media channels.

The respondents were from two distinct participant groups: the first included young people who were current or recent members of youth councils; the second consisted of professionals associated with the work of the youth council (such as youth workers, councillors and other public servants). These two participant groups are distinguished throughout this thesis as ‘young people’ and ‘adults’.

The survey asked participants about the work of the particular youth council they are currently or have been associated with (see Appendix 6 for the survey questions). In particular, the survey questions focused on:

a) the aim and purpose of the youth council
b) how the work of the youth council is organised (what is the [legal] basis of their existence; what is the structure of the youth council; how are members selected/recruited; frequency of meetings)

c) the activities/projects carried out by the youth council (during the past up to two years, current/future projects and activities) as well as the impact made by these projects
d) factors affecting the work of the youth council (political, resources, regulatory, internal, other kinds of support)
e) how these factors influence the outcomes of the work of the youth council.

The questions for both participant groups – members of the youth council ('young people') and professionals associated with the work of the youth council ('adults') were identical. However, participants were asked to identify which participant group they belong – this enabled the research team to analyse similarities and differences between answers.

The majority of the questions were closed and did not provide scope for individual interpretation – that is, the questions related to the work of the council and experiences gained through the youth council as a structure, rather than participants' personal background, individual attributes and other individual characteristics. Only one question openly asked individuals about their dreams or visions of what a youth service could be.

The survey was conducted, and data collected in two languages – Estonian and English – and the questions were identical in both languages. The translation was undertaken by the researcher, who is an Estonian native speaker and has a full professional proficiency in English.

The total sample size for the survey was 114 participants, of which 62 participants were from Estonia and 52 from Victoria. In total, 28 youth councils / local government areas from Estonia were represented in the survey, and 23 from Victoria. A further breakdown of the participants' profile and categories is given in chapters 4 and 5.

3.4.3 Sampling, recruitment and informed consent

Purposive sampling techniques were used to ensure comparability of cases (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2009). Maxwell (1997) defines purposive sampling as where "particular settings,

persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices". Sequential purposive sampling techniques were chosen in order to "that are representative or typical of a particular type of case on a dimension of interest" and to "achieve comparability across different types of cases on a dimension of interest" (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2009, p. 175). This approach was justified in the cases of both countries but particularly in the case of collecting Australian data, given the lack of a coordinating peak body and overview of the number, location and other information about the youth councils.

Snowballing recruitment was employed, in which the participant sample emerged through a process of reference from one person to the next, quickly building and enabling the researcher to approach participants with credibility as they were sponsored by a named person (Denscombe 1997).

In particular, youth workers – as representatives of local councils – were responsible for recruiting many participants for interviews and surveys. Youth worker involvement in the recruitment process was crucial because of their central role in supporting the work of youth councils as professionals and their initial access to potential participants. It was communicated to the youth workers acting as recruiters that the information about being involved in the research had to be made available to all present and former members of the particular youth council who met the criteria set out by the researcher.

Decisions about participants were made in consultation with representatives from the youth council pursuant to the principles of youth participation as outlined in the *Estonian Youth Work Act 2010* and the Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector (YACVic 2007). Consulting with young people in the selection process of participants was also important, to mitigate the risk of potential favouritism and the consequent bias in participant selection and the data.

3.5 Data analysis

Mixed-methods data analysis involves connecting, combining or integrating qualitative and quantitative data analysis strategies. This research used sequential mixed data analysis, which includes two separate processes: analysis of qualitative data using thematic analysis, and the analysis of quantitative data using descriptive statistics (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2009). Using sequential qualitative to quantitative data analysis enabled the researcher to form groups of themes through qualitative analysis, followed by confirmatory statistical analysis using quantitative data (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2009).

In the third stage of the data examination process for this study, the results from qualitative and quantitative data were combined through comparing in-depth interviews with the results of the survey to determine where the data supported, challenged or expanded understandings about the environments in which youth councils are enacted.

3.5.1 Stage 1. Analysis of qualitative data – Thematic analysis

Qualitative data analysis is predominantly inductive and is listed as one of the major principles of qualitative research (Patton 2002). It is an iterative process which includes navigating back-and-forth between data collection and data analysis.

Thematic analysis was undertaken in the process of analysing the qualitative data. Fugard and Potts (2019) note that thematic analysis is a family of qualitative social research methods that formalise, to varying degrees, the process of developing themes. A theme "represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 82). Boyatzis (1998) notes that the purpose of conducting a thematic analysis is to discover patterns that relate to frequencies, magnitudes, structures, processes, causes and consequences of phenomena and to conduct case-oriented analysis.

Thematic analyses focused on identifying and describing implicit and explicit themes within the data. Those themes were influenced by the literature, policy documents, the researcher's

own experience and also by the emerging data. Codes were then developed to represent the identified themes and applied or linked to raw data as summary markers for later analysis (Guest, MacQueen & Namey 2012).

The interview transcripts were organised in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet; this format was selected predominantly due to the researcher's experience and knowledge in the software and particularly the filtering function, which allowed easy organisation of the codes and themes.

The interview data was then coded manually according to thematic patterns. Saldaña (2015) describes coding as a method that enables the researcher to organise and group similarly coded data into categories because they share some characteristics. For the purposes of accuracy and validation of the coding process, two interview transcripts were selected for preliminary coding and were subsequently coded by the researcher and a research supervisor. These selected transcripts were read and re-read, with emergent themes, possible codes and sub-codes identified by the researcher and research supervisor (Thomas 2006; Creswell & Miller 2010). It is important to note that in the development of codes the literature around enabling environments by CIVICUS, along with personal memories from my autoethnography, may have subconsciously influenced the process.

Following the identification and comparison of emergent themes and application of codes and sub-codes (Kader 2018), categories of recurrent themes, which were identified as important factors by the participants in relation to forming part of the enabling environment for local youth councils, were recorded. This process also allowed the researcher to triangulate the data through returning to the results of the coding following the completion of the analysis of quantitative data, and where common themes between the two datasets occurred, seek a more detailed explanation about the phenomena from the qualitative data.

3.5.2 Stage 2. Analysis of quantitative data

Descriptive univariate analysis was conducted to analyse the survey data. Descriptive analysis of quantitative data refers to "procedures for summarising data, with the intention of discovering trends and patterns, and summarising results for ease of understanding and communication" (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2009, p. 257). According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009), the goal of the descriptive approach is to understand the data, detect patterns and relationships, and communicate the results.

Univariate analysis involves describing a case in terms of a single variable and often involves reporting all individual cases (Babbie 2007). Univariate analysis, although limited in its ability to enable findings to be generalised onto larger populations, was deemed by the researcher to be of sufficient complexity for the purpose of this study as the research aims, question and the report of the findings did not aim to make conclusions beyond the data that had been analysed.

Due to the limitations of the study related to sample size and sample bias described in this chapter, using inferential statistical analysis would not have been appropriate.

3.6 Research benefits

It is anticipated that the results of this research will enable youth councils and local governments that facilitate their work to better plan, develop, resource and support the work of youth councils. The results may also assist in understanding the landscape of youth councils in the respective countries but also in the international context through the presentation of multiple cases, common themes and the development of a framework for an enabling environment for youth councils.

For policy-makers, this research may contribute to the body of knowledge around the benefits and enabling environment that is required to achieve the fulfillment of a youth council's maximum potential and may inspire and provide impetus for the development of new policies

or a legislative framework and support mechanisms to better support the work of youth councils.

3.7 Ethical considerations

In accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Victoria University internal policies and procedures, an approval from the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) was required prior to carrying out the data collection and analysis. Due to some participants in the survey and semi-structured interviews being under the age of majority (18 in both countries), this project was considered to be high risk by the VUHREC. Ethics approval for this research project was granted by VUHREC on 1 September 2016 (approval number HRE 16-121).

Undertaking this study carried some social risk, particularly with the semi-structured interviews, related to the potential disclosure of issues in the relationship between youth councils and adults. This risk was particularly present for youth councils that are financially dependent on a local council. The abovementioned risk were mitigated through conducting the semi-structured interviews separately for adult participants and youth representatives and not identifying the authors of quotes in this research report. The confidentiality of all participants was respected and transparency about the research process assured.

Given that data collection was undertaken in two languages – Estonian and English – risks related to accuracy in translation, transcription of interviews and the use of comparable terminology were also present. Given the non-personal nature of the questions asked in the survey and in focus groups, this research did not involve major psychological risks to participants.

3.8 Limitations of the study

The empirical results reported in this thesis should be considered in the light of some limitations. The acknowledgment and discussion of these limitations may benefit future research in this area. The main limitations of this study were related to the sample size, sample bias and linguistic aspects.

3.8.1 Limitations related to sampling

The main challenge that the researcher encountered in the sampling process was the unavailability of data about the total population of youth councils. Whereas for Estonia, estimates of the total population size were more trustworthy (though not precise), as there had been a conscious effort on behalf of the peak body to record information about the total number of youth councils, in Victoria there was no reliable data recorded about the total population size and the researcher had to use publicly available information in order to make an estimate.

Another limitation was particularly present in the sampling process for quantitative data collection. Given the survey distribution methods chosen by the researcher, it was not viable or reasonable to limit the number of survey participants associated with the same local government area / youth council. Consequently, there were instances where particular local government areas were under- or over-represented in the survey data; for example, there was only one survey participant per local government area in 14 cases among the Victorian survey respondents, but two local governments / youth councils in Victoria were represented by seven participants each. For Estonia, 12 local governments were represented in the survey with a single participant, whereas one council was represented by 14 and another by four participants. Despite this limitation, the population of the survey and interviews ensured the representation of a variety of perspectives and voices from a diverse range and number of local government areas.

The study aimed to capture the voices of all stakeholders – young people as members or former members of youth councils and adults that have been connected with a youth council in their professional capacity. At times, distinctions between these groups are made in the following chapters when presenting or discussing the data but, for the most part, these voices are blended and given equal weight and value in this study, while the researcher fully acknowledges the limitations of this approach. As such, the findings in this research report should not be generalised to the entire population of youth councils in Victoria or Estonia.

It should also be noted that in the presentation of the findings of this study, the terms 'Australian data', 'Australian youth councils' and 'Australian participants' are used in lieu of 'Victorian data', 'Victorian youth councils' and 'Victorian participants', to better contextualise this research as a cross-cultural comparison of two countries. 'Australian' in the context of this study refers to data and participants only from the state of Victoria, and no attempt is made or any claim laid that the findings are representative across all Australian states and territories.

3.8.2 Linguistic and cultural limitations

Another limitation of the study is related to language. Risks related to biculturalism and bilingualism (English and Estonian) were addressed in the design phase of the study and the main asset and guarantor of mitigating these risks was the researcher itself, who is fluent in both languages and has lived and worked professionally in the youth field in both countries for a significant amount of time. However, it was impossible to completely eliminate these risks and it is apparent that care should be taken in interpreting the meaning of some data, particularly the quotes from interviews with Estonian participants, when trying to locate and apply results in an Australia context and in the English language. There is a risk that some terms, connotations and meanings did not translate identically from Estonian to English or from an Estonian to Australian political/cultural context.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION, AUSTRALIAN DATA

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the findings from the data that represent the perspectives of members of youth councils and stakeholders who have been connected to the work of these youth councils, such as youth workers and local councillors. Australian data was collected through 52 responses to online surveys and through semi-structured interviews with five participants. The findings from the survey supported the data from the interviews. The data presented and discussed in this chapter provides an overview of the profile of respondents and identifies the factors that make up the enabling environment for local level youth councils: (i) aims, activities, objectives and challenges; (ii) governance; and (iii) outputs, outcomes and aspirations. The qualitative and quantitative data in this chapter has been combined and organised according to the dominant themes emerging from the research and the researcher's own experience.

4.1 Profile of respondents

The target group for the survey and semi-structured interviews included multiple eligibility criteria:

- association with local government-affiliated youth council within the state of Victoria as a current or former young member, mentor, youth worker, council officer or elected councillor within the affiliated municipality
- association with the youth council had to be recent – no more than three years ago.

Participants of the online survey were asked to confirm their eligibility to participate before starting the survey; ineligible participants who did not meet all of the abovementioned criteria were prevented from taking the survey.

4.1.1 Survey respondents

Table 1: Total number, gender and age composition of survey participants (Australia)

Indicator	Response rate
Total number of survey participants	52
Males	13% (7)
Females	85% (44)
Non-binary	2% (1)
Percentage of young participants (under 26) of the total number of participants	67%
Age group of the youngest participants	13–14
Age group of the oldest participants	40–49
Most popular age categories amongst participants	15–17 (23%) 18–20 (19%)

An overwhelming majority of survey respondents were female. Women were overrepresented in both survey participant categories – former and current young members of youth councils and youth workers / other adults in a mentoring capacity. This can be at least partially justified with the overall female dominance within supporting professions, such as youth worker, community development or social work (WGEA 2019).

4.1.2 Survey respondents' affiliation with a local government youth council

The majority of the survey respondents identified their type of affiliation with a youth council as being either a former or current member (61% of all survey respondents). The makeup of the other, non-member participant group was dominated by local government youth workers (19% of all survey respondents), followed by other council officers (10%). Other affiliations included mentors and non-local government youth workers (8%). For the purpose of this chapter, participant groups are referred to as young people (members or former members of youth councils) and adults (stakeholders supporting/connected to the work of a youth council in a non-member capacity).

4.1.3 Occupation of survey respondents

In order to get a better understanding of the background of the survey respondents, participants were asked to respond to a question about their occupation. The most popular occupation category amongst survey respondents was secondary/tertiary student (57%), followed by local government employee (34%). Respondents were able to select multiple occupations (e.g. university student who is also a private sector employee).

Table 2: Occupation of survey respondents (Australia)

Occupation	Response rate
Tertiary/secondary student	57%
Out of which secondary students	29%
Local government youth worker	25%
Non-local council employed youth worker	0%
Local government employee other than youth worker	9%
Local government employees combined	34%
Private / NGO sector / other levels of government worker	9%
Not in employment, education or training	0%

4.1.4 Representation of local governments amongst survey participants

In 2017, the Australian state of Victoria had 79 local government areas. Prior to the start of the survey, a preliminary analysis was conducted to map local governments where, according to publicly available data, a youth council, youth advisory council or other similar structure was or had been recently operating (within the last two years). As a result, a list was compiled with local governments with existing youth participatory structures. The existence of these structures was an important prerequisite for participating in the survey and the estimation and mapping of potential participants assisted in targeting particular local governments where there was likely to be suitable survey participants. Nevertheless, the information about the survey was distributed to all local government youth services (through the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria as well as through direct email) although with more emphasis on councils with known current/past youth councils. In total, survey respondents from Victoria were affiliated with youth councils from 23 Victorian local government areas.

4.1.5 Profile of the participants of the semi-structured interviews

In total, five semi-structured interviews were conducted, with all participants in one rural municipality in Victoria. Of the five participants, one was an appointed member of the city council (Chair of the Panel of Administrators, the equivalent of the role of mayor), one was a youth worker, and three participants were members of youth councils. Of the five people interviewed, one was male and four identified as female.

4.2 Aims, objectives, activities and challenges of youth councils

Understanding the purpose and aims of youth councils, which can be more aspirational than active, and comparing them with activities commonly undertaken in practice is crucial in understanding the landscape of youth councils. Not only does it provide a basis for comparison about the relevance of the activities and outcomes of youth councils in relation to what they were established to do, but it also allows the identification of gaps in the existing enabling environment.

4.2.1 Why do youth councils exist?

Interview participants from both groups highlighted the importance of representing young people's views and concerns to the local council as their primary purpose. It was also frequently mentioned that the role of youth councils is to provide advice to decision-makers, particularly councillors.

> *[The purpose of the youth councils is] to have more connections between the younger people of the area and the actual council 'cause the council seem like this big executive thing that you can't really go near because it's too much but if we're out there and in the schools and stuff we can gather information about what people would like improved or things that they'd like done or just ideas and we can relay that back to council.* *Interview participant (young person) from Australia*

> *[The purpose of the youth councils is] to provide advice to council about youth issues. That's fundamentally what it is. it's a leadership opportunity for young people and … yeah … a chance to learn about different processes within local government but also local services and issues that young people, their peers, are facing …* *Interview participant (adult) from Australia*

Whereas the aspects of providing advice and representing the voice of young people were similarly represented in both participant groups' answers, political aspects such as lobbying, working with the opposition, and getting experience in decision-making and government functioning did not emerge as a particularly frequent theme.

4.2.2 What do youth councils do?

Youth councils in Victoria undertake a broad range of activities. Survey respondents were given a list of nine groups of activities and asked to identify how often their youth council had undertaken these activities in the past three years. The most common category of activities, as identified by survey respondents, was organising events. This coincides with the common perception of the role of youth councils, particularly by other young people: they are often seen as event organisers, which could be explained by events being the most visible part of their work to the community but, as confirmed by the survey responses, also because this tends to be by far the most popular type of activity for youth councils to undertake.

Organising events was closely followed by the category of representing young people in dealings with local government and other organisations and levels of government.

Of the nine categories of activities provided, respondents identified 'participating in committees of the local council or other organisations' as the category in which their youth council had been least engaged in the past three years.

Table 3: Activities and the frequency of activities undertaken by youth councils in Australia (data from survey)

Activities	Often / many times	Sometimes / occasionally	Not at all	Don't know / no information
Consulting with young people	33	13	1	5
Representing the young people in the area in dealings with local/state/federal government	20	28	1	3
Representing local young people in other ways	25	23	0	4
Organising events for young people	37	12	2	1
Participating in committees of the local council or other organisations	14	24	4	10
Informed young people in the area through newspapers, newsletters, social media etc.	22	20	7	3
Advocacy/promoting a youth issue	26	22	1	3
Initiated/implemented project(s) that benefit local young people	31	17	2	2
Provided advice and/or made proposals to the local council	16	29	3	4

n = 52

Similarly to the survey respondents, interview participants were asked about activities that their youth council had been undertaking in the past three years. This data correlates with the survey data and organising events dominated the interview responses in all participant groups:

> *Yeah, we did events. We have an informal meeting and a formal meeting. An informal is we get together and collaborate and discuss what's the best way, what's the best approach to get it out in the community, and a lot of people say "Ah, you know those cool milkshake bikes, you know, that's fun, people can hop on and make their own, like that's cool and that's funky you know". And I said: "Yeah, that's great and that's promoting healthy eating". So, we did that in parks and people walked past the park and they would get on, jump on the bike and do all this and exercising and they're getting healthy milkshake and out of it and it was laugh and it was fun and you know, just things like that, they can "Oh it tastes good so we might actually go and buy them" so I was promoting that, mental health, yeah, that's another one, we have like things down by the river, and I said this is a touchy subject, 'cause a lot of people aren't OK with coming out with this especially youth today so I said we had to be careful with what we want. So we*

did the whole "It's OK to say we're not OK" and what we did, we just did a talk and just gave out, you know, pamphlets on local areas where you can access help and so therefore they won't ask for it, we just give that to them so that they can do it in their own leisure time. And it was targeted at everyone so no one felt it was specifically them targeted that they needed help, if that makes sense so it was really come together, and we had music and all that together, so it wasn't just specifically them so people could go off and do so they didn't feel excluded or targeted which is awesome. So, we do lots of fun things to tie things in together [with what] needs to be done around here so yeah, that's just what we do. *Interview participant (young person) from Australia*

Interview participants predominantly mentioned events that had a purpose of raising awareness about specific issues, which suggests that there is usually an underlying reason or a cause why youth councils choose to organise so many events. Rather than solely a recreational focus or providing something 'fun' or 'relaxing' to do as the only and main purpose for organising an event, they are seen as the most convenient or achievable mechanisms for promoting or introducing an idea or a cause. The recreational focus is often also present; however, it is not usually the sole aim.

Some of [the things] they've been working on … 2015–16 worked on the development of the Youth Summit. They were involved in planning, I guess, a forum for young people to come along and, so, the 15–16 youth council were involved in that and also doing a survey for the young people in the municipality to find out some of the key issues facing young people … then some of the other projects they've been involved in … the outcomes of the Youth Summit – there were three key projects identified: one of which was the Youth Space [inaudible] young people involved in sitting on an advisory committee providing recommendations and advice to the Lion's Club to ensure that a Youth Space was built with … that was youth friendly … so, yeah … that's couple of projects. Other

things they were involved in various things were … they were invited to events or invited to present or speak about youth council, so, last year our Youth Mayor, went and spoke to community leadership program about the youth council, her experience of being young in the municipality and, I guess, you know, what some of her peers are facing and what these community leaders should take into account. Then there are things like Children's Week – the youth council were involved in that … so they might be involved in face painting on the Children's Week, which is not necessarily an advocacy role or anything like that but they've seen more as helping out on a community activity. Last year they were involved in Relay for Life which is an event to raise money for cancer sufferers and also carers. Yes, so they were involved in lots of different bits and bobs. *Interview participant (adult) from Australia*

4.2.3 Challenges faced by youth councils

When undertaking the survey, participants were given a list of 14 challenges and asked to indicate whether these have been often, sometimes or not at all a challenge for their youth council. The list was based on the literature, the researcher's own experience and the 17 indicators for civil society organisations as identified by the CIVICUS Enabling Environment Index. These 14 challenge categories represent the vast majority of the types of challenges commonly impacting the work of youth councils. Figure 3 demonstrates the challenges faced by youth councils based on frequency: often or always a challenge, sometimes a challenge and not a challenge.

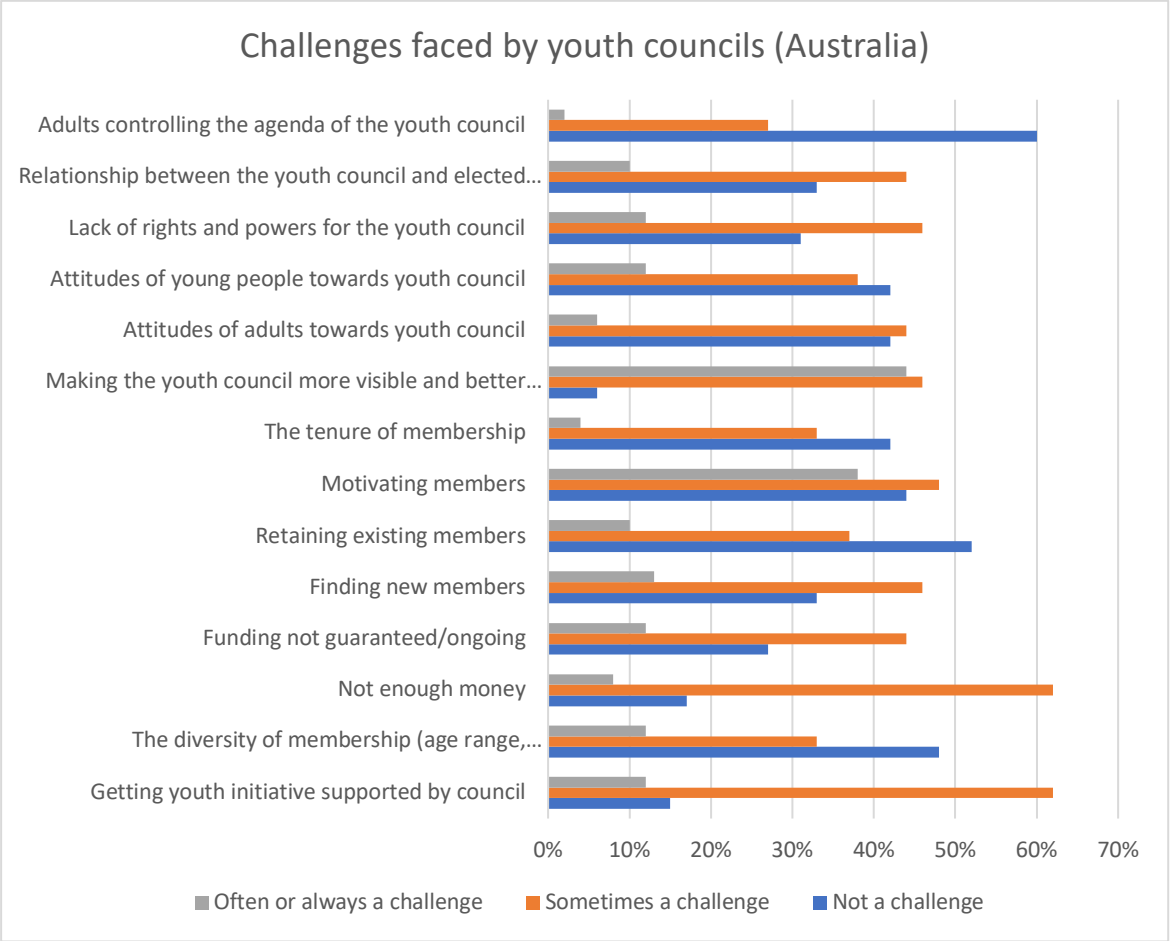

Figure 3: Challenges faced by youth councils in Australia

Out of the 14 categories listed, 10 were identified as being always or sometimes a challenge by more than half of the respondents. The most frequently identified challenges, in order of frequency, that are either always or sometimes a challenge were:

- making the youth council more visible and better known in the community (often or always a challenge = 46% / sometimes a challenge = 48% / often, always and sometimes a challenge combined = 94%)
- getting youth initiative supported by council (13% / 70% / 83%)
- not enough money (9% / 71% / 80%)
- funding not guaranteed (14% / 53% / 67%)
- finding new members (15% / 50% / 65%)
- lack of rights (13% / 52% / 65%)

- relationship between the youth council and the elected council (11% / 51% / 62%)
- attitudes of young people towards youth council (13% / 42% / 55%)
- motivating members of youth council (4% / 50% / 54%)
- attitudes of adults towards youth council (6% / 48% / 54%).

Only four out of the 14 challenge categories listed in the survey were identified as being 'always or often' or 'sometimes' a challenge by fewer than 50% of the respondents. This suggests that the overwhelming majority of respondents found the list of challenges to be relevant and applicable for their experience.

The following categories were identified most frequently as 'not a challenge':

- adults controlling the agenda of the youth council (60% of the respondents)
- retaining the existing members (52%)
- the diversity of membership – age range, backgrounds and so on (48%)
- motivating members of youth council (44%)
- the tenure of membership (42%).

The most pressing challenges in the work of youth councils appear to be therefore related to either the attitudes, visibility and acknowledgment by the community and the council towards youth councils; funding (security); lack of rights; and strengthening and sustaining the membership of the youth council.

One interview participant described how the attitudes and visibility in the community can be challenge for the youth council:

> *A challenge for me was getting everyone together, turning up to meetings where we were discussing things – it was just those little things like that. Like in a normal workplace I suppose … We did have the challenge of does the community really know about us and know what we're doing and we said: Right! Let's have a once a month, we have this thing called Youth News, and we told them something that*

we've achieved or we're doing, and something, an event that's coming up. So the community know what we're doing and it's good for them that it's right there, more posts on Facebook, and our Facebook page up and going so people from the community know what we're doing, so we defeated that by putting it out there more. That was a challenge. People turning up to events but we got there because we've got advertisement, we fixed that. So just little things like that. Otherwise I don't think we have any major issues at the moment. *Interview participant (young person) from Australia*

Membership-related challenges were also identified as a frequent challenge by survey respondents and interview participants alike. Even though the diversity of membership appears to be generally among the main challenges for youth councils in Victoria, it commonly emerged as an important theme, particularly in the context of ensuring and furthering diversity. One participant emphasised the aspects of representation and diversity during the interview:

Representation, like ensuring that it's a representative sample of young people, I think it is an ongoing challenge and one that, you know, you're fighting a few different battles to achieve [laughter], like externally there's the idea that Youth Services within local government don't necessarily target young people who aren't typically engaged, so I think it's an ongoing challenge to ensure that we have representation on the youth council, that they are really cohesive group that work really well together. *Interview participant (adult) from Australia*

4.3 Governance of youth councils

In the survey, participants were given a list of 17 statements about governance, including about the recruitment of new members, level of democracy and youth participation, and main partnerships for youth councils. They were asked to select all statements that applied to their youth council/experience.

4.3.1 Recruitment of members

Survey participants were asked about different methods for determining new members of their youth council, who had the authority to make membership decisions and whether there was a process in place to do so. The most prevalent method for recruiting new members for a youth council in Australia involves submitting an expression of interest or application (88% of survey respondents). In Australia, only 12% of all of the survey respondents indicated there was a democratic process in place for recruiting new members within their youth council. A slightly a bigger percentage of respondents (31%) indicated that there were no elections held for the youth council. Furthermore, 17% of the respondents claimed that schools and youth organisations can delegate or appoint people to become members of the youth council.

More than one-third (37%) of the respondents indicated that youth workers alone chose the members for the youth council. The results also confirm that the practice of the outgoing membership choosing incoming members for the youth council is virtually non-existent – only 2% of the respondents indicated this to be the case. Furthermore, 15% of respondents acknowledged that there was no set and timed process in place and new people could join the youth council at any time.

4.3.2 Level of youth participation in everyday governance of youth councils

One of the aims of the study was to investigate the level of youth participation, as defined earlier in this thesis, within the everyday governance of youth councils. The most basic indicator for measuring the level of youth participation in youth participatory structures such as youth councils is the age composition of membership, and any power imbalance this creates as a result.

More than one-third (37%) of survey respondents indicated that their youth council's membership consisted of adults and young people. This implies this to be a less common yet still prevalent practice for youth participatory structures in which young people are not the sole members and therefore don't have full control in voting or directing work.

As Hart (1992) notes on his Ladder of Youth Participation, shared decision-making between adults and young people is sometimes a necessary strategy and not in itself an automatic indication of low levels of youth control/self-governance. But in the context of youth participatory structures, which traditionally are set up to represent the voice of young people in dealings with decision-makers and the community, age composition can be viewed as potentially problematic if it prevents direct representation by young people for young people.

Regardless of the composition of official membership of youth participatory structures, adults play a crucial role in supporting the work of these structures. Some 31% of respondents indicated that meetings of their youth council were chaired by an adult, usually a youth worker, and 63% of respondents claimed that a young person fulfilled this task.

When asked about who drove the work of the youth council, only a small number of participants agreed that it was the adult / youth worker alone directing the work of the council (10%). Less than half (44%) of participants claimed that full control of the work of the council lies in the hands of young people. About half of the respondents (54%) suggested that the work of the youth council was directed by adults and young people in partnership.

Three-quarters of the Australian participants indicated the frequency of youth council meetings to be at least monthly. Only 6% of respondents outlined the frequency of youth council meetings to be less than monthly.

4.3.3 Main partners for youth council

As representative and participatory structures tasked with advocating the interests and voices of young people in the local area, youth councils collaborate and build relationships with a vast array of stakeholders internally (within the local council apparatus) as well as externally in the community. Amongst the internal partners, survey respondents and interview participants overwhelmingly emphasised the importance of the relationship with the youth worker / youth services department. It was evident from the data that youth workers are crucial

to the work of youth councils in Australia, even to a degree where it can be predicted that many youth councils would likely not exist without the support received from youth workers.

Similarly, an important partner for youth councils appears to be the elected city/shire council. Other areas/departments of the city/shire council were identified as key internal partners . These two stakeholders were mentioned by every interview participant and by the overwhelming majority of survey respondents.

In addition to internal stakeholders and partnerships, youth councils collaborate with many external organisations and institutions. Key external partners identified (in order of frequency) were youth organisations/youth groups, local schools and vocational education providers, community organisations, local media, student representative councils, local businesses, and lastly state or federal government departments and agencies.

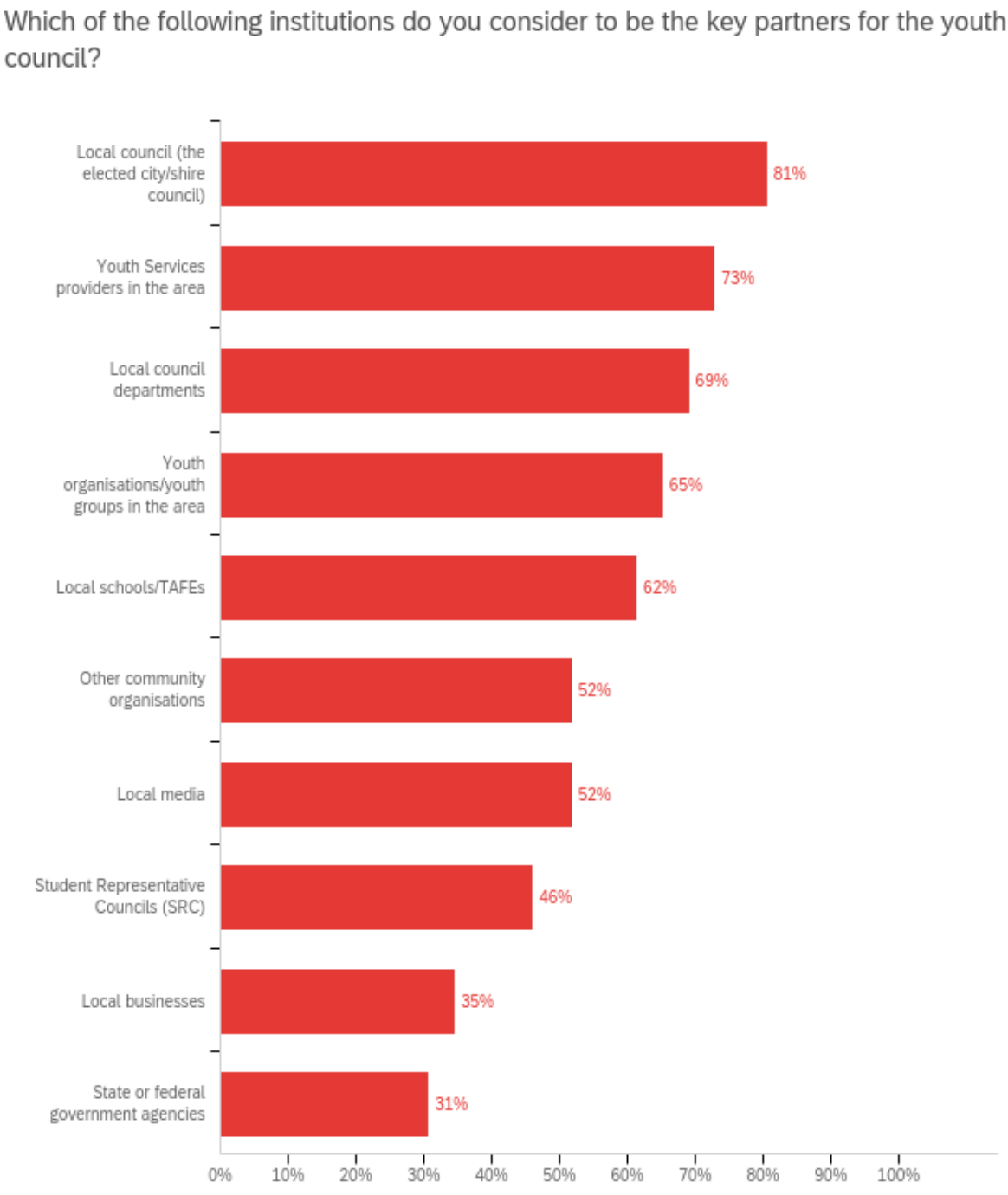

Figure 4: Key partners of youth councils in Australia

One interview participant elaborated on the most logical partners for youth councils:

> *I don't think there's any limit on who can be a partner. But I guess logically it would be the council and the council officers, particularly our community wellbeing team, because that part of council … works in that community sphere and that, I think,*

is where a youth council most logically sits, in that interface between the community and the organisation. And to provide, as I said before, opportunity to provide advice but then to provide that advocacy out to a broad section of the community. *Interview participant (adult) from Australia*

Another interview participant emphasised the importance of youth worker knowledge to the work of youth council:

That's a tough question 'cause everyone puts in, don't they?! I suppose youth worker is our main one, I think, we wouldn't be able to do much without her because of her knowledge. *Interview participant (young person) from Australia*

Table 4: The importance of direct or indirect support from policy and decision-making levels to the work of youth councils / advisory committees in Australia

Question	Very important		Moderately important		Neutral		Not important		Not sure / don't have enough information		Total
Local council youth services team / youth worker	82.69%	43	9.62%	5	3.85%	2	0.00%	0	3.85%	2	52
Other departments and areas of the council	30.77%	16	44.23%	23	19.23%	10	1.92%	1	3.85%	2	52
CEO / Executive leadership of the local council	30.77%	16	32.69%	17	25.00%	13	3.85%	2	7.69%	4	52
Elected councillors/council	50.00%	26	30.77%	16	15.38%	8	0.00%	0	3.85%	2	52
State government	34.62%	18	23.08%	12	28.85%	15	1.92%	1	11.54%	6	52
Federal government	23.08%	12	15.38%	8	40.38%	21	9.62%	5	11.54%	6	52

Support provided by the youth services team of the local council was rated as "very important" by an overwhelming majority of Australian respondents to the survey (83%). This is a further indication of the strong and dominant role that youth workers play in supporting and often also driving the work of youth councils in Australia. Slightly less important but nevertheless still prominent was the importance of support to the youth council from elected councillors, followed by the support from the CEO and other departments of the council.

In terms of internal people, the departments have traditionally, I think, worked in isolation, like, you know, in most councils, they kind of focus on whatever they are

doing and because I work in Youth Services then I'm solely responsible for young people in the municipality … I've really tried to bring in people who work within council to be involved in the youth council … so for example the media and communications coordinator here now every youth council term does a presentation about representing council and speaking to the media and that sort of things so he provides a bit of training in that space. We also pull in like the people from finance to do how to manage a budget effectively and how to plan about cause some of the youth councillors … they're not so into it but others are. … Also, councillors as well play a key role. Councillors will, at various events, young people probably will come across councillor or have to present to a councillor on something so it's a good way of you know, keeping those people who are making decisions, in the loop hopefully it advances the youth council as a whole. *Interview participant (adult) from Australia*

4.4 Outputs, outcomes and aspirations of youth councils

In order to compare similarities and differences of aims, objectives and activities with actual outputs, outcomes and aspirations of the work of the youth councils, survey respondents were asked what they consider to be the main achievements of the youth council. It is important to note that the question asked to list what respondents considered to be *main* achievements, rather than all achievements. In the broadest terms, the achievements outlined by respondents can be categorised into: (i) connecting with the community; (ii) influencing decision-making and political processes; and (iii) development of skills and youth council as a structure.

4.4.1 Connecting with the community

An overwhelming majority of participants in both groups outlined some event that the youth council had organised, either on its own or in partnership with other organisations, as their main achievement. This is consistent with answers to the earlier question about the main types

of activities carried out by the youth council. Events with a recreational focus such as award ceremonies, movie nights, festivals, youth weeks and so on appeared to be the most prevalent category of events listed as a main achievement. In most cases, these events also had a theme or a social action overlay, such as awareness raising on topics such as anti-bullying, mental health, the environment and fundraising.

Several participants outlined why they considered running successful events as the main achievement of the youth council. One survey respondent noted that:

> *Creating our annual anti-bullying event is easily our youth council's biggest achievement. For the past 4 years we have organised and run [Municipality name] stands for change: zero tolerance for bullying. The event is held at a local school, a different one every year, and we are able to have presenters talk about tips and experiences as well as have relevant stall holders. We have recently won a contest which is going to help us create a DIY workshop for schools so that they can too run events much like ours, the prize also included $1000 to help with our cause.*

It is noteworthy that the importance of a youth council's connectedness to the community was stressed frequently, including in answers about achievements. One survey participant gave the following example:

> *[The main achievement of our youth councils is] promoting the positive influence young people have on their community and providing advice to key stakeholders about youth issues. Delivering inclusive youth events in the community.*

4.4.2 Influencing decision-making and political processes

Another category of achievements that dominated responses to the question was initiatives for creating a dialogue between decision-makers and young people. Several respondents emphasised influencing and consequently changing the public transport timetable, concessions or route planning as their youth council's main achievement. Other policy-related

achievements included development of a youth charter, which served as an agreement between the council and young people, and providing advice and input to council in relation to a youth strategic plan.

4.4.3 Development of skills and youth council as a structure

Although strengthening the relationship between the youth council and elected local councillors emerged as a theme in survey responses from Australia, it was not mentioned frequently. This suggests that it is not very important to emphasise youth councils as an independent and standalone structure.

One youth worker (survey respondent) strongly emphasised individual achievements amongst group ones:

> *Young people developing their confidence, negotiation skills, event management and project organisation skills and passion for community work, politics, law and youth/social work. I feel the greatest sense of achievement when young people spend years in youth council and eventually begin operating independently towards their goals e.g. move on to even bigger better things such as Rotary, legal studies at university or applying to be a member of the Senior Council. The way in which our youth councillors presented and communicated with politicians at their Q&A experience and at Senior Council meetings really highlighted to me how well their skills and passions have developed over the duration of their involvement in Youth Council. In summary, for me the greatest achievement of Youth Council is providing a space for young people to develop their skills, friendships, networks and confidence in order become bigger players in the community and implement their ideas, passions and projects. Even though it is sad when they move on, I feel great pride in each of them as they move as highly competent and conscientious young professionals.*

4.4.4 Additional resources youth councils need to be effective in their work

Regarding resources, funding was identified by 36% of participants as being insufficient. Youth workers in particular emphasised the importance of having a dedicated paid youth worker responsible for facilitating the work of the youth council. A number of respondents from rural municipalities indicated lack of public transport or distance between different parts of the municipality but also to Melbourne and surrounding areas, which results in youth councillors missing opportunities such as training and workshops, to be the main area needing additional resources.

Another recurring theme was the need to strengthen relationships with the community and schools. This was often seen as crucial to be able to have a bigger impact in the community.

Lack of funding for resources was followed closely by funding security, and the need to have an independent annual budget as opposed to one-off grants to implement projects or organise events that need to be applied for separately.

Amongst other things, several respondents stressed the importance of having greater recognition and clearer expectations from the elected council. Some respondents also outlined the need for youth council to have their own room or dedicated space.

4.4.5 Dreams and aspirations

At the end of the survey, participants were invited to dream. The question asked respondents to imagine a situation where the right conditions were in place and describe what the youth council could achieve in these circumstances.

The following common themes emerged:

- To create more social change. Examples were given, such as to completely eradicating bullying.

- Greater representation and cooperation on higher levels of government. For example, to establish state and federal youth councils that represent youth on state and federal levels but with local level input.
- More regional cooperation between municipalities and youth councils.
- Greater recognition and higher status of the youth council within the elected council and in the community in order to become a valued advisory committee to the council in *all* areas (not just youth work).

> *I'd like to Youth Council to have more freedom to assist with the issues of child abuse/family violence, homelessness and young people in state care as these are areas which frequently emerge in Youth Council discussions. On a selfish level, I'd love to have the resources to take Youth Council to Canberra to immerse them in [the] Australian political system.*

4.5 Conclusion

It is evident from the data that youth councils surveyed in Australia share similar views on their purpose, aims and objectives and undertake similar activities. They also share common challenges. Whereas youth councils see their role as being representatives of the 'youth voice', in reality they are often restricted by lack of resources, rights, acknowledgement or relationships in fulfilling their role of advocacy, lobbying and representation in decision-making processes. Instead, youth councils tend resort to fulfilling tasks that are considered 'low risk', such as organising events.

Youth councils in Australia also appear to rely heavily on the support and initiative of a youth worker, which on one hand provides opportunities for the youth council to grow its capability and reach, and be a valuable resource. On the other hand, the heavy involvement and reliance of youth workers in the work of youth councils also poses some risk – particularly if a council becomes too dependent on the support of youth worker, or if there is a considerable power

imbalance in the council, which is likely to result in decreased levels of youth participation and self-governance.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION, ESTONIAN DATA

This chapter will present and discuss the perspectives of Estonian survey respondents and interview participants. Similar to the Australian data presented and discussed in the previous chapter, the data from Estonia was collected through 62 survey responses and 10 semi-structured interviews with members of youth councils and stakeholders who have been connected to the work of these councils, such as youth workers, members of city government and local councillors. The data presented and discussed in this chapter provides an overview of the profile of respondents and identifies the factors that make up the enabling environment for local level youth councils: (i) aims, activities, objectives and challenges; (ii) governance; and (iii) outputs, outcomes and aspirations. The qualitative and quantitative data in this chapter has been combined and organised according to the dominant themes emerging from the research and the researcher's own experience.

5.1 Profile of respondents

Identical to the Australian cohort, the target group for the survey and semi-structured interviews in Estonia had to fulfil the following criteria:

- association with local government-affiliated youth council in Estonia as a current or former young member, mentor, youth worker, council officer or elected councillor within the affiliated municipality
- association with the youth council had to be recent – no more than three years ago.

Participants of the online survey were asked to confirm their eligibility to participate before starting the survey and ineligible participants who did not meet all of the abovementioned criteria were prevented from taking the survey.

5.1.1 Survey respondents

Table 5: Total number, gender and age composition of survey participants (Estonia)

Indicator	Response rate
Total number of survey participants	62
Males	24% (15)
Females	76% (47)
Percentage of young participants (under 26) of the total number of participants	74%
Age group of the youngest participants	15–17
Age group of the oldest participants	50–59
Most popular age categories amongst participants	18–20 (32%) 15–17 (19%)

Similar to the Australian respondents, a large majority of the survey respondents in Estonia in all participant categories were female. There is no data available about the gender composition of youth councils in Estonia, but (much like in Australia) women are likely to be overrepresented in the membership of youth councils.

5.1.2 Survey respondents' affiliation with a local government youth council

Former or current members of youth councils formed the largest participant group among survey respondents in Estonia (64% of all respondents). Non-member participants were dominated by local government youth workers (21% of all survey respondents), followed by local government executives (8%). Other affiliations included mentors and non-local government employed youth workers (5% of all respondents).

5.1.3 Occupation of survey respondents

Respondents were asked about their occupation to provide a better understanding of other factors that might influence their responses (e.g. being currently employed by a local council, being unemployed). The most popular occupation category amongst survey respondents was secondary/tertiary student (46% of all respondents), followed by local government employee (23%). Respondents were able to select multiple occupations (e.g. university student and a private sector employee).

Table 6: Occupation of survey respondents (Estonia)

Occupation	Response rate
Tertiary/secondary student	46%
Out of which secondary students	25%
Local government youth worker	11%
Non-local council employed youth worker	13%
Local government employee other than youth worker	11%
Local government employees combined	23%
Private / NGO sector / other levels of government worker	11%
Not in employment, education or training	1%

5.1.4 Representation of local governments amongst survey participants

In Estonia, the number of local governments has changed drastically due to recent local government amalgamation reforms implemented by the Estonian government. At the end of June 2017, which is when data collection was finalised, there were 213 local government areas in Estonia. Prior to the start of the survey, a preliminary analysis was conducted to map local governments where, according to publicly available data, a youth council, youth advisory council or other similar structure was or had been recently operating (within the last two years).

The Estonian National Youth Council, the peak body for youth councils in Estonia, also maintains a database about existing local youth councils in Estonia. Their data was cross-checked with publicly available data on local government websites. As a result, a list was compiled with local governments that had existing youth participatory structures.

The existence of these structures was an important prerequisite for participating in the survey and the estimation and mapping of potential participants assisted in targeting particular local governments that were likely to have suitable survey participants. Nevertheless, information about the survey was distributed to all local government youth services via the Estonian National Youth Council, Estonian Youth Workers Association and Estonian Youth Work Centre as well as through direct email, with more emphasis on councils with known current/past youth councils. Survey respondents from Estonia were affiliated with 28 individual local government areas.

5.1.5 Profile of the participants of the semi-structured interviews

Ten interviews were conducted in two local government areas: three interviews with participants from a rural municipality (parish) in Estonia and seven with participants affiliated with a metropolitan local government area (city) in Estonia. Of the 10 participants, three were elected or appointed members of either city government or city council, two were youth workers, and seven were former or current members of youth councils. That is, two participants belonged to two categories – they were elected or appointed members of either city government or city council and also former members of the youth council. Of the 10 people interviewed, six were male and four identified as female.

5.2 Aims, objectives, activities and challenges of youth councils

Mapping the purpose and aims of youth councils, which often tend to be more aspirational, and comparing them with activities commonly undertaken by youth councils is crucial in understanding the landscape of local level youth councils in Estonia.

5.2.1 Why do youth councils exist?

Estonian interview participants strongly highlighted the importance of representing young people's views and concerns to the local council as the primary purpose of their youth council. It was also frequently mentioned that the role of youth councils is to provide advice to decision-makers, particularly councillors.

Estonian interview participants also emphasised the importance of achieving tangible results resulting in long-term change; for example, new infrastructure, services or policies. One young interview participant from Estonia described the aim of a youth council as follows:

> *I think that the aim is to achieve something real in our city every year, for example two or three things, something that you can see and feel that has changed in our city, that improves the lives of young people. For example, having a new sports*

ground built or young people can access some new services or there will be new legal wall dedicated for graffiti. Something that really changes for the better.

Interview participant (young person) from Estonia

The aspects of providing advice and representing the voice of young people were similarly represented in all participant groups. Estonian interview participants frequently mentioned political aspects such as lobbying, working with the opposition, and getting experience in decision-making and government functioning. For example, a decision-maker from a metropolitan municipality in Estonia emphasised the following:

There is a general understanding that youth council will offer the first political experience. Young people will be able to understand how things are negotiated, agreed, discussed, how decisions are made and what is the structure and system of the city government. So, you can say that it will paint a picture of our democracy and structure of the city government. In a more philosophical sense, I do believe that it is a good experience for understanding how in our world ideas are being created, how they are implemented, how you can consolidate different opinions together and how to make something of it. Even when these opinions are very different from each other, there can even be a clash between them at the start, how to then still achieve some kind of result that will be a positive one for everyone. It gives the opportunity for people to communicate with each other. And what I think is the most important – to listen one another. So that it would not be that there is only one opinion and that is the right opinion. And it is the right opinion because it is my opinion. And vice versa. And that someone else's opinion cannot be right because it is not my opinion. Of course, this is more idealistic approach, as we know. More or less the same experience can happen in the real city council as well. But I still think that that experience, I think it will give some [young people] in the future opportunities, and they will find a way to make right decisions. Including when choosing their own path in life. And whether or not that kind of

career suits them in the future and even if they do not have that kind of political ambition, then this experience [of being a member of a youth council] will benefit them in their life – much like, for example, having a law degree – even if you don't end up working as a lawyer then understanding the legal system and how it works will help you a lot, especially when you will work in the public sector. *Interview participant (adult) from Estonia*

5.2.2 What do youth councils do?

The scope of activities undertaken by youth councils in Estonia is diverse. Survey respondents were given a list of nine groups of activities and asked to identify how often the youth council they have been associated with had undertaken these activities in the past three years. The most commonly identified category of activities undertaken by a youth council was organising events, which coincides with the common perception of the role of a youth council. This was closely followed by representing young people in dealings with local government and other organisations and levels of government.

In Estonia, out of the nine categories of activities provided, respondents identified 'participating in committees of the local council or other organisations' as the category in which their youth council had been least engaged in the past three years.

Table 7: Activities and the frequency of activities undertaken by youth councils in Estonia (data from survey)

Activities	Often / many times	Sometimes / occasionally	Not at all	Don't know / no information
Consulting with young people	21	33	3	5
Representing the young people in the area in dealings with local/state/federal government	29	30	0	3
Representing local young people in other ways	27	30	1	4
Organising events for young people	38	21	1	2
Participating in committees of the local council or other organisations	23	27	8	4
Informed young people in the area through newspapers, newsletters, social media etc	35	24	1	2
Advocacy/promoting a youth issue	14	32	7	9
Initiated/implemented project(s) that benefit local young people	31	28	2	1
Provided advice and/or made proposals to the local council	19	32	4	7

n = 62

Interview participants were asked about the activities that their youth council had undertaken in the past three years. There was a strong correlation with the survey data, and organising events dominated the interview responses in all participant groups:

> *We had a barbecue area for public use near the lake and it was not in a good condition. People said that young people go there only to drink, and we heard all sorts of excuses why it won't be fixed up. We went there, in cooperation with one company, took some trees down and made a decent barbecue area from the woods there and got a media coverage in the big media. That was the opening of the youth council so to say … But our big fame came when they wanted to remove the Mayor … they had all sorts of silly reasons and then our youth council wrote a letter why young people do not agree with it. We went to the city council meeting, but we were kicked out and then this was a big news story in the national media. We got support letters even from the ministry and umbrella organisations etc. This was something that was a big drama but at the same time bonded the youth council together very well.* *Interview participant (young person) from Estonia*

However, a number of participants were critical of the event-organising focus of youth councils:

> *The [second] big challenge is that there seems to be a big calling for the youth council to organise different events. It took us a little time to understand that if we are going to organise events then they have to somehow support our political aims. If there is no connection there is simply no point of doing it. If you want to organise events then please go and do it – we have millions of youth organisations, cultural clubs, whatever, do your events there! [Youth council] is one of a very few places where you can have an impact on people's lives. It doesn't mean that we did not organise events but I know that many other youth councils are organising sporting competitions, clean up days, flea markets, whatever. And I know that our youth council [that I used to be a member of] now also has this problem. This is not needed. And if your main motivation is to be able to organise events then youth council is not for you. And this is it.* Interview participant (young person) from Estonia

Another young person described the complexity and political sensitivity of some issues that youth councils are dealing with and how choosing the right strategy can be complex:

> *Initially we had to map the problems. For that we had different events – for example a faction at the city council where young people come together and discuss what are the problems. We had roundtable discussions where young people and politicians discuss together about the problems and where we gathered some data. We keep our eyes open, for example what is being covered in the media. When we have a problem then we will think [with the youth council] how to solve it. Often it means that we will need to sit down with experts. For example, I might have no idea what a skater wants. We, I, don't know what they need. So, we just met with these people, who deal with these problems on a daily*

basis, came up with a solution and if that solution was awesome then we had multiple options how to proceed with it. If it was a simple solution, politically quite easy to get approved, then we wrote a letter to the responsible member of the city government, for example the vice-Mayor or Mayor. But if it was more complex politically, for example it involves a bigger group of people, or politically sensitive or not acceptable for some political parties … Then we have to try to entice politicians, we need to get along with them well, maybe we need to organise some actions, draw media's attention, do some lobbying. Sometimes there are key persons we need to convince, such as committee members, some public servants. And when they get behind you then it might be much easier to reach that political decision. *Interview participant (young person) from Estonia*

5.2.3 Challenges faced by youth councils

Survey participants were presented with a list of 14 challenges and asked to indicate whether these had been often, sometimes or not at all a challenge for their youth council. These challenges were based on the literature, the researcher's own experience and the 17 indicators for civil society organisations as identified by the CIVICUS Enabling Environment Index. The categories represent the majority of the types of challenges commonly impacting the work of youth councils. Figure 5 demonstrates the challenges faced by Estonian youth councils based on frequency: often or always a challenge, sometimes a challenge and not a challenge.

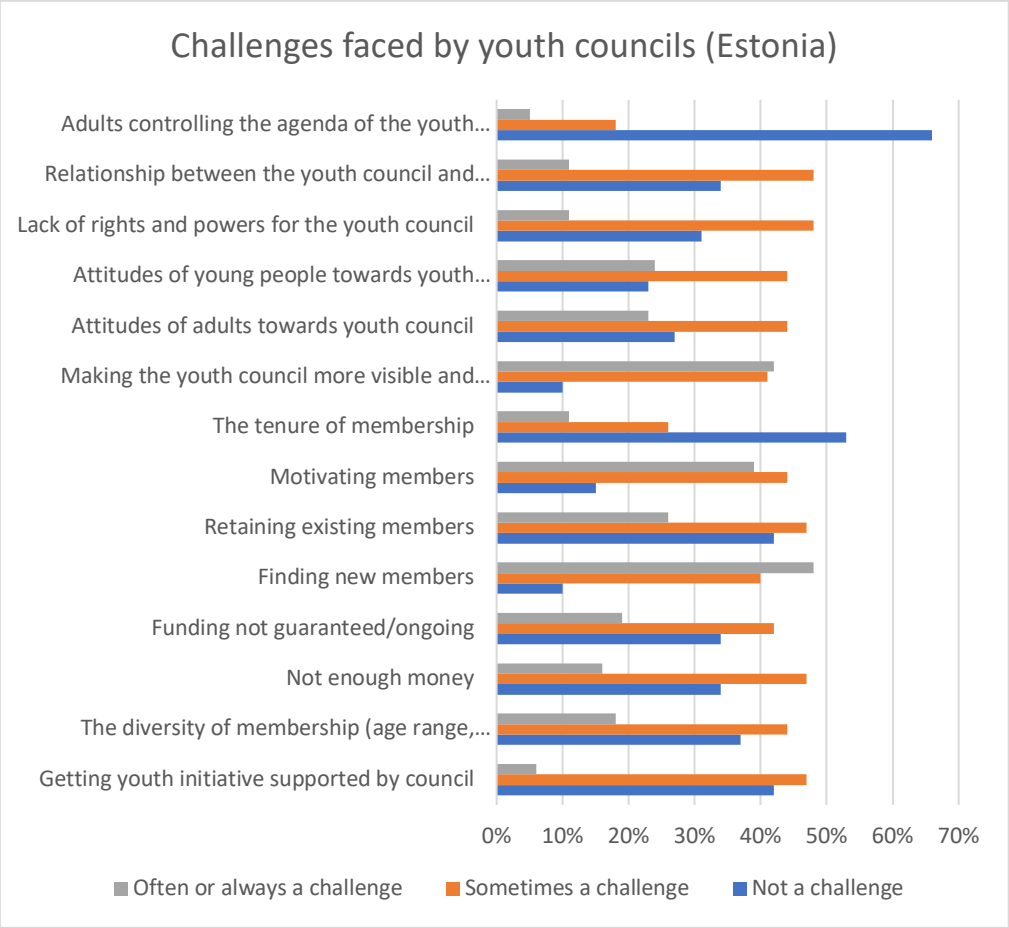

Figure 5: Challenges faced by youth councils in Estonia

Out of the 14 categories listed, 12 were identified as being always or sometimes a challenge by more than half of the respondents. The most frequently identified challenges, in order of frequency, that are either always or sometimes a challenge were:

- finding new members (often or always a challenge = 49% / sometimes a challenge = 41% / often, always and sometimes a challenge combined = 90% of all respondents)
- making the youth council more visible and better known in the community (45% / 45% / 90%)
- motivating members of youth council (40% / 45% / 85%)
- attitudes of young people towards youth council (27% / 48% / 75%)
- retaining the existing members of youth council (26% / 48% / 74%)
- attitudes of adults towards youth council (24% / 47% / 71%)

- lack of rights (13% / 54% / 67%)
- not enough money (17% / 48% / 65%)
- funding not guaranteed (20% / 44% / 64%)
- relationship between the youth council and the elected council (12% / 52% / 64%)
- diversity of membership (18% / 44% / 62%)
- getting youth initiative supported by council (7% / 49% / 56%).

Only two of the 14 challenge categories listed in the survey were identified as being 'always or often' or 'sometimes' a challenge by fewer than 50% of the respondents, which suggests that the overwhelming majority of respondents found the list of challenges to be relevant and applicable for their experience.

The following categories were identified most frequently as 'not a challenge':

- adults controlling the agenda of the youth council (75% of all respondents)
- the tenure of membership (59%)
- getting youth initiative supported by the council (44%)
- diversity of membership (38%).

The most pressing challenges in the work of youth councils appear to be therefore related to either finding new or retaining existing members, and the visibility of and attitudes towards the youth council.

Similar themes emerged from the interviews. One respondent explained how motivating members can often be challenging:

> *I think that the biggest challenge is how to make people to work. So that they would attend and want to do things. Because for example I, when I ran for the seat at the youth council, I knew that I wanted to contribute a lot, otherwise I would not have run for an election. I never do anything half-way. But often some young*

people are like that – they apply, get elected, it is wonderful but then they do not want to do a lot of work. *Interview participant (young person) from Estonia*

However, in comparison to the list of challenges provided in the survey, additional themes emerged from the interviews:

I think that an ongoing challenge is really having an understanding how the processes of city governance work. I can say that in smaller municipalities it is much simpler. In big cities, when I first read the city budget … this was not easy, it is a complex document to understand. All these draft motions and those documents – there is a lot of information to understand … Youth council would benefit from more support from city officials. *Interview participant (young person) from Estonia*

5.3 Governance of youth councils

Survey participants were presented with a list of 17 statements relating to governance, including about the recruitment of new members, level of democracy and youth participation, and main partners for youth councils. Respondents were asked to select all statements that applied to their youth council/experience.

5.3.1 Recruitment of members

There is an array of methods used in youth councils to recruit, accept and confirm new members. The most common categories of methods for determining new members were presented to respondents. Statements about who had the authority to make decisions about accepting new members and whether there was a process in place to do so were also included in the survey.

Results indicate that the most prevalent method for recruiting new members for youth councils in Estonia involves submitting an expression of interest or application (66% of respondents

indicated this to be the case). A total of 73% of all of the Estonian respondents indicated that there is a democratic process in place for recruiting new members in their youth council, which suggest that democratic principles are an important consideration for determining the membership of youth councils.

Although the survey did not ask respondents to justify why this might be important , partial justification can be found from the Estonian Youth Work Act, which governs the work of youth councils in Estonia and stipulates that “youth council shall be elected democratically by the young people of the rural municipality or city pursuant to the procedure established by the rural municipality or city council” (*Youth Work Act 2010, paragraph 9*).

Only 18% of the Estonian respondents reported that there were no elections for their youth council, while 13% claimed that schools and youth organisations can delegate or appoint people to become members of the youth council.

No survey respondents indicated that youth workers alone chose the members for the youth council, which suggest that this is not a practice in Estonia. However, when asked about the practice of deciding/selecting new members in collaboration with a youth worker, the rate was significantly higher at 31%. Some 21% of respondents also indicated that the outgoing membership of the youth council selects the new members. Furthermore, 16% of respondents acknowledged that there was no process in place and new people could join the council at any time.

5.3.2 Level of youth participation in everyday governance of youth councils

A total of 82% of survey respondents reported that the membership of their youth council consists of young people only. Only a small proportion (10%) of respondents reported that their youth council membership consists of adults and young people. This finding is particularly interesting given that the Youth Work Act states that only young people can be members of youth councils (the same Act defines a young person to be between the ages of seven and 26). Some explanation can be found through noting that the survey question did not define

ages for ‘young person’ and ‘adult’, which might have created some diversity in interpreting the question. Similarly, given the role of youth workers in supporting the work of youth councils, some respondents might have considered youth workers as members of the youth council.

Regardless of the composition of official membership of youth participatory structures, adults play an important role in supporting the work of these structures. Only 5% of survey participants suggested that an adult usually fulfils the task of chairing the meetings of the youth council; 90% of respondents claimed this role was undertaken by a young person.

When asked about who drives the work of the youth council, only a small number of participants (10%) agreed that it was the adult / youth worker alone directing the work of the council. A majority of respondents claimed that the full control of the work of the council was within the hands of young people – 65% agreed with this statement. Less than a third of respondents (29%) suggested that youth council work was directed by adults and young people in partnership.

Finally, 62% of survey participants indicated the frequency of youth council meetings to be at least monthly; only 16% of Estonian respondents outlined the frequency of meetings to be less than monthly.

5.3.3 Main partners for youth council

Youth councils in Estonia collaborate and build relationships with a diverse range of stakeholders internally (within the local council apparatus) as well as externally in the community. The overwhelming majority of respondents identified the three key partners for their youth council to be external: the Estonian National Youth Council as the peak body for youth councils in Estonia (89%), schools as institutions (82%), and student representative councils within schools as another form of youth participatory structure (82%). This suggest that youth councils in Estonia are very outward looking and prioritise working with the community and external stakeholders.

Regarding internal partners, survey respondents and interview participants alike overwhelmingly emphasised the importance of the relationship with the elected city or parish council. This was followed by the local council youth services department, which was the second most commonly mentioned key partner for youth councils in Estonia. It was somewhat surprising that the elected council was identified as the key partner more often than the youth worker / youth services department. Two possible explanations can be offered: first, youth workers might have either been seen by some respondents not as partners but as an integral part of the youth council; alternatively, the youth council operates independently, and the role of youth worker was not as crucial. In addition, other (non-youth work) departments of city or parish councils appear to be very important partners for youth councils.

According to the survey results, associations of local councils, national government agencies and county governments were among the least frequently identified key partners for youth councils in Estonia. This suggests that the youth council focus is predominantly local issues and participation in regional and national debates, and processes mainly happen indirectly, through the peak body for youth councils that represents such councils in dealings with national government agencies.

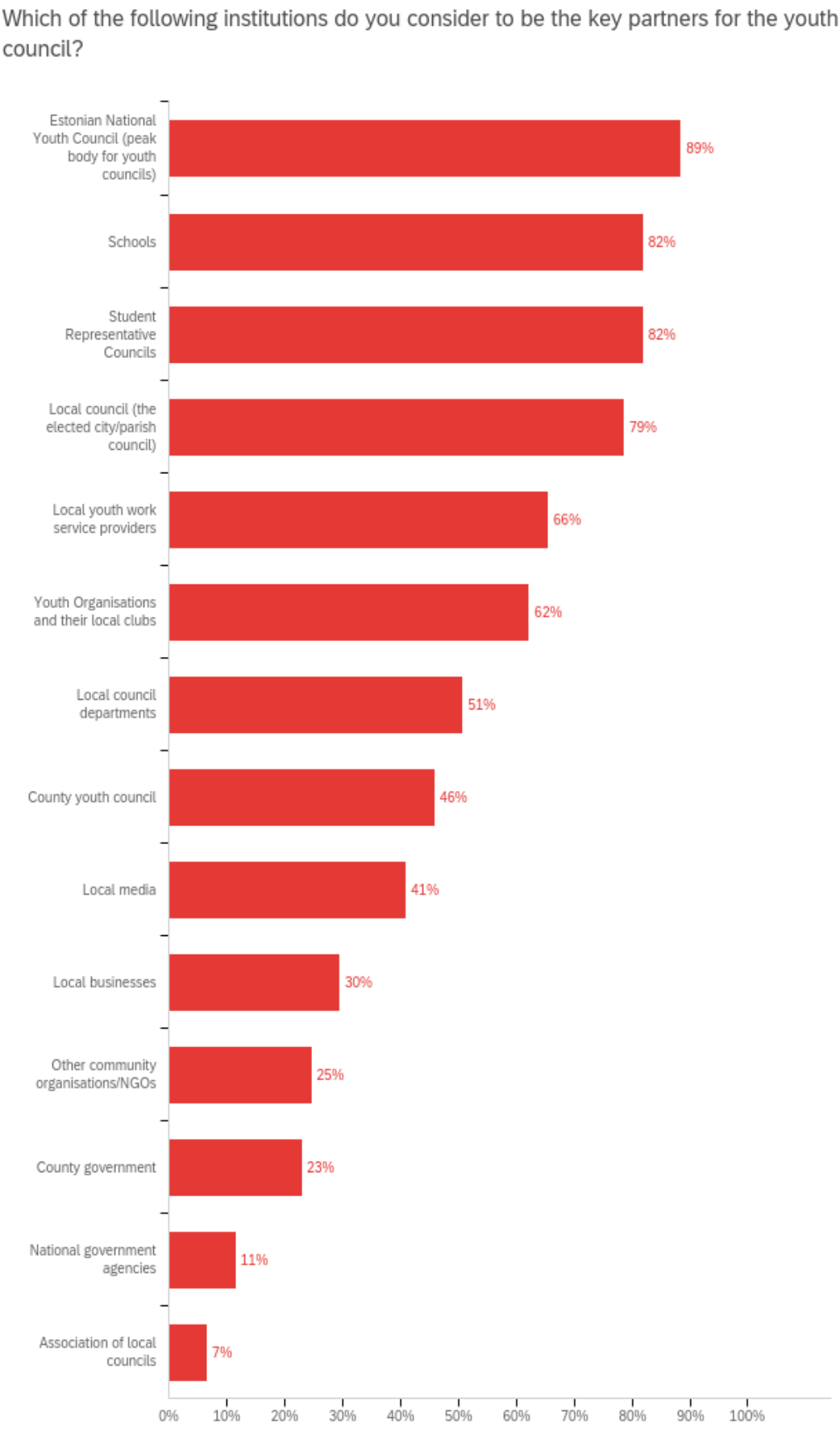

Figure 6: Key partners of youth councils in Estonia

One interview participant elaborated on the importance of their youth council's relationship with the local council:

> *Our youth council's main partner is definitely the youth department of the city government who gives us 5000 euros each year. But also city district leaders, council officers, deputy chairman of the city council who we have had a lot of contacts recently. When you are a member of a youth council then you can approach anyone: managers, public servants, they will listen to you and then do their best to help us. We do not have any limits or boundaries on who we can contact.* *Interview participant (young person) from Estonia*

Another interview participant added:

> *All successive mayors have visited youth council meetings. Also the former chairman of the city council and others have attended our meetings. They know who we are, they know who to approach when they need young people's opinion or participation. Current mayor also cooperates with us a lot. Youth council meetings are held at city hall and there we feel well received. We have not yet met with the newly elected city council, although they have asked us to meet the, but we will try to meet their new chairman in June … And very often we communicate with the public relations manager of the city council who is in constant contact with us and the mayor, she is kind of a communication channel between youth council and the mayor.* *Interview participant (adult) from Estonia*

Table 8: The importance of direct or indirect support from the policy and decision-making levels to the work of youth council/advisory committee in Estonia

Question	Very important		Moderately important		Neutral		Not important		Not sure/don't have enough information		Total
Parliament, national government and ministries	14.52%	9	30.65%	19	40.32%	25	11.29%	7	3.23%	2	62
County government / associations of local councils	9.68%	6	43.55%	27	33.87%	21	8.06%	5	4.84%	3	62
Members of the elected city or parish council	38.71%	24	41.94%	26	14.52%	9	3.23%	2	1.61%	1	62
Executive leadership of the city or parish government	54.84%	34	30.65%	19	11.29%	7	1.61%	1	1.61%	1	62
Other departments and areas of the council	16.13%	10	64.52%	40	17.74%	11	0.00%	0	1.61%	1	62
Local council youth services team / youth worker	64.52%	40	25.81%	16	6.45%	4	1.61%	1	1.61%	1	62

Estonian survey respondents indicated the support from the youth services team / youth worker to be the most important for them. This was closely followed by the support from the executive leadership and members of the elected city or parish council. Support from other departments and areas of the council as well as from the county government and national government was mentioned less frequently as being "very important" to the youth council.

5.4 Outputs, outcomes and aspirations of youth councils

Survey respondents were asked what they considered to be the main achievements of their youth council. It is important to note that the question asked what respondents considered to be main achievements, rather than all achievements. The achievements outlined by the survey respondents can be divided into three categories: (i) connecting with the community; (ii) influencing decision-making and political processes; and (iii) development of skills and youth council as a structure.

5.4.1 Connecting with the community

A vast majority of survey participants in both participant groups indicated some event that the youth council had organised either on their own or in partnership with other organisations as their main achievement. These findings correlate with answers to the earlier question about

the main types of activities carried out by the youth council. Events with a recreational focus such as award ceremonies, movie nights, festivals, youth weeks and so on appeared to be the most prevalent category of events listed as a main achievement. These events also often had a theme or specific purpose, such as fundraising or the celebration of cultural traditions.

There was little emphasis on connecting with the community amongst survey respondents in Estonia.

5.4.2 Influencing decision-making and political processes

A popular category of achievements that dominated responses to the survey question in Estonia were initiatives for creating a dialogue between decision-makers and young people. Some participants indicated that holding events such as a 'participation café' where young people and leaders of the council, community and sometimes members of parliament come together, had become a tradition and one of the main events of the year.

Other respondents outlined specific achievements related to successful advocacy work: one survey respondent noted that a youth councillor was successfully elected to the local council and thus strengthened the importance and the position of the youth council within the municipality. A few respondents also noted the importance of having a representative in the board of the regional or national youth council.

Other policy-related achievements mentioned include renovation of playgrounds and parks as a result of youth council's advocacy; being allocated a legal wall for street art and graffiti as a result of youth council's advocacy; providing advice and input to council in relation to the youth strategic plan; sending letters to the council about the concerns of young people and the youth council; and having representation in the membership of official council (sub)committees.

5.4.3 Development of skills and youth council as a structure

The strengthening of the relationship between the youth council and elected local councillors emerged as a theme; achievements related to the development of youth council as a structure

were frequently highlighted by respondents from both groups. This suggests that in Estonia, there is considerable emphasis on youth councils as an independent structure, and how they operate and organise their work. This data correlates with answers to other questions, where it is evident that the role of the youth worker in facilitating the work of youth councils is important but not necessarily crucial, as youth councils in general appear to be autonomous and youth-led.

Answers to other survey questions frequently mentioned things like team training and team building, implementing democratic elections, cooperating with other youth councils and improving the sustainability of the youth council as main achievements.

5.4.4 Additional resources youth councils need to be effective in their work

For Estonian youth councils, 30% of respondents identified financial resources as an area requiring additional support. Lack of funding was the most dominant aspect followed closely by funding security and the need to have an independent annual budget as opposed to one-off grants to implement projects or organise events that need to be applied for separately.

Another dominant category of resources that youth councils currently lack in Estonia was members, and in particular motivated members. One survey respondent from Estonia elaborated:

> *From my own experience I can tell that making the work more effective requires competent people, well thought-through process and the "right" leader – or in other words, strong organisation. More frequent trainings (or refreshers at the start of a new membership) can help. Although, organising trainings also requires time commitment and dedication from young people (though this itself is not the core function of the youth council). In reality, it means that often the necessary trainings won't happen because of the lack of time so perhaps there should be an external organisation offering them … Young people would benefit from getting training on how to lead an organisation. Young people who become leaders often don't have*

prior leadership experience and often they will turn into "that active young person" who does everything by themselves without delegating. This is not a principle of team work and can divide the youth council. Additionally this is not very helpful for the continuity and sustainability which is one of the main concerns amongst youth councils every year (as much as I have talked to other young people and observed the work of youth councils) …

Amongst other things, several survey respondents stressed the importance of having greater recognition and clearer expectations from the elected council. Some respondents also outlined the need for youth council to have their own room.

5.4.5 Dreams and aspirations

The last question of the survey invited respondents to dream. The question asked respondents to imagine a situation where the right conditions were in place and describe what the youth council could potentially achieve in these circumstances.

The following common themes emerged:

- Youth council making young people more interested and active in (local) politics. That all young people who can would participate in elections.
- Greater recognition, status by the council and community – to give opinion on every draft council motion and by-law and to be represented in all of the official council committees.
- Youth council to have an equal weight to all other committees.
- That officials and politicians trust young people more.
- To reach more young people and to have more young people involved in the work of the youth council.
- Ensuring the continuity and sustainability of youth council – that it would still exist in 10 years.

5.5 Conclusion

It is evident from the data that youth councils surveyed in Estonia share similar views on their purpose, aims and objectives and undertake similar activities. They also share common challenges. Estonian youth councils appear to be largely autonomous and youth-led, outward looking and democratic. There appears to be much emphasis on the importance of developing youth councils as a structure/organisation. Whereas the most common activities undertaken by youth councils are organising events, there is also a clear understanding of the youth council's role in influencing decisions and policies to benefit young people. This was particularly true in youth councils operating in larger metropolitan cities.

Lastly, the role of youth workers in Estonia youth councils is supportive rather than leading, and youth workers are there to improve the work of youth councils rather than the reason why youth councils exist.

CHAPTER 6: ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

This chapter outlines the similarities and differences of data from Australia and Estonia, as presented in previous chapters. It will also identify the enabling conditions for local level youth councils based on the literature and findings from the data. This chapter has two parts: in the first part the similarities and differences between the Australian and Estonian data will be presented and discussed according to the themes identified in chapters 4 and 5; in the second part, the enabling environment for youth councils will be defined and a framework for enabling conditions for youth councils identified, presented and discussed.

I. COMPARISON OF DATA ACROSS AUSTRALIA AND ESTONIA

6.1 Aims, objectives, activities and challenges of youth councils

Table 9 shows the similarities and differences between the qualitative and quantitative data collected in Australia and Estonia in the broad category of aims, objectives, activities and challenges of youth councils.

These results are consistent with the literature that distinguishes youth development and youth involvement approaches in youth participation strategies. Australian data indicates the prevalence of youth development approach in youth councils, which puts the main emphasis on the development of skills and competences of young people, whereas Estonian findings suggest the prominence of a youth involvement approach, which aims to impact policy-making, organisations and society (Bell, Vromen & Collin 2008; White & Wyn 2008).

Table 9: Similarities and differences between Australian and Estonian data in the category of aims, objectives, activities and challenges of youth councils

DOMAIN	SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES	
1. Aims, objectives, activities and challenges		**Australia**	**Estonia**
Aims and objectives	Representing young people's views and concerns to the local council is seen as the primary purpose of youth councils in both countries. The role of youth councils is viewed as provision of advice to decision-makers, particularly to councillors.	Australian youth councils emphasise more philosophical aims, such as "getting the youth voice heard" and "making young people more visible in the community".	Estonian youth councils emphasise more often the importance of achieving tangible outcomes resulting in long-term change (e.g. new infrastructure, services or policies).
Commonly undertaken activities	Organising events is the most common category of activities undertaken, followed by representing young people in dealings with government and other organisations. Participating in committees of the local council or other organisations was the least popular category in both countries.	Events and activities organised by the youth council in Australia tend to be more focused on campaigning / raising awareness for a particular social issue (e.g. bullying, domestic violence, mental health, environment).	Events organised by youth councils in Estonia were more diverse and ranged from world cafés with politicians to celebration of cultural traditions. They also often had a theme or a specific purpose, such as fundraising.
Challenges	Main challenge that is common across two countries is making the youth council more visible in the community. Lack of rights and the relationship between the youth council and elected council are challenges at similar levels in both countries.	Insufficient funding and getting youth initiative supported by local council are considerably more prevalent in Australia than in Estonia.	Finding new members, and motivating and retaining existing members is among the most common challenges in Estonia – much more so than in Australia.

6.2 Governance of youth councils

Table 10 outlines the main similarities and differences between the qualitative and quantitative data collected in Australia and Estonia in the broad category of governance of youth councils.

The main differences between the data from the two countries in the broad area of governance relate to the level of self-governance and existence of a democratic process to select members, both of which appear to be more prevalent in Estonia.

Similarly, there is a variance between the data from both countries around the most important partners for youth councils, which in Estonia's case are more outward-facing than what can be concluded from the Australian data.

Using Giddens' (1984) description of power, where he talks about power as the existence of capability to 'make a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events, as a basis, there are indications of greater levels of power among Estonian respondents in comparison to Australian ones, particularly in the areas of recruitment of members and the level of control within the governance of youth councils.

Table 10: Similarities and differences between Australian and Estonian data in the category of governance of youth councils

DOMAIN	SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES	
2. Governance of youth councils		**Australia**	**Estonia**
Recruitment of members	The most popular method for recruiting new members for the youth council in both countries involves submitting an expression of interest or application. The decision-making/selection process most commonly involves the existing/outgoing members and youth worker working together.	More than one-third of respondents indicated that a youth worker alone chose the members for the youth council. Very few youth councils in Australia have a democratic process in place for recruiting new members.	A majority of Estonian respondents indicated that their youth council has a democratic process in place for recruiting new members. Young people are always involved in the decision-making process relating to new members of youth councils.
Level of youth participation in governance of youth councils	Most respondents from both countries disagreed with the statements that an adult / youth worker alone drives the work of the youth council. The vast majority of participants indicated the frequency of youth council meetings to be at least monthly.	Half of the respondents indicated that the membership of their youth council consists of young people and adults who are not young people. Nearly a third of respondents indicated that the meetings of their youth councils are chaired by an adult.	Most respondents in Estonia indicated that their youth councils have only young people as members. Almost all respondents agreed that meetings of their youth council are chaired by a young person. Estonians were also more likely to claim that the full control of the work of the council lies in young people.
Main partners for youth councils	Schools, youth workers, elected council, council departments and youth organisations are among the main partners for youth councils in both countries. State/county/national governments were among the least important.	The three most important key partners identified were all internal: elected councillors, youth workers and other council departments.	An overwhelming majority of respondents identified the three key partners for their youth council to be external (as opposed to partners connected to local government apparatus). The most important key partner in Estonia's case was the peak body for youth councils; such a body does not exist in Australia.

6.3 Outputs, outcomes and aspirations of youth councils

Table 11 shows the most notable similarities and differences in Australian and Estonian survey and interview data in the category of outputs, outcomes and aspirations of youth councils.

The literature highlights that the models of operation for youth councils depend on regulatory frameworks, as well as institutional and organisational structures, and on demography, politics and local traditions (Collins et al., cited in Perry-Hazan & Nir 2016). Giddens (1984) identifies "rules and resources recursively involved in institutions" as most important aspects of a structure (p. 24). It is evident that the existence, strength, status and further development of structures are of less importance in the Australian context than in the Estonian context. This can be partly explained by the existence of multiple mechanisms as discussed in detail in Chapter 2, but most notably the existence of legislation, rights, advocacy and funding opportunities independent of the local council that are granted to youth councils in Estonia but not in Australia.

Table 11: Similarities and differences between Australian and Estonian data in the category of outputs, outcomes and aspirations of youth councils

DOMAIN	SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES	
3. Outputs, outcomes and aspirations of youth councils		**Australia**	**Estonia**
Connecting with the community	An overwhelming majority of respondents in both countries outlined some event that the youth council had organised either on their own or in partnership with other organisations as their main achievement. Events with a recreational focus such as award ceremonies, movie nights, festivals, youth weeks etc. appeared to be the most prevalent category of events.	Amongst Australian respondents, the importance of a youth council's connectedness to the community was stressed more frequently.	Estonian respondents mentioned specific reasons for organising community events, such as fundraising and celebration of cultural traditions, which were not prevalent among Australian participants.
Influencing decision-making and political processes	In both countries, this category emerged in the discussion about outcomes and outputs of youth councils.	Achievements in this category of outcomes were less prevalent in Australian respondents' answers compared to Estonian respondents. Examples included influencing and consequently changing public transport timetables, concessions or route planning and development of a youth charter, and providing input to the youth strategic plan.	Among Estonian respondents this category was very prevalent. Some participants indicated that holding events such as a "participation café" where young people and leaders of the council, community and sometimes members of parliament come together, have become a tradition. Others outlined specific achievements related to successful advocacy: a youth councillor being successfully elected to the local council; having a representative in the regional or national youth council.

DOMAIN	SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES	
Development of skills and youth council as a structure	In both countries, this category emerged in the responses.	Strengthening of the relationship between the youth council and elected councillors emerged as a theme but was not mentioned frequently. This suggests that it is not very important to emphasise youth councils as an independent and standalone structure in Australia.	Achievements related to the development of youth council as a structure were frequently highlighted by respondents. In Estonia, there is considerable emphasis on youth councils as independent structures, and how they operate and organise their work.
Additional resources youth councils need to be effective in their work	Funding was the main category identified in both countries as currently being insufficient and requiring additional resources. In addition, funding security and having an independent budget emerged as important themes across both countries.	A number of respondents from rural municipalities indicated the lack of public transport or the distance between different parts of a municipality as a resource that is currently lacking. There was also the importance of having greater recognition and clearer expectations from the elected council.	Members, and in particular motivated members, emerged as a dominant category of resources that youth councils currently lack in Estonia.
Dreams and aspirations	Respondents in both countries identified dreams and aspirations that relate to improving/strengthening the role, work or status of youth councils in the community and within the local council itself.	Some Australian respondents highlighted ambitious changes in society as their dreams, such as to eradicate bullying.	Almost all Estonian respondents were focused on developing and strengthening youth councils as structures, including specific propositions such as for the youth council to give opinions on every draft council motion and by-law and to be represented in all official council committees.

II. ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

6.4 Enabling environment for local level youth councils

Based on the literature and the findings of this study, the following definition of an enabling environment for youth councils was constructed by the researcher: **an enabling environment for youth councils means the fulfilment of a set of conditions that allow them to be independent, youth-led and participatory structures so that they can represent the interests of young people through advocacy and give advice to decision-makers on matters impacting young people.**

This definition summarises the main purpose of the existence of youth councils as structures and highlights the core reasons why an enabling environment needs to be created for these structures, ultimately to increase the agency of young people.

6.4.1 Enabling Environment Index as a guide for developing a Framework for an Enabling Environment for Youth Councils

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Enabling Environment Index (EEI) developed by CIVICUS is made up of three domains and 17 sub-dimensions that together describe the aspects of an enabling environment in the context of civil society. Youth participatory structures share many similarities with civil society organisations: they are usually based on voluntary participation; they aim to empower a group in society through better advocacy and representation in decision-making processes; they usually follow the principles of democracy in their work and in determining their membership; and they encourage and rely on the concept of active citizenship – that is, the will of members to contribute for the betterment of others.

The EEI's three domains – socio-economic environment, socio-cultural environment and governance environment – although connected, have also considerable differences, particularly in their focus. The socio-economic dimension combines social processes and economic factors that affect the work of youth councils; the socio-cultural dimension

emphasises the interconnection of society and culture and its impact on youth councils; and the governance environment focuses on the act of governance, power, processes and leadership itself.

In 21st-century societies based on democratic principles, the rule of law and enabling the human rights of all people, all three domains are important and must be considered in order for an enabling environment for youth councils to be created. However, distinguishing them might aid in developing better and more focused strategies and approaches for improvement, as often the enabling conditions might be more notably absent in only one or two of the three domains.

There are also some notable differences between independent civil society organisations and local level youth councils, which in most cases are affiliated with or incorporated into the structures of local government authorities. The latter usually means that they are not fully independent bodies, unlike civil society organisations, and thus a few of the indicators outlined in the EEI are relevant for the context of the enabling environment for youth councils. For this research, there is also a need for the language of the sub-dimensions to be more accurate and to reflect the context of youth participation and young people.

Based on this discussion of the EEI, and on findings from the quantitative and qualitative data in this report, the researcher developed a Framework for an Enabling Environment for Youth Councils that uses the three dimensions from the EEI and includes nine new sub-dimensions. Figure 7 outlines the Framework and the following sections will discuss it in detail.

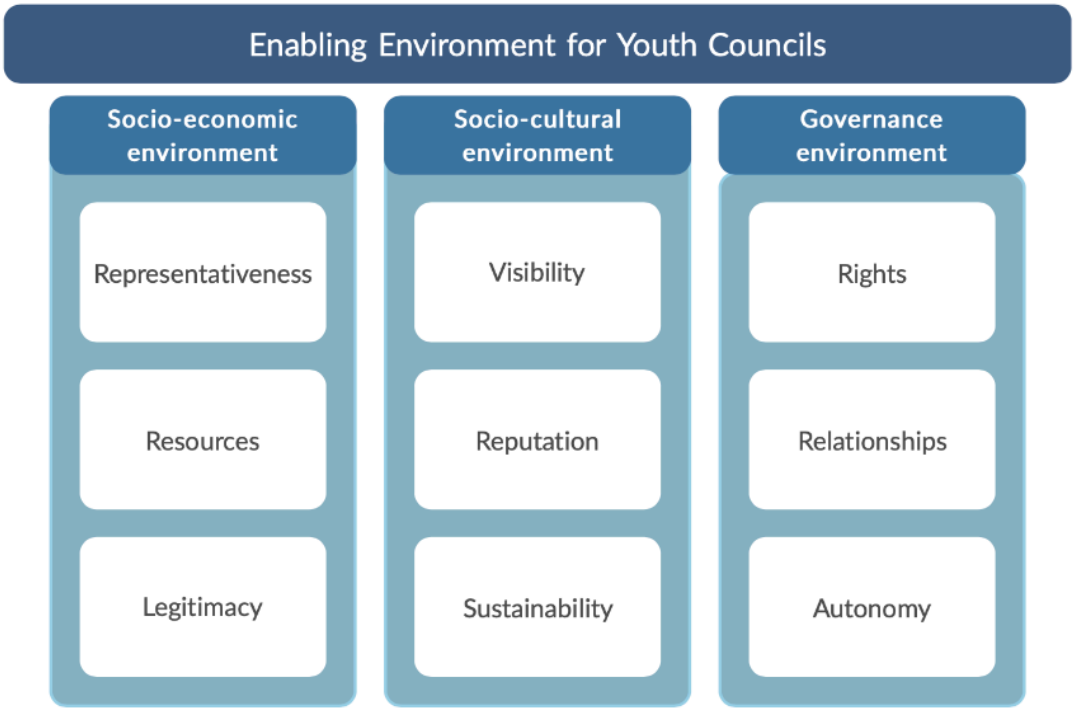

Figure 7: Framework for an Enabling Environment for Youth Councils

The proposed Framework does not offer any weighting for the three domains or individual sub-dimensions – each sub-dimension needs to be equally present in the enabling environment for youth councils. The Framework is intended as a guide in the creation process of new youth councils and for evaluating and reorganising the work of existing youth councils. It can also be used as a reference point in creating policies, programs, regulatory or rights-affirming legislative frameworks for youth councils. It is not, intended as a tool for guiding the operational aspects and everyday decisions of individual youth councils.

6.4.2 Dimension: socio-economic environment for youth councils

The CIVICUS EEI describes the socio-economic environment dimension as one that "provides a series of assessments of factors such as education, equity, gender equality and, quite importantly to support civic participation in the age of the digital revolution, the development of communication technologies" (Fioramonti & Kononykhina 2013, p. 5).

The following new sub-dimensions emerged from the interview and survey data across Australia and Estonia.

Representativeness: having a diverse membership of the youth council. Diversity in this context can encompass equal or near equal representation of all genders, representation of various cultural backgrounds, subcultures and identities, age brackets, geographical coverage of the municipality, and schools.

Resourcing: stability, sufficiency and independence of funding. Resourcing encompasses the availability and guarantees for financial resources, such as a dedicated youth council budget, human resources, often in the form of training, administrative or mentoring support through secretaries, youth worker, lawyers or other advisers; free access to facilities, such as rooms to hold meetings or events in; equipment, such as computers, phones, access to databases and internet; and transportation needed for the fulfilment of the aims and tasks of the youth council.

Legitimacy: having a mandate to represent other young people. Mandate in this context is to be approached very broadly: in the simplest terms it means having a democratic and open process in place to select members for the youth council. Democratic can mean organised elections where young people vote for their representatives but most often it means either an open application process where all young people have the right to express their interest and apply to become a member and the process of selection is transparent and youth-led; or a process through which youth organisations or student councils delegate their representatives to become members of youth councils; or a combination of all of the above.

6.4.3 Dimension: socio-cultural environment for youth councils

The CIVICUS EEI describes the socio-cultural environment as one that "examines cultural factors reinforcing the capacity of citizens to get involved in the civil society arena, such as inter-personal trust and tolerance, inclination to join collective action and solidarity" (Fioramonti & Kononykhina, p. 5).

The following new sub-dimensions emerged when combining the interview and survey data across both countries with the literature.

Visibility: of the work of the youth council in the community. Visibility in this context means the provision of resources and mediums such as official websites, social media and local newspapers, but also events and advertising channels through which the work of the youth council could be made visible to the entire community.

Reputation: supporting attitudes of adults and young people towards the youth council that understand and acknowledge the role of the youth council as equally important to any other committee or advisory council of a similar purpose comprised of adults.

Sustainability: motivating new and existing members of the youth council. Sustainability means ensuring that members are motivated and that there is sufficient interest generated and maintained within the youth population of the local community so that there are more candidates interested in becoming a member of the youth council than there are places. Competition also strengthens representativeness and legitimacy of the youth council.

6.4.4 Dimension: governance environment for youth councils

The CIVICUS EEI describes the governance environment as one that "includes fundamental capabilities that create the minimum preconditions, or lack thereof, for social and political engagement. These include the overall state effectiveness, rule of law, policy dialogue, corruption, associational rights and political liberties. It also covers a series of personal rights, guarantees against unduly interference from state agencies or private actors, freedom of speech, media freedom and, importantly, it assesses the regulatory frameworks for NGOs" (Fioramonti & Kononykhina 2013, p. 5).

The following sub-dimensions emerged as a result of combining the interview and survey data across both countries with the literature.

Rights: having an official status and rights that are enshrined in statutes. Rights in this context relate to rights endorsed in legislation, constitution, terms of reference or equivalent documents of official standing. Those rights can relate to the right to self-govern and for young people to be able to drive the work of the youth council, be provided with sufficient resources, support and information, be represented in other bodies that make decisions impacting young people, and to give advice and make suggestions.

Relationships: with the elected council and council departments. Relationships means ongoing, professional, equal and mutually respectful relationships that enable the youth council to seek information, gain support and regularly communicate with elected councillors and council departments and official in order to best fulfil the aims of the youth council .

Autonomy: to drive and lead the work of the youth council. Autonomy means having a mandate and measures to reduce the inherent power imbalance that exists between young people and adults; for example, through transfer of some adult power to young people in order for the youth council to be youth-led, fully self-governing, and empowered to drive their own work and take responsibility of their actions.

6.5 Conclusion

Youth councils in Estonia and Australia share many similarities. There have relatively small differences in aims, objectives, activities and challenges – particularly in aims and objectives, which appear to be very similar in both countries. The most notable differences between the data from Australia and Estonia in this category relates to Estonian respondents identifying activities and events that aim to achieve changes in policies and achieving tangible results resulting in long-term change – this was generally not present in the Australian data.

In the category of governance of youth councils, respondents across both countries employed similar processes for recruiting members and similar key partners. Australian participants identified their main three partners as internal to the council, whereas for Estonian

respondents the top three partners were all external to local government. Estonian respondents were also more likely than their Australian counterparts to have involvement in or control over the work of the youth council and recruitment process of new members, as well as acknowledging the existence of democratic process for selection of new members.

In the third category of outputs, outcomes and aspirations of youth councils, respondents across the two countries identified lack of funding and funding security as the common challenges for the work of their youth councils. In comparison with the Australian data, in Estonia there is more importance on developing youth councils as structures as well as influencing political processes. In Australia, connecting with the community appears to be more important than in Estonia.

There have been numerous attempts to define and identify enabling environments in various fields of life and professions, but only a few documented cases in areas relating to children or youth participation. Based on the example of the CIVICUS EEI, the proposed Framework for an Enabling Environment, contextualised in this research for youth councils, can be broadly categorised into three domains: socio-economic, socio-cultural and governance. Under these dimensions, the youth council framework has nine sub-dimensions that each represent a set of conditions required in order to create an enabling environment for local level youth councils. These sub-dimensions are representativeness, resources, legitimacy, visibility, reputation, sustainability, rights, relationships and autonomy.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of this chapter is to explain the context and importance of this study and to summarise the findings. Recommendations relating to organisational and policy improvements, in order to create an enabling environment for local level youth councils – directed towards local governments and adults within these structures and for state and national government – will be provided and suggestions for further research will be made . Finally, concluding remarks will be offered.

7.1 Study context and importance

The traditional methods, structures and processes for implementing youth participation are changing, with advancements in technology, young people's disappointment in traditional democratic structures and old power values providing the biggest impetus.

The mixed-methods comparative case study in this research analysed the current environment and context in which youth councils operate, and the experiences of former and current members of youth councils and the professionals that support their work in the Australian state of Victoria and in Estonia. Through the results of this study, a Framework for an Enabling Environment for Youth Councils was identified and conceptualised, building on previous enabling models identified within the literature.

The findings of this research also sought to provide an understanding of how the work of local level youth councils can be better supported and organised by policy, organisational and legislative measures to increase the effectiveness and benefits of these structures for young people and the community. Very few studies so far have focused on structures and identifying the enabling environment for structures, as opposed to individual participation and processes in general. This study aimed to fill that gap through providing a cross-cultural comparison between local level youth participation in Estonia and Australia and through identifying the

enabling environment for local level youth councils as structures, as opposed to focusing on individual young people or participatory processes/activities.

7.2 Research question and methodology

In order to address the aims of this study the following research question was asked:

> *What are the enabling conditions for local level youth councils in the Australian state of Victoria and Estonia?*

Semi-structured interviews offered an in-depth empirical investigation, and the mixed-methods approach in this study provided the opportunity to rely on multiple sources of evidence and to triangulate the data. Employing a survey enabled the researcher to obtain the 'big picture' knowledge that quantitative research surveys with closed questions of larger populations across countries can provide. Thematic analyses focused on identifying and describing implicit and explicit themes within the data. Those themes were framed by the literature, policy documents and the researcher's own experience to explain the emerging data.

The results of the interviews guided the design of the survey questions. Descriptive univariate analysis, which refers to "procedures for summarising data, with the intention of discovering trends and patterns, and summarising results for ease of understanding and communication" (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2009, p. 257), was used.

The empirical results reported in this thesis should be considered in the light of some limitations, described in Chapter 3, which were mainly related to sample size, sample bias and language.

7.3 Summary of main findings

The findings of this study provide an overview of the landscape of local level youth councils in two countries separately but also in comparison. This knowledge should facilitate a better

understanding of the importance and potential of these structures, covering adult and young people's perspectives, which will hopefully avoid tokenism and lead to more focus on creating better support mechanisms, resources, policies and relationships with youth councils.

Youth councils in Estonia and Australia share many similarities. There are relatively small differences in their aims, objectives, activities and challenges – particularly aims and objectives, which appear to be very similar. One notable difference between the data from Australia and Estonia relates to Estonian respondents identifying activities and events that aim to achieve changes in policies and achieve tangible results resulting in long-term changes – this was generally not present in the Australian data.

In looking at how youth councils are governed, there are similar processes for recruiting members. Key collaboration partners in both countries appear to be similar; however, Australian participants identified their main partners to be internal, whereas for Estonian respondents the top partners were all external to local government. Estonians respondents were also more likely to have involvement in or control over the work of the youth council and recruitment process of new members, as acknowledged the existence of democratic process for selection of new members.

In the realm of outputs, outcomes and aspirations of youth councils, respondents across the two countries identified lack of funding and funding security as the common challenges for the work of their youth councils. In comparison with Australia, Estonians put more emphasis on developing youth councils as structures and on influencing political processes. In Australia, connecting with the community at large appears to be more important than in Estonia.

An enabling environment for youth councils means the fulfilment of a set of conditions that allow them to be independent, youth-led and participatory structures that can represent the interests of young people through advocacy and giving advice to decision-makers on matters impacting young people.

Based on the example of the Enabling Environment Index developed by CIVICUS, an enabling environment contextualised for youth councils can be broadly categorised into three domains: socio-economic, socio-cultural and governance. The research proposes that under these three domains are nine sub-dimensions that represent a set of conditions required in order to create an enabling environment for local level youth councils. These sub-dimensions are representativeness, resources, legitimacy, visibility, reputation, sustainability, rights, relationships and autonomy.

The Framework for an Enabling Environment for Youth Councils developed as a result of this study is intended as a guide in the creation process of new youth councils, when evaluating and reorganising the work of existing youth councils or as a reference point in creating policies, programs, regulatory or rights-affirming legislative frameworks for youth councils.

7.4 Recommendations

This section makes recommendations to policy and decision-makers in local, state and national governments, particularly in the context of Victoria, Australia. The six recommendations are categorised according to the three domains of the Framework for an Enabling Environment for Youth Councils: socio-economic, socio-cultural and governance.

7.4.1 Socio-economic environment

Local governments play a crucial role in providing a range of services for young people but also in enabling young people's participation in democracy, which is often one of the first positive participation experiences for young people. There are many similarities between the roles of local government in Victoria and Estonia. However, there are also notable differences, mainly related to Estonian local councils having a much stronger legislative basis and autonomy from other levels of government.

In the socio-economic environment, which addresses the representativeness, resources and legitimacy sub-dimensions from the Framework for an Enabling Environment for Youth Councils, the following recommendations are made.

Recommendation 1: Provision of adequate support and resources to youth councils by the local councils in which they operate. Youth councils need a variety of resources in order to fulfil their aims and carry out tasks:

- Sufficient (not token) and stable funding that is not dependant on the persona or attitudes of the youth worker or mayor of the day towards the youth council and that enable the youth council to make long-term plans and to undertake a broad range of activities.
- Administrational support. As members of youth councils usually work on a voluntary basis, it is important to provide administrative support, such as writing minutes meetings, keeping a record of documentation and so on. Specific areas in which administrative support will be provided to the youth council should arise as a result of consultation with the youth council. There might also be some administrative tasks that adults are willing to assist with but that young people might want to carry out themselves to gain experience.
- Use of council facilities and equipment, such as meeting rooms, office space, computers and databases.
- Training, mentoring and specialist advice from other council departments and officers that the youth council needs in order to meaningfully perform their tasks.

Recommendation 2: A recognition of the role of youth councils and guaranteed rights within policy and legal framework, particularly to exist and to receive adequate resources and access information within the Local Government Act. In Estonia, the *Youth Work Act 2010* includes provisions that recognise the role, democratic principles and rights of the youth council as well as the obligation for local councils to consult with the youth council in particular questions. As is evident from the data, this has contributed to the situation where youth councils in Estonia are more independent, value the importance of strengthening youth

councils as structures and are more likely to see their role as influencing decisions and policies than their Victorian counterparts. Legislating youth councils in Estonia eliminated the opportunity to use as an excuse the fact that youth councils had no legal basis for existence, which was commonly encountered before 2010. Legislating youth councils in Victorian law would help to raise the status and importance of these structures in the community and within local councils.

Recommendation 3: Provision of funding opportunities for youth councils that are independent of local governments. Sufficiency and stability of funding emerged as a significant challenge from the data. Funding is often insufficient and can be dependent on multiple factors, such as the youth-friendliness of the management of the council of the day and the funding priorities of the council, but also the positioning and reputation of the youth services department within the council. This can create serious limitations and risks for youth councils. Having the opportunity to access funding provided by state or national governments would create added opportunities, including for stability and security of funding for youth councils.

7.4.2 Socio-cultural environment

State and national governments (note: Estonia does not have state governments) can play an important role in identifying and agreeing on policy priorities, creating a legislative framework and allocating funding through programs and grants. Through that they can also impact the work of the local councils and youth councils operating within the context of local councils. In the socio-cultural domain, which deals with the capacity of citizens to get involved in the civil society arena, in order to aid the creation of visibility, reputation and sustainability, the following recommendation is made.

Recommendation 4: State or national governments to provide support for the establishment of a peak body (umbrella organisation) tasked with coordinating the collaboration and advocacy efforts of youth councils in Victoria. The existence of such

a peak body (the Estonian National Youth Council) has made a significant impact in the landscape of youth councils in Estonia. The survey and interview data clearly evidenced advocacy outcomes that can be attributed to the work of the peak body. The peak body was also identified as the single most important partner for youth councils in Estonia. On the other hand, Victorian participants highlighted lack of cooperation between youth councils and lack of cooperation and the absence of representation on state level as a significant challenge (as well as a dream and aspiration). Therefore, the Victorian government could provide adequate funding and other support to establish a relevant peak body for local level youth councils be.

7.4.3 Governance environment

Enabling meaningful youth participation, which is the purpose that local level youth councils have been created to fulfil, is intrinsically connected to concepts of power and agency. In order for youth councils to be empowered, some of the real power vested in local councils as authorities created under the law – and adults as a result of their personal agency, knowledge, experience and privileges arising from their official position – needs to be shared with youth councils. It can be argued that there is a correlation between the extent of power being shared with youth councils, and the motivation of the members of youth councils, with the outputs and outcomes of youth councils.

Sharing of power needs to be genuine and as unconditional as possible. For example, it is reasonable for adults to expect that decision-making power is shared with (and in some cases delegated to) the youth council provided that it is exercised according to limits and rules set by law. That means that as long as power is exercised according to existing legal and regulatory norms and conventions around good governance, this shared or delegated power will not be retracted, even in instances where adults would have acted differently.

In the governance environment domain of the Framework for an Enabling Environment for Youth Councils, which covers the sub-dimensions of rights, relationships and autonomy, the following recommendations are made.

Recommendation 5: **Decision-makers and adults supporting the work of the youth council to address and conceptualise the questions of power and sharing of power:** how much power are you willing to share with the youth council (meaning that you commit to making decisions jointly without using age, official position or agency as an advantage) and how much and which of your powers are you willing to delegate to the youth council (meaning that you will give them full control and the right to self-decide certain things). Power imbalance can also be present through smaller and often unconscious actions such as adults dominating or chairing the meetings of youth councils, or the requirement for an adult to have a final say over whatever has been decided by the youth council in order for the decision to be implemented.

Recommendation 6: Ensuring that there is a **comprehensive and officially endorsed written agreement** that sets out the rules and division of responsibilities around the governance, recruitment, decision-making and representation processes and powers, but also the rights to receive funds and use other resources, to access information and advice relevant to the work of the youth council and the responsibilities of each party, including young people. This agreement should be mutual and not written by adults. It usually takes the form of a constitution or terms of reference.

7.5 Recommendations for further research

There is a clear need for further case study research – particularly cross-cultural case study research – to strengthen the evidence base for youth participation, especially youth councils as structures. At the same time, quantitative research with larger populations is also needed in order to generalise findings and get a stronger sense of prevalence of these issues.

This study and its research design have the potential to be replicated in other contexts and countries; however, caution should be exercised when generalising the results of this study

onto larger populations, due to sample bias and sample size limitations as discussed in Chapter 3.

For future research in this area, consideration should be given to identifying population size with greater precision and increasing the sample size for surveys and interviews to enhance comparability and representativeness. There is a need to study more the potential of youth councils as structures and how they could evolve, taking into account current changes in society, particularly the disappointment and distrust of young people across many countries towards traditional democratic processes and structures. The emergence of new power values and issue-based youth movements and the relationship and potential impact of these phenomena on the work of youth councils also requires further investigation.

Finally, power relationships, including power imbalance and the practice of sharing and delegating power by adults or local councils with youth councils is an under-researched area, but crucial to understanding these structures and how to create a truly enabling environment for the youth councils.

7.6 Conclusion

Youth councils in Victoria and Estonia are widespread and have been in existence for a couple of decades. They have been created for a similar purpose, often colloquially and philosophically summarised as ‘providing young people a voice’ or ‘representing young people in dealings with the government’. In practice, they often aspire to and have a potential for much more than merely a voice.

Having a voice is not an end in itself but rather a tool for achieving change in policy, processes, service delivery and even attitude. Or to put it in other words, having a voice is to shift the power imbalance from those who have power (usually institutions and adults) in favour of those who do not (in this instance young people).

While young people are not a homogenous group with identical needs and aspirations, they do share many things in common due to their position and status in society but also their similar experiences and circumstances. Youth councils, being representative and participatory, are seen as structures that bring forward the opinions of young people, but also need to be wary of not monopolising youth voice. Adults and the power structures,(e.g. local councils) they operate within need to address the question of power and how much they are willing to share or delegate to young people if they are serious about empowerment and creating an enabling environment for youth councils.

The Framework for an Enabling Environment for Youth Councils developed as a result of this study can serve as a guide to understand and evaluate the work and needs of youth councils as collective structures – whether to strengthen an existing or create a new youth council; or to plan, develop or evaluate policy measures that can better support the work of these structures.

Many existing models and frameworks for youth participation lack a focus on established structures and concentrate rather on the role of individuals or groups of young people in the participation process. The Framework presented in this thesis focuses on the importance of youth councils as structures and emphasises dimensions that are particularly relevant in the context of youth councils.

Finally, I would like to note that youth councils, as well as young people, are an enormous and valuable resource that need to be taken more seriously and treated as equal partners to adults – this is a practice that in many cases is still not happening. Youth workers play a crucial role in accompanying young people and youth councils along this journey and often enable change – but to achieve a real shift, all adults in positions of power need to be on board and policies, legislation and funding need to be addressed.

REFERENCE LIST

ARACY (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth) 2012, *A national plan for child and youth wellbeing. A review of the literature,* ARACY*,* Canberra, viewed 21 August 2015 <http://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/152>.

Australian Youth Affairs Coalition 2015, *Briefing paper: National Youth Week and Youth Engagement Cuts*, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Melbourne, viewed 20 July 2015 <http://www.yacvic.org.au/news/596-national-youth-week-and-youth-engagement-cuts>.

Babbie, E 2007, *The Practice of Social Research*, 6th edn, Thomson Learning, California.

Badham, B & Wade, H 2010, *Hear by Right: Standards Framework for the Participation of Children and Young People*, The National Youth Agency, London.

Baker, GR 2011, The contribution of case study research to knowledge of how to improve quality of care, *BMJ Quality & Safety,* vol. 20, i30–i35, viewed 1 August 2015 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3066793/>.

Bart, S, Müürsepp, L, Rannala, I.-E, Taru, M & Toots, M 2013, *Youth and public policy in Estonia*, International Debate Education Association, US.

Basic and Upper Secondary Schools Act 1998 (Estonia).

Beers, H, Chau, V, Ennew, J, Khan, P, Long, T, Milne, B, Nguyet, T & Son, V 2006, *Creating an enabling environment: Capacity building in children's participation*, Save the Children Sweden, Vietnam.

Bell, J, Vromen, A & Collin, P 2008, Rewriting the rules for youth participation: *Report to the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS)*, Canberra, viewed 21 June 2015 <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/Programs/NYARS/Documents/InclusionandDiversity_report.pdf>.

Bessant, J 1997, 'Free market economics and new directions for youth workers', *Youth Studies Australia,* vol. 16, no. 2, pp 34–40.

Bessant, J 2004, 'Mixed messages: youth participation and democratic practice', *Australian Journal of Political Science,* vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 387–404.

Bowen, GA 2009, 'Document analysis as a qualitative research method', *Qualitative Research Journal*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 27–40.

Boyatzis, RE 1998, *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Braun, V & Clarke, V 2006, 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 77–101.

Brodie, E, Cowling, E, Nissen, N, Paine, AE, Jochum, V & Warburton, D 2009, *Understanding participation: a literature review*, Pathways through Participation, UK, viewed 13 July 2015 <http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Pathways-literature-review-final-version.pdf>.

Bruter, M & Harrison, S, 2014, 'Memory, emotions and ergonomics: The electoral psychology of voters in perspective', *LSE for the ECREP Workshop Series*, London, March 2014.

Burridge, P, Carpenter, C, Cherednichenko, B & Kruger, T 2010, 'Investigating praxis inquiry within teacher education using Giddens' Structuration Theory', *Journal of Experiential Education*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 19–37.

Cairns, L 2006, 'Participation with purpose', in EKM Tisdall, J Davis, M Hill & A Prout (eds), *Children, young people and social inclusion: Participation for what?*, The Policy Press, Bristol.

Chisolm, L, Kovacheva, S & Merico, M (eds) 2011, *European Youth Studies: Integrating research, policy and practice*, M.A. EYS Consortium, Innsbruck, viewed 15 January 2020 <https://www.academia.edu/2548265/The_social_construction_of_youth_and_the_triangle_between_youth_research_youth_policy_and_youth_work_in_Europe>.

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation 2013, *The CIVICUS 2013 Enabling Environment Index*, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, viewed 20 July 2019 <http://civicus.org/eei/downloads/Civicus_EEI%20REPORT%202013_WEB_FINAL.pdf>

Cleaver, F 2002 'Institutions, agency and the limitations of participatory approaches to development' in B Cooke & U Kothari (eds), *Participation: The new tyranny?*, Zed Books, London, pp. 36–45.

Collin, P 2008, *Young people imagining a new democracy: Literature review*, The Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney.

Collins, ME, Augsberger, A & Gecker, W 2016, 'Youth councils in municipal government: Examination of activities, impact and barriers', *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 65, pp. 140–147.

Comrie, G 2010, *Where are you going with that?: Maximising young people's impact on organisational & public policy*, Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, Sydney, viewed 14 June 2015 <http://www.ayac.org.au/wp-content/Where-are-you-going-with-that-Australian-Youth-Affairs-Coalition.pdf>.

Constitution of the Republic of Estonia 1992 (Estonia).

Corney, T 2014, 'The human rights of young people: A catalyst for the professionalisation of youth work through the development of codes of practice' in T Corney (ed.), *Professional youth work: An Australian perspective,* The Centre for Social Research Melbourne & Youth Studies Australia, Melbourne.

Couch, J 2007, 'Mind the gap: Considering the participation of refugee young people', *Youth Studies Australia*, vol. 26, no. 4, pp. 37–44, viewed 1 February 2020 <https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=902468736667163;res=IELHSS>.

Council of Europe 1985, *European Charter of Local Self-Government*, Strasbourg, viewed 3 February 2020 <https://rm.coe.int/168007a088>.

Creswell, JW & Miller, DL 2010, 'Determining validity in qualitative inquiry', *Theory Into Practice*, vol. 39, no. 3.

Crowley, A, Moxon, D 2017, *New and innovative forms of youth participation in decision-making processes*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, viewed 10 February 2020 <https://rm.coe.int/new-and-innovative-forms-of-youth-participation-in-decision-making-pro/1680759e6a>.

Creswell, J 2014, *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*, 4th edn, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Cushing, DF & van Vliet, W 2017, 'Children's right to the city: the emergence of youth councils in the United States', *Children's Geographies*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 319–333.

DCSF (Department of Children, Schools and Families) 2008, *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage*, DSCF Publications, Nottingham.

Denscombe, M 1997, *The Good Research Guide*, Open University Press, Buckingham.

Dibou, T 2015, 'Estonian experience of implementing the new forms of youth participation in youth policy', *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 176−206.

Farrow, A 2015, Global Young Researcher's Lab: Research Brief, Youth Policy Labs, Berlin.

Farrow, A 2018, *Salto Think Tank On Youth Participation: Closer to the edge of participation and activism*, SALTO-YOUTH Participation & Information Resource Centre, Tallinn, viewed 10 January 2020 <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3830/Raport_210x210mm_sm.pdf>.

Farthing, R 2012, 'Why youth participation? Some justifications and critiques of youth participation using New Labour's youth policies as a case study', *Youth & Policy*, no. 109, pp. 71–97, viewed 1 August 2017 <https://www.youthandpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/farthing_why_youth_participation.pdf>.

Fioramonti, L & Kononykhina, O 2013, *Methodological note on CIVICUS' Civil Society Enabling Environment Index (EE Index),* accessed 22 August 2015 <http://civicus.org/eei/downloads/Methodological%20note%20on%20the%20CIVICUS%20Civil%20Society%20 Enabling%20Environment%20Index.doc>.

Fleming, J 2013, Young People's Participation – Where next?, *Children & Society*, no. 27, pp 484–495.

Forbirg, J 2005, Introduction: democratic politics, legitimacy, and youth participation, in J Forbirg (ed), *Revisiting youth political participation*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, viewed 10 December 2019 <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261662/Revisiting_youth_politica.pdf/5476c081-1a5d-4139-96f7-2ada7bcc2766>.

Forde, C & Martin, S 2016, 'Children and young people's right to participate: National and local youth councils in Ireland', *International Journal of Children's Rights*, vol. 24, pp. 135–154.

Fugard, A & Potts, HW 2019, 'Thematic analysis', in P Atkinson, S Delamont, A Cernat, JW Sakshaug & RA Williams (eds), *Sage Research Methods Foundations,* viewed 20 January 2020 <https://au.sagepub.com/en-gb/oce/sage-research-methods-foundations>.

Giddens, A 1984, *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Griffin, C 2004, 'Representations of the young', *Youth in society*, no. *2*, pp. 10–18.

Guest, G, MacQueen, KM & Namey, EE 2012, *Applied thematic analysis*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Gökçe-Kızılkaya, S & Onursal-Beşgülb, Ö 2017, 'Youth participation in local politics: City councils and youth assemblies in Turkey', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 17. no. 1, pp. 97–112.

Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium 2015, Noortevaldkonna arengukava 2014–2020 rakendusplaani aastateks 2014–2017 täitmise 2014. aasta aruanne, Haridus-ja Teadusministeerium, Estonia.

Hart, R 1992, *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship*. UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Florence, viewed 10 August 2016 <https://www.unicefirc.org/publications/pdf/childrens_participation.pdf>.

Hickey, S & Mohan, G 2004, *Participation: From tyranny to transformation?*, Zed Books, London.

Hine, J & Wood, J (eds) 2009, *Work with young people: Theory and policy for practice*, Sage, London.

Holdsworth, R 2001, 'Youth participation', Charting the course: ACT and SE NSW regional Youth Services conference, Bateman's Bay, October 2001.

IJAB (International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany) 2014, Guidelines for successful e-participation by young people in decision-making at local, regional, national and European levels, IJAB, Germany.

Irvine, F, Roberts, G & Bradbury-Jones, C 2008, 'The researcher as insider vs the researcher as outsider: enhancing rigour through language and cultural sensitivity' in P Liamputtong (ed.), *Doing cross-cultural research: Ethical and methodological perspectives*, Springer.

Irving, T, Maunders, D & Sherington, G 1995, *Youth in Australia – Policy, administration and politics: A history since World War II*, Macmillan Education Australia, South Melbourne.

Johnson, RB, Onwuegbuzie, A & Turner, L 2007, 'Toward a definition of mixed methods research', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 112–133.

Karsten, A 2012, *Participation models – Citizens, youth*, viewed 3 April 2007 <http://nonformality.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Participation_Models_20121118.pdf>.

Kassman, A & Vamstad, J 2019, 'Local public administration as facilitator of political youth participation – good intentions and institutional shortcomings', *International Review of Sociology*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 484–497.

Kohlbacher, F 2006, 'The use of qualitative content analysis in case study research'*, Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, vol. 7, no. 1.

Laverack, GR & Brown, KM 2003, 'Qualitative research in a cross-cultural context: Fijian experiences', *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 333–342.

Lentin, A & Ohana, Y 2008, 'All different – never equal? On the intolerance of tolerance', *Born in Flensburg, Europe: Journeys with Peter Lauritzen*, Demokratie & Dialog e.V., Germany.

Local Government Bill 2019 (Victoria).

Loncle, P, Leahy, P, Muniglia, V & Walther, A 2012, 'Youth participation: strong discourses, weak policies – a general perspective' in M Cuconato, P Loncle, V Muniglia & A Walther (eds), *Youth Participation in Europe: beyond discourses, practices and realities*, The Policy Press, Bristol.

Lundy, L 2007, ' "Voice" is not enough: Conceptualizing article 12 of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child', *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 33, no. 6, pp. 927–942.

Maier-Rabler, U & Neumayer, C 2008, 'Youth and eParticipation: Strategies for Innovative Democracy Youth and eParticipation: Strategies for Innovative Democracy, EDEM2008 conference'*, Krems,* viewed on 3 February 2020 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259670767_Youth_and_eParticipation_Strategies_for_Innovative_Democracy_Youth_and_eParticipation_Strategies_for_Innovative_Democracy>.

Manning, N & Edwards, K 2014, 'Why has civic education failed to increase young people's political participation?', *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 19, no. 1, viewed 10 February 2020 <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/19/1/5.html>.

Matthews, H 2001, 'Citizenship, youth councils and young people's participation', *Journal of Youth Studies*, v.4, no. 3, pp. 299–318.

Maxwell, J 1997, 'Designing a qualitative study' in L Bickman & DJ Rog (eds), *Handbook of applied social research methods*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Morgan, D & Spanish, M 1984, Focus groups: A new tool for qualitative research, *Qualitative Sociology*, vol. 7.

Municipal Association of Victoria, n.d., *Victorian Councils Map*, viewed 28 January 2016 <https://www.viccouncils.asn.au/find-your-council/council-map>.

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) 2013, *Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle*, United Nations, New York, viewed 3 February 2020 <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Electoral%20Systems%20and%20Processes/ENG_UN-Youth_Guide-LR.pdf>.

Patton, MQ 2002, *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*, 3rd edn, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Pirvulescu, C, Moxon, D, Banari, R, Kost, R & Cappechi, D 2019, SALTO Participation and Information Think Tank: A seat at the table for everyone. Promoting inclusive youth participation through the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, SALTO-YOUTH Participation & Information Resource Centre, Tallinn, viewed 3 February 2020 <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3830/Raport_210x210mm_sm.pdf>.

Percy-Smith, B & Thomas, N (eds) 2010, *A handbook of children and young people's participation: Perspectives from theory and practice*, Routledge, UK.

Perry-Hazan, L & Nir, T 2016, 'The framed right to participate in municipal youth councils and its educational impact', *Children and Youth Services Review*, accepted manuscript, viewed 10 December 2016 <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740916302286>.

Riigikogu 2015, *Riigikogu made amendments to Constitution and lowered voting age for local elections,* media release, Estonia, viewed 1 June 2015 <http://www.riigikogu.ee/en/press-releases/riigikogu-made-amendments-to-constitution-and-lowered-voting-age-for-local-elections/>.

Rupkus, E & Franzl, K 2018, Digital and mobile tools and tips for youth eParticipation, *Perspectives on youth: Young people in a digitalised world*, vol. 4, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, viewed 5 February 2020 <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262538/PoY-4+Full/db47aa10-2df6-3d9c-bb83-14f48b10328c>.

Safran, W 2004, 'The political aspects of language', *Nationalism and ethnic politics*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp 1–14.

Saldaña, J 2015, *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Sant, E & Davies, I 2018, 'Promoting participation at a time of social and political turmoil: What is the impact of children's and young people's city councils?', *Cambridge Journal of Education,* v.38, no. 3, pp. 371–387.

Selbie, P & Wickett, K, 2010, 'Providing an enabling environment', *Early Childhood Studies*, pp. 75–87.

Shier, H 2001, 'Pathways to participation: openings, opportunities and obligations', *Children & Society*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 107–117.

Sinclair, R & Franklin, A 2000, 'Quality Protects Research Briefing 3: Young People's *Participation', Research in practice: Making research count*, DoH, UK.

Spencer, C & Aldouri, S 2016, *Young Arab voices: Moving youth policy from debate into action,* Chatham House.

Stake, RE 1995, *The art of case study research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Stake, RE 2005, 'Qualitative case studies' in NK Denzin & YS Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 3rd edn, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

State of Victoria DHHS 2016, *Youth Policy. Bringing Stronger Youth Engagement in Victoria*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, viewed 10 February 2020 <https://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au/file/721/download?token=9Zgj4ytl>.

Sukarieh, M & Tannock, S 2015, *Youth rising? The politics of youth in the global economy*, Routledge.

Tashakkori, A & Teddlie, C (eds) 2003, *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Tashakkori, A & Teddlie, C 2009, *Foundations of mixed methods research*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Thomas, DR 2006, 'A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative education data', *American Journal of Evaluation*, vol. 27, no. 2.

Timms, H & Heimans, J 2018, *New power – how it's changing the 21st century – and why you need to know*, Pan Macmillan, UK.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.

Victorian Government 2015, *Service Delivery 2015–2016: Budget Paper No. 3*, Melbourne, accessed 10 July 2015 <http://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/files/869ffb27-4996-4b53-baff-a48200c2db0a/BP3-2015-16.pdf>.

Warshak, R 2003 'Payoffs and pitfalls of listening to children', *Family Relations,* vol. 52 no. 4, pp. 373–384.

White, R & Wyn, J 2008, *Youth and society: Exploring the social dynamics of youth,* 2nd edn, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2019, *Social Assistance Services within Health Care and Social Assistance Division,* Australian Government, viewed 10 January 2020 <https://data.wgea.gov.au/industries/7>.

Wyn, J & White, R 1997, 'The concept of youth', in J Wyn & R White, *Rethinking youth*, Sage, London, pp. 8–25.

YACVic (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria) 2007, Code of Ethical Practice – A First Step for the Victorian Youth Sector, Melbourne.

YACVic (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria) 2015a, *YACVic Submission for Parliamentary Inquiry Into Rate Capping Policy*, Melbourne, viewed 30 July 2015 <http://www.yacvic.org.au/component/docman/doc_download/491-yacvic-submission-rate-capping-inquiry-2015?Itemid>.

YACVic (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria) 2015b, *A strong budget for young Victorians*, media release, Melbourne, viewed 10 July 2015 <http://www.yacvic.org.au/news/media-releases/585-media-release-a-strong-state-budget-for-young-people>.

YACVic (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria) 2016, Young people and local government: A response to the discussion paper 'Act for the Future: Directions for the New Local Government Act', Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Melbourne, viewed 15 December 2019 <https://www.yacvic.org.au/assets/Documents/Review-of-Local-Government-Act-1989-Youth-Affairs-Council-Victoria-2016.pdf>.

YACVic (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria) 2018, *Victorian State Budget 2018–2019: Reflections*, YACVic, viewed 15 December 2019 <https://www.yacvic.org.au/advocacy/victorian-state-budget-2018-19-reflections/>.

YACVic (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria) 2019, *Federal Budget 2019 – where are the young people?*, YACVic, viewed 15 December 2019 <https://www.yacvic.org.au/advocacy/budget-2019-young-people/>.

Yakovlev, A 2003, *A century of violence in the Soviet Union*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.

Yin, RK 2003, *Case study research: Design and methods*, 3rd edn, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Yin, RK 2014, *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*, 5th edn, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Youth Policy Labs 2015, *From rhetoric to action: Towards an enabling environment in the Sustainable Development Goals*. *The Case for Space Initiative*, Youth Policy Press, Berlin, viewed 24 August 2016 <https://restlessdevelopment.org/file/from-rhetoric-to-action-pdf>.

Youth Work Act 2010 (Estonia).

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Participant information sheet in English

Explanatory note: At the time of data collection I was enrolled in a PhD course. I later converted my enrolment into a Master of Applied Research.

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled ***"What is the enabling environment for local level youth participation? A comparative study of youth councils in the Australian state of Victoria and Estonia".***

This project is being conducted by a student researcher Martti Martinson as part of his studies for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Victoria University under the supervision of Dr Cathryn Carpenter and Professor Robyn Broadbent from the College of Education.

Project explanation

This comparative case study research project will seek to analyse the current political, legislative and organisational environment that the local level participatory structures work in and identify the enabling environment for youth councils in the state of Victoria in Australia and Estonia. The results of this research will seek to provide an understanding of how the work of local level youth councils can be better supported and organised by policy, organisational and legislative measures to increase the effectiveness and benefits for young people.

What will I be asked to do?

Participation in this project involves being interviewed by Martti Martinson. The interview duration is anticipated to be 30-45 minutes, and will take place in person at the same location where the meetings of the youth council you are a member of/affiliated with are usually held (council offices/youth centre). The exact time and location will be arranged with and communicated to you via email.

Before you volunteer to be part of this study, there are some important things to understand:

- You may change your mind or withdraw from the project at any time with or without giving us a reason
- You can be sure that there are no correct or incorrect answers and that you do not need to please the researchers with your responses.
- You may decline to answer interview questions you feel are inappropriate.
- All answers will remain confidential between the researchers and you.

What will I gain from participating?

You will not be paid for your participation. However, whilst you may not realise any immediate or direct benefits from your participation, it is anticipated that the information you provide will assist in the following respects:

- contributing substantially to identifying the gaps in the current environment that hinders youth councils in local governments achieving their maximum potential;
- contributing to identifying the enabling conditions for the work of youth councils on the local level, based on the needs and experience of yourself and your local community;
- having the work of your youth council compared to similar structures in Europe and in Victoria.

How will the information I give be used?

By consenting to take part in this study, you also consent to the recording, transcription, storage and use of data as specified below.

- An audio recording of the interview will be made by the interviewer.
- The recording will be transcribed into text from.
- The recording and transcription will be stored in codes (i.e., without your name or personal details) and only the researchers will be able to connect this material to you. All data will be kept in lock and key protected files only accessible to the researchers. The same principles of privacy and confidentiality will apply for all research outputs such as publications.
- Data and recordings will be kept for 7 years after the completion of the project.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

If adverse events were to occur the interview would be ceased and the interviewee questioned to establish if they would like a long or short break. If this seems unacceptable to the participant they will be asked if they would prefer to terminate the interview.

How will this project be conducted?

This project is conducted using the following data collection methods: document analysis to capture and analyse the current political, legislative and organisational environment for the work of local level youth councils in the Australian state of Victoria and in Estonia; survey, that will be open for participation for the representatives from all the local government-affiliated youth councils in the state of Victoria and in Estonia and semi-structured interviews which will investigate and capture the experiences of a selected number of local level youth councils in Estonia and in Victoria.

Who is conducting the study?

This study is conducted by the College of Education at Victoria University.

Chief Investigators of this project are Dr Cathryn Carpeter (e-mail: Cathryn.Carpenter@vu.edu.au, telephone (+61) 3 9919 5517) and Prof Robyn Broadbent (e-mail: Robyn.Broadbent@vu.edu.au, telephone: (+61) 3 9919 4861)

The student researcher conducting the interviews is Martti Martinson (e-mail: Martti.Martinson@vu.edu.au, telephone: (+61) xx xx xxx).

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigators listed above.
If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Participants under the age of 18

If you are a parent/guardian of a young person under the age of 18 who has been asked to participate in this research, you have the right to opt out/withdraw your child's participation in this research project at any time either before, during or after the interview by notifying the researcher (either in Estonian or in English) via the following e-mail address: Martti.Martinson@vu.edu.au.

Appendix 2: Participant information sheet in Estonian

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

TEAVE UURIMUSTÖÖS OSALEJATELE

Olete palutud osalema uurimuses

Olete palutud osalema uurimuses ***"What is the enabling environment for local level youth participation? A comparative study of youth councils in the Australian state of Victoria and Estonia"*** *(eesti keeles "Milline on kohalikul tasandil noorte osalust võimaldav keskkond? Võrdlev uurimus noorte osaluskogudest Victoria osariigis Austraalias ning Eestis").*

Uurimustööd viib läbi doktorant Martti Martinson Dr Cathryn Carpenteri ning Professor Robyn Broadbenti juhendamisel. Käesolev uurimus on osa Martti Martinsoni doktoriväitekirjast Victoria Ülikoolis filosoofiadoktori kraadi kaitsmisel.

Uurimustöö kirjeldus

Käesolev võrdlev uurimus analüüsib poliitilist, seadusandlikku ning organisatsioonilist keskkonda, milles kohaliku tasandi noorte osaluskogud tegutsevad ning ning kaardistab ja tuvastab neid tegureid ja võmaldavat keskkonda, mis aitab noorte osaluskogudel Eestis ning Victoria osariigis Austraalias saavutada oma maksimaalset potentsiaali. Käesoleva uurimustöö tulemused pakuvad paremat aruasama selle kohta, kuidas kohaliku tasandi noorte osaluskogude tööd poliitikate (policy) kaudu ning organisatsioonilisi ja korralduslikke ning seadusandlikke meetmeid rakendades paremini toetada ja organiseerida, et suurendada osaluskogude võimekust ning kasutegureid noorte ja ühiskonna jaoks.

Mida minult oodatakse?

Osalemine käesolevas uurimuses tähendab Teie jaoks intervjuu andmist Martti Martinsonile. Intervjuu ligikaudne pikkus on 45 minutit. Toimumise täpne aeg ja koht lepitakse eelnevalt teiega kokku e-kirja teel.

Enne kui annate oma nõusoleku vabatahtlikuks osalemiseks käesolevas uurimuses, palun võtke teadmiseks, et:

- Teil on õigus igal ajal oma nõusolek käesolevas uurimuses osalemiseks tagasi võtta ilma, et te peaksite oma otsust põhjendama
- Intervjuu käigus küsitavatele küsimustele ei ole olemas õiged ega valesid vastuseid ning teil ei ole mingit kohustust intervjueerijat oma vastustega rõõmustada.
- Teil on õigus keelduda vastamast ükskõik millisele küsimusele juhul, kui tunnete et te ei soovi vastata.
- Kõik vastused, mida te intervjuu käigus annate, on konfidentsiaalsed teie ning käesolevat uurimustööd läbi viivate uurijate vahel.

Mida annab mulle uurimuses osalemine?

Uurimuses osalemine on vabatahtlik ning tasustamata. Kuigi Te ei pruugi näha otsest ja kohest kasu Teile endale, aitab Teie osalus uurimuses kaasa järgnevatele aspektidele:

- Teie osalus panustab märkimisväärselt puuduste tuvastamisele noorte osaluskogude tegutsemiskeskkonnas, mis takistavad kohaliku tasandi noorte osaluskogusid saauvtamaks nende maksimaalset tegevusvõimekust;
- Teie poolt edasi antav informatsioon panustab kohaliku tasandi noorte osaluskogude jaoks võimaldava/soodustava keskkonna kaardistamisse, võttes samal ajal aluseks Teie, Teiega seotud noortevolikogu ning Teie valla/linna kogemused ja vajadused:
- Teie noortevolikogu tegutsemiskeskkond ja töökorraldust võrreldakse teiste Eestis ja Austraalias tegutsevate noorte osaluskogudega.

Kuidas kasutatakse minu poolt antavat informatsiooni?

Nõustudes käesolevas uurimuses osalemisega, annate nõusoleku ka Teiega tehtava intervjuu audiosalvestamiseks, salvestuse transkribeerimiseks ning audiosalvestuse säilitamiseks alljärgnevatel tingimustel.

- Intervjuu audiosalvestatakse intervjueerija poolt.
- Intervjuu audiosalvestis transkribeeritakse.
- Audiosalvestis ning transkriptsioon säilitatakse kodeeritult (ilma personaalsete identifitseerimist võimaldavate tunnusteta) ning ainult uurijad saavad nimetatud andmeid/teie vastuseid Teiega seostada. Kõiki andmeid hoitakse parooliga kaitstud andmekandjatel, millele on ligipääs ainult uurijatel. Sama põhimõte kehtib ka teistele uurimustöö väljunditele, näiteks publikatsioonidele.
- Andmeid ning salvestusi säilitatakse 7 aastat pärast käesoleva uurimustöö lõppemist.

Millised on potentsiaalsed riskid käesolevas uurimuses osalejatele?

Juhul, kui intervjueeritavad tunnevad ennast ebamugavalt ükskõik millisel põhjusel, intervjuu peatatakse ja intervjueeritavale pakutakse võimalust lühikeseks või pikemaks pausiks. Juhul, kui intervjueeritav ei soovi pausi, pakutakse intervjueeritavale võimalust intervjuu andmine katkestada.

Kuidas käesolevat uurimustööd läbi viiakse?

Käesolev uurimustöö hõlmab endast järgnevaid andmekogumismeetodeid: dokumendianalüüs, mis kaardistab ja analüüsib kohaliku tasandi noorte osaluskogude tegutsemise poliitilist, seadusandlikku ja organisatsioonilist keskkonda Victoria osariigis Austraalias ning Eestis; veebiküsitlus, mis on avatud osalemiseks kõikidele Victoria osariigis Austraalias ning Eestis tegutsevatele kohaliku tasandi noorte osaluskogudele ja nende tööga seotud ametnikele; poolstruktureeritud intervjuud, mis keskenduvad valitud arvu noorte osaluskogude, nende liikmete ja toetajate kogemuste koondamisele ning analüüsimisele.

Kes on käesoleva uurimuse läbiviija?

Käesolevat uurimust viib läbi Victoria Ülikool, College of Education.

Projekti eest vastutavad uurijad on Dr Cathryn Carpeter (e-mail: Cathryn.Carpenter@vu.edu.au, telefon (+61) 3 9919 5517) ja Professor Robyn Broadbent (e-mail: Robyn.Broadbent@vu.edu.au, telefon: (+61) 3 9919 4861)

Intervjuusid viib läbi doktorant Martti Martinson (e-mail: Martti.Martinson@vu.edu.au, telefon (+61) xxx xxx xxx).

Küsimuste korral palun kontakteeruge eelpool mainitud uurijatega või Eestis paikneva kontaktisiku Dr Ilona-Evelyn Rannalaga (e-post: ilona-evelyn.rannala@tlu.ee telefon: +372 xxx xxxx). Juhul, kui Teil on küsimusi või pretensioone selle kohta, kuidas teid on uurimuses osalemise käigus koheldud, palun võtke ühendust (inglise keeles): Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au või telefoni teel (+61) 3 9919 4781 või 4461 lõpuga.

Appendix 3: Participant consent form in English

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:
We would like to invite you to be a part of a study into the work of local level youth councils.

This comparative case study research project will seek to analyse the current political, legislative and organisational environment that the local level participatory structures work in and identify the enabling environment for youth councils in the state of Victoria in Australia and Estonia.

Participation in this project involves being interviewed by Martti Martinson. The interview duration is anticipated to be 45-60 minutes. Participation of this research is voluntary and unpaid.

CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I, "……(Full Name of the participant)"
of "……(Suburb of the participant)"

certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: *"What is the enabling environment for local level youth participation? A comparative study of youth councils in the Australian state of Victoria and Estonia"* being conducted at Victoria University by: student researcher Martti Martinson under the supervision of Chief Investigators Dr Cathryn Carpenter and Prof Robyn Broadbent.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Martti Martinson

and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- An audio recorded interview (approximate duration 45-60 minutes) conducted by Martti Martinson

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researchers
Dr Cathryn Carpenter (e-mail: Cathryn.Carpenter@vu.edu.au, telephone (+61) 3 9919 5517);
Martti Martinson (e-mail: Martti.Martinson@vu.edu.au, telephone: (+61) xx xxx xxx).

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

[*please note: where the participant/s are unable to answer for themselves due to mental illness or disability, parental or guardian consent may be required.]

Appendix 4: Participant consent form in Estonian

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

NÕUSOLEK OSALEMISEKS UURIMUSTÖÖS

INFORMATSIOON UURIMUSES OSALEJATELE:
Meil on hea meel paluda teil osaleda kohaliku omavalitsuse noorte osaluskogude teemalises uurimustöös.

Käesolev võrdlev uurimus on osa doktoritööst, mis analüüsib kehtivat poliitilist, seadusandlikku ja organisatsioonilist keskkonda, milles kohaliku tasandi noorte osaluskogud tegutsevad ning kaardistab ja tuvastab neid tegureid ja võmaldavat keskkonda, mis aitab noorte osaluskogudel Eestis ning Victoria osariigis Austraalias saavutada oma maksimaalset potentsiaali.

Teie osalemine antud uurimustöös hõlmab intervjueerimist Martti Martinsoni poolt. Intervjuu pikkus on orienteeruvalt 30-45 minutit. Osalemine uurimustöös on vabatahtlik ning tasustamata.

KINNITUS

Mina, "……(osaleja ees- ja perekonnanimi)"

elukohaga "……(linn või vald)"

kinnitan, et olen vabatahtlikult nõus osalema käesolevas uurimuses: *"What is the enabling environment for local level youth participation? A comparative study of youth councils in the Australian state of Victoria and Estonia"*, mille läbiviijad on: doktorant Martti Martinson ning juhendajad Dr Cathryn Carpenter ja Professor Robyn Broadbent.

Kinnitan, et uurimustöö eesmärgid ning uurimustöös osalemisega kaasnevad võimalikud riskid on mulle arusaadavad ning Martti Martinson´i poolt piisavalt selgitatud

ning ma annan oma nõusoleku osaleda vabatahtlikult järgnevates tegevustes/toimingutes:

- Intervjuu, mis viiakse läbi Martti Martinsoni poolt ligikaudse kestusega 30-45 minutit ning mis salvestatakse diktofonile.

Kinnitan, et mul on olnud võimalus küsida uurijalt minu uurimises osalemisega seonduvaid küsimusi ning saada nendele vastuseid ning olen teadlik, et mul on õigus igal hetkel oma nõusolek uurimuses osaleda tagasi võtta ilma et see mind kuidagi kahjustaks või negatiivset mõju omaks.

Olen teadlik, et informatsiooni, mida uurimuses osalemise käigus avaldan, koheldakse konfidentsiaalsena.

Allkiri:

Aasta:

Küsimuste korral palun pöörduda:
Dr Ilona-Evelyn Rannala , e-mail: Ilona-Evelyn.Rannala@tlu.ee, telefon +372 5236015 (eesti keeles).
Martti Martinson, e-mail: Martti.Martinson@vu.edu.au, telefon: (+61) xx xxx xxx (eesti või inglise keeles).

Juhul, kui Teil on küsimusi või pretensioone selle kohta, kuidas teid on uurimuses osalemise käigus koheldud, palun võtke ühendust (inglise keeles): Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au või telefoni teel (+61) 3 9919 4781 või 4461 lõpuga.

[*juhul kui osaleja ei ole oma tervislikust seisundist või puudest tulenevalt võimeline iseseisvalt nõusolekut andma, võb osutuda vajalikuks vanema või hooldaja nõusoleku küsimine]

Appendix 5: Sample interview questions

1. How are you connected to the youth council? Since when?
    - How did you become involved in the work of a youth council?
2. What is/was your role within the youth council or local government?
3. What is the main aim of the youth council? Why does the youth council exist?
4. How important is it that the youth council is formed democratically and representing the interests of all young people in the area, not just the interest of its members?
5. Thinking back of your time in your current/former position within the youth council/local government, what were the main issues that the youth council dealt with?
    - Out of these issues, which one of these were you personally involved in?
6. What do you consider to be the main achievements of the work of the youth council so far? Why?
7. Which institutions, organisations, local government departments would you consider to be the key partners of the youth council? Why?
    - What is the youth council's relationship like with these partners?
    - What would happen if any of these relationships weren't there?
    - Which stakeholder would you like the youth council to establish/further strengthen its partnership with the most? Why?
8. Which individual council officers (such as the youth worker, councillors, mayor) would you consider to be the key contact persons/mentors for your youth council? Why?
    - What is the youth council's relationship like with them?
    - What would happen if any of these relationships weren't there?
9. How good partner has the youth council been to the 'official' city council?
10. What kind of support and resources has the youth council received from its key partners in recent years?
    - In your opinion, has that support been sufficient for the youth council?
11. What kind of support or resources is the youth council currently lacking?

- How is that affecting the work of the youth council?

12. How is the work of the youth council currently supported by local government policies/local laws/motions/strategies?
    - What has been the impact of that support/lack of support to the outcomes of the work of the youth council?
    - What could the local government do more in that regard?
13. Do you consider county/state and federal governments to have any role in resourcing, legislating and creating policies for local level youth councils?
    - If so, what do you consider their role to be?
14. What are the main challenges in the work of the youth council?

Appendix 6: Survey questions in English

Have you been affiliated (as a member, mentor, youth worker, council officer, councillor or other stakeholder) with a youth council/youth advisory committee within a Victorian local government sometime during the past three years?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

What is your gender?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Intersex
- ○ Non-binary
- ○ Other: _____
- ○ Prefer not to disclose

What is your age?

- ○ 7–10
- ○ 11–12
- ○ 13–14
- ○ 15–17
- ○ 18–20
- ○ 21–23
- ○ 24–26
- ○ 27–30
- ○ 31–39

- ○ 40–49
- ○ 50–59
- ○ 60–69
- ○ 70 or above

Which of the following describe your current occupation?

- ☐ School student
- ☐ University student
- ☐ TAFE student
- ☐ Local council youth worker
- ☐ Local council employee other than youth worker
- ☐ Non-local council employed youth worker
- ☐ Local councillor
- ☐ Not studying nor working
- ☐ Private sector employee
- ☐ Private sector executive
- ☐ Public servant (federal/state government)
- ☐ Not-for profit sector employee or executive

Which Victorian local council/municipality is the youth council/advisory committee affiliated with?

- [ ] Alpine Shire
- [ ] Ararat Rural City
- [ ] Ballarat City
- [ ] Banyule City
- [ ] Bass Coast Shire
- [ ] Baw Baw Shire
- [ ] Bayside City
- [ ] Benalla Rural City
- [ ] Boroondara City
- [ ] Brimbank City
- [ ] Buloke Shire
- [ ] Campaspe Shire
- [ ] Cardinia Shire
- [ ] Casey City
- [ ] Central Goldfields Shire
- [ ] Colac Otway Shire
- [ ] Corangamite Shire

- [ ] Darebin City
- [ ] East Gippsland Shire
- [ ] Frankston City
- [ ] Gannawarra Shire
- [ ] Glen Eira City
- [ ] Glenelg Shire
- [ ] Golden Plains Shire
- [ ] Greater Bendigo City
- [ ] Greater Dandenong City
- [ ] Greater Geelong City
- [ ] Greater Shepparton City
- [ ] Hepburn Shire
- [ ] Hindmarsh Shire
- [ ] Hobsons Bay City
- [ ] Horsham Rural City
- [ ] Hume City
- [ ] Indigo Shire
- [ ] Kingston City

- [ ] Knox City
- [ ] Latrobe City
- [ ] Loddon Shire
- [ ] Macedon Ranges Shire
- [ ] Manningham City
- [ ] Mansfield Shire
- [ ] Maribyrnong City
- [ ] Maroondah City
- [ ] Melbourne City
- [ ] Melton City
- [ ] Mildura Rural City
- [ ] Mitchell Shire
- [ ] Moira Shire
- [ ] Monash City
- [ ] Moonee Valley City
- [ ] Moorabool Shire
- [ ] Moreland City
- [ ] Mornington Peninsula Shire

- [ ] Mount Alexander Shire
- [ ] Moyne Shire
- [ ] Murrindindi Shire
- [ ] Nillumbik Shire
- [ ] Northern Grampians Shire
- [ ] Port Phillip City
- [ ] Pyrenees Shire
- [ ] Borough of Queenscliffe
- [ ] South Gippsland Shire
- [ ] Southern Grampians Shire
- [ ] Stonnington City
- [ ] Strathbogie Shire
- [ ] Surf Coast Shire
- [ ] Swan Hill Rural City
- [ ] Towong Shire
- [ ] Wangaratta Rural City
- [ ] Warrnambool City
- [ ] Wellington Shire

- [ ] West Wimmera Shire
- [ ] Whitehorse City
- [ ] Whittlesea City
- [ ] Wodonga City
- [ ] Wyndham City
- [ ] Yarra City
- [ ] Yarra Ranges Shire
- [ ] Yarriambiack Shire

What is the official name of the youth council/advisory committee?

_____

Which of the following best describes your affiliation with that youth council?

- ○ I am a current member of the youth council
- ○ I am a former member of the youth council
- ○ I am a youth worker that has a relationship with the youth council
- ○ I am a current or former councillor of the local government
- ○ I am a current or former council officer (other than youth worker)
- ○ Other: please specify _____

How long has the youth council/advisory committee been operating?

- ○ Less than a year
- ○ 1 year

- ○ 2 years
- ○ 3 years
- ○ 4 years
- ○ 5–6 years
- ○ 7–8 years
- ○ 9–10 years
- ○ Other: _____
- ○ Not sure

How many members does the youth council/advisory committee currently have?

- ○ 2–4
- ○ 5–7
- ○ 8–10
- ○ 11–13
- ○ 14–16
- ○ 17–20
- ○ 21–25
- ○ Other: please specify _____
- ○ Not sure

What is the minimum age of becoming a member of the youth council/advisory committee?

- ○ No minimum age limit
- ○ 7 or younger
- ○ 8

- ○ 9
- ○ 10
- ○ 11
- ○ 12
- ○ 13
- ○ 14
- ○ 15
- ○ 16
- ○ 17
- ○ 18
- ○ 19
- ○ 20
- ○ 21
- ○ Other
- ○ Not sure

What is the maximum age of becoming a member of the youth council/advisory committee?

- ○ 14 or younger
- ○ 15
- ○ 16
- ○ 17
- ○ 18
- ○ 19

- ○ 20
- ○ 21
- ○ 22
- ○ 23
- ○ 24
- ○ 25
- ○ 26
- ○ 27 or above
- ○ Other
- ○ No maximum age limit
- ○ Not sure

What is the key role of the youth council/advisory committee? Why does it exist?

_____

How would you rate the partnership between the youth council/advisory committee and the local council? 1 – non-existing; 9 – extremely strong

- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5
- ○ 6
- ○ 7
- ○ 8
- ○ 9

To your knowledge, which of the following activities and how often has the youth council undertaken in the past three years?

	Often/many times	Sometimes/occasionally	Not at all	Don't know/no information
Consulting with young people	○	○	○	○
Representing the young people in the area in dealings with local/state/federal government	○	○	○	○
Representing local young people in other ways	○	○	○	○
Organising events for young people	○	○	○	○
Participating in committees of the local council or other organisations	○	○	○	○
Informed young people in the area through newspapers, newsletters, social media etc.	○	○	○	○
Advocacy/promoting a youth issue	○	○	○	○
Initiated/implemented project(s) that benefit local young people	○	○	○	○
Provided advice and/or made proposals to the local council	○	○	○	○
Other (please specify):	○	○	○	○

Please select all statements that are correct and relevant to your youth council/advisory committee.

- [ ] There is a democratic election process in place to determine the new members of the youth council
- [ ] There is no election process to join the youth council
- [ ] New members are determined through an application/expression of interest process
- [ ] Youth worker chooses the members of the youth council
- [ ] Youth council and youth worker choose the members of the youth council together
- [ ] Existing members of the youth council alone choose the new members of the youth council
- [ ] Everyone can join the youth council at any time – there is no set process for becoming a member
- [ ] Schools/SRCs/youth organisations delegate or appoint members to the youth council

Please select all statements that are correct and relevant to your youth council/advisory committee. Hint: Hold down Control key (or Command key on MacBooks) to select multiple answers.

- [ ] Youth council/advisory committee consists of young people only
- [ ] Youth council/advisory committee's membership consists of both – adults and young people
- [ ] Youth council/advisory committee usually meets at least monthly
- [ ] The meetings of the youth council/advisory committee are usually held less frequently than once a month
- [ ] Youth council meetings are chaired by a young person (young people)

☐ Youth council meetings are chaired by an adult (youth worker, councillor, council officer etc)

☐ Young people are the ones driving/directing the work of the youth council

☐ Adult(s) drive/direct the work of the youth council

☐ Young people and adults equally drive/direct the work of the youth council

Which of the following do you consider to be challenges for the work of the youth council/youth advisory committee?

	Not a challenge	Sometimes a challenge	Often or always a challenge	Don't have enough information
Getting youth initiative supported by council	○	○	○	○
The diversity of membership (age range, backgrounds etc)	○	○	○	○
Not enough money	○	○	○	○
Funding not guaranteed/ongoing	○	○	○	○
Finding new members	○	○	○	○
Retaining existing members	○	○	○	○
Motivating members	○	○	○	○
The tenure of membership	○	○	○	○
Making the youth council more visible and better known in the community	○	○	○	○

Attitudes of adults towards youth council	○	○	○	○
Attitudes of young people towards youth council	○	○	○	○
Lack of rights and powers for the youth council	○	○	○	○
Relationship between the youth council and elected council	○	○	○	○
Adults controlling the agenda of the youth council	○	○	○	○
Other (please specify):	○	○	○	○

What additional resources does the youth council need to be more effective in its work?

_____

Please describe what do you consider to be the main achievements of the youth council/advisory committee.

_____

How important is the direct or indirect support from the following policy and decision-making levels to the work of the youth council/advisory committee?

	Very important	Moderately important	Neutral	Not important	Not sure/don't have enough information
Local council youth services team/youth worker	○	○	○	○	○
Other departments and areas of the council	○	○	○	○	○
CEO/Executive leadership of the local council	○	○	○	○	○
Elected councillors/council	○	○	○	○	○
State government	○	○	○	○	○
Federal government	○	○	○	○	○
Other (please list):	○	○	○	○	○

Which of the following institutions do you consider to be the key partners for the youth council?

☐ Local council departments (please list if applicable:)

_____

☐ Local council (the elected city/shire council)

☐ State or federal government departments/agencies (please list if applicable):

_____

- [ ] Local schools/TAFEs
- [ ] Student Representative Councils (SRC)
- [ ] Youth organisations and youth groups in the area
- [ ] Youth Services providers in the area
- [ ] Other community organisations
- [ ] Local businesses
- [ ] Local media
- [ ] Other (please specify):

Please take a moment to dream. What could the youth council potentially achieve and implement, if the conditions were right?

_____