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The lacking engagement of young adults in citizen participation

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ABSTRACT

Citizen participation has the potential to achieve a more inclusive society, with more public-preferred policies that ultimately would increase the effectiveness and citizens' level of satisfaction of public services. However, this potential is often not reached in practice. Certain demographic groups are largely underrepresented, with different negative effects as a result. One of these groups are the young adults, who actually represent one of the largest groups in society.

The current literature explains this lack of engagement through the perceived lack of governmental involvement, the relatively low degrees of community concern, the absence of other young adults and the lack of certain characteristics, like extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness. This research is aimed at testing these preliminary findings by conducting a qualitative study based on twelve in-depth interviews with young adults from multiple districts of the Hague.

By using the Volunteer Process Model of Omoto & Snyder (2010), results showed that young adults indeed perceived the current governmental efforts to be lacking. Very few were even aware of the concept of citizen participation, let alone how they would be able to contribute. The majority did show a general level of community concern but failed to actually connect to their local community members. It thereby was harder to determine what type of help was needed in the community, which ultimately made it even more unlikely that these young adults would contribute. The relation between the presence of other young adults and the likelihood of their participation was less clear. It could have worked for some of the young adults but was definitely not the panacea for increasing the participation of this demographic group. The characteristic entities of the respondents did not show any relation to their lack of participation, making it thereby subordinate to the other explanatory variables.

PREFACE

This document contains the master thesis of student Maarten Robbers. The research was aimed at achieving a better understanding to why young adults are not engaging in citizen participation initiatives. Writing this thesis is a mandatory part of the International and Europeans Governance master of Leiden University.

The research direction and development were coordinated by my supervisor, Carola van Eijk. It was due to her flexible attitude during this COVID-19 pandemic that I was able to successfully finish this thesis. I would like to thank her for this and her overall detailed and involved guidance. In addition, I would also like to thank my close friend, Patrick Bruijne, for being a sparring partner and the overall support throughout the process, that in the end allowed me to hand in a worthy final product.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Many forms of citizen participation exist within the democracies of modern society. Through the use of referenda, citizens' forums, collaborative governance projects and participatory budgeting, citizens have co-created the policies that shape and influence their daily lives. This is considered as a positive development throughout modern democracies. Integrating citizens' ideas into the policy cycle has the potential to generate more appropriate solutions, increase citizens' trust in the government and overall enhance the effectiveness and citizens' satisfaction of public services (Fung, 2015; Seltzer & Mahmoudi, 2013., Schmidhuber et. al, 2019).

Besides trust and efficiency, citizen participation also has the potential to enable higher levels of citizen inclusion. These participation tools have, in combination with the digitalization of public services, the ability to provide better access to the underrepresented groups of society (Michels, 2011). The other, more traditional forms of public citizen interaction, such as voting, petitioning and lobbying are only frequently used by specific segments of society. Those who do engage in these traditional forms of democratic acts are often the well-educated, employed, high earners of society. Outcomes of these political participations thereby do not provide an accurate representation of the needs of society at large (John, 2009). Citizen participation however has the potential to minimize this lack of representativeness. Due to the close relation between the citizens' participation and the outcome and output of public services, underrepresented groups generally tend to be more motivated to express their opinion and help co-create the ideal solution (John, 2009).

However, despite the citizen participation efforts in trying to increase the participation of the underrepresented, there are some demographic groups that still barely participate. Michels' (2011) research on the levels of representation of different forms of citizen participation indicated that cultural minorities and young adults were underrepresented in 67% of the cases. Based on her four different types of citizen participation, she concluded that the most active one – participatory policymaking/interactive governance – also had the lowest level of accurate representation. Both cultural minorities and young adults showed low levels of engagement within these projects. Apparently, low threshold, well-structured and easily accessible participation tools do not automatically guarantee the desired realistic representation of society.

This research is interested in why, despite the efforts of the local government, young adults are not engaging in these citizen participation initiatives. Extensive literature on the

potential of these citizen participation tools in regard to achieving representativeness already exists (e.g. Michels, 2011; Schimdtuber, 2019; Warren 2004). Statements, like the one of Cornwall (2007) that researched the potential benefits on inclusion of citizen participation, exists in many varieties. Embedding the actions of the governments in society rather than imposing them society has the potential strengthens the legitimacy of decision-making and overall trust in public services. However, the research that tests these assumptions is rather scarce. The article of Marshall and Jones (2005) is one of the few that touched upon this research topic but did so by focussing on natural resource management. The results of this research showed a disproportionate representation of older, well-educated men. Like the study of Michels, (2011), the younger groups were highly underrepresented in this study. Unfortunately, the study of Marshall and Jones (2005) also did not provide further argumentation to why these younger groups did not feel the desire to be engaged. Nor does there exist a citizens' perspective to this problem.

This gap in the literature is worth investigating, not only because it is still lacking and could therefore provide bases for further research within this field, but also because of the decreasing engagement of young adults in political and governmental matters in general. Recent research emphasizes on the increasing problem of losing the engagement of young adults, especially since they represent such a large part of society that is eligible to vote (UN, 2015). They are becoming more sceptical of the democratic process and fail to connect with politicians and their parties (Bhatti et al., 2012; Blais & Ruberson, 2013). Currently, a vicious circle between the lack of representation and their view within the policy formulation and implementation process cause them to become decreasingly politically active. Actions have been taken by the UN to prevent the further declination of their engagement, by for instance incorporating youth quota's and the establishment of youth parties (not to be mistaken with the youth wings of traditional parties). However, these preventive measures have only been taken in the political realm. The steps necessary to include these young adults more into the governmental processes have not been taken yet. This might be partially because of the currently missing research and thereby lacking recommendations for how to approach the problem. Hopefully, the results of this research may act as the beginning of a line of research towards this subject and be of use for possible implementations by the government to enhance the engagement of young adults in the policy process.

In order to investigate this issue, a research question had to be formulated. It reads as follows: *Why are young adults not engaging in citizen participation initiatives?*

To answer this research question, twelve qualitative, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with young adults that lived in multiple neighbourhoods of The Hague. The city of The Hague has been chosen for a variety of reasons. To begin with, the Hague is considered to be the governmental and political heart of the Netherlands, making it thereby the most active city in terms of governmental processes and thereby guarantees us a city that does at least the same and often times more compared to other municipalities. Also, the Hague also published a report in 2016 (Actieplan Burgerparticipatie 2016-2020) that underlined their ambitions to include all inhabitants of The Hague into the process and explicitly appointed themselves as frontrunners of citizen participation and their aspiration to set an example for other municipalities to follow. Yet another reason for the decision to take citizen of The Hague, has been a matter of convenience. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, it was less easy to visit other locations and to get in contact with the young adults that met the pre-set requirements. By conducting the research in The Hague, I was able to use my own personal network and was thereby still able to digitally meet the suitable young adults. This of course had some complications for the validity and dependability of the research, but that been thoroughly worked out in the methodology section of this research.

This research will start by construction a theoretical framework by combining the current literature on citizen participation and representation – for both general and young adults specifically - with the Volunteer Process Model of Omoto & Snyder (2010). This model goes into the different motivational antecedents for civic engagement and has been proven to be able to have some degree of predictability towards the likeliness of a person's participation.

After the literature review the design, settings and limitations of the research are explained in the methodology. This methodology also pays attention to how the interview data was collected and analysed. The next chapter includes the results and the analysis of these findings. At the end, the conclusion and discussion are presented.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework elaborates on the three main concepts of the research, being; Citizen participation, representativeness and the Volunteer Process Model (VPM), with a specific focus on the antecedents of action. Throughout the theory, as specific focus is put on the role of young adults.

2.1. Citizen participation

Citizen participation (CP) is the concept in which citizen are involved in the decision-making process of (often local) policy formulation and implementation processes (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). It allows people to potentially influence the outcome of the decision-making process in a way that fits their personal preference. When preferences are supported by a significant part of the involved community, policy formulation and implementations may be adjusted.

The concept of citizen participation has been around for several decades, with its origin dating back to the 1960's. The literature from the 90's was filled with concerns on the limited opportunities of public involvement (e.g. Arnstein, 1969; Munro-Clarke, 1992; Webber & Crooks, 1996). However, since the turn of the century, citizen participation has made its comeback and has become a central aspect of many policy formulation and implementation processes (Lane, 2005). Imposing rules through hierarchy no longer suffices the needs of the increasingly complex structures and the new political culture of modern society. Instead, increasing reliance is put on the network of decision-making processes that combine efforts of both the government and the public (Van Driesche & Lane, 2002).

The majority of today's citizen participations tools focus on the local policy decisions, such as participatory budgeting of neighbourhood grants, the possibility to formulate agenda topics for municipality council meetings and the decoration of public areas (Schmidhuber et al., 2019). The usefulness of including citizen participation processes is divided amongst scholars. Advocates in favour of such citizen-government collaborations emphasize on the values of citizenship, the increasing accountability, trust and legitimacy benefits and the overall better policy outcomes (Coursey et al., 2012; Fung, 2015; Schmidhuber et al., 2019). Others emphasize on the proven fact that citizen engagement may be shallow and only extend and delay the decision-making process, increase conflict and dissatisfy participants (Callahan, 2007; Coursey et al., 2012). There is a thin line between the failure and success of citizen participation processes, which is affected by a range of complex variables. The level of representation is one of such, which will be discussed later on in this research.

2.1.1. Benefits of citizen participation

A central tenet within democratic decision making is the belief that involving citizen allows for a more public-preferred outcome (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). Integrating citizens' ideas into the policy cycle has the potential to increase citizens' trust in the government and overall enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of public services (Fung, 2015; Seltzer & Mahmoudi, 2013; Schmidhuber et al., 2019). Thus, citizen participation benefits both the process and the outcome, which are of benefit to the government as well as the citizen.

These factors also play a significant part in establishing outcomes that are legitimate. According to Fung (2015) and Michels (2011), citizen engagement and participation on policies have an important role in establishing rules and policies that are accepted throughout society. Participatory democrats stress the vital importance of including citizen participation in modern democracies. They claim that otherwise the delegation of decision-making processes leads citizens to become alienated from politics and that it would eventually lead to a decrease in the legitimacy of the government and citizen trust (Michels, 2011).

However, a comment must be placed on concept of increasing legitimacy through citizen participation. Sherry Arnstein's (1969: p. 217) work on the ladder of citizen participation rightfully argues that citizen participation exists in different degradations, with one being more influential and effective than the other. Citizen may have substantial power in the decision-making process and thereby increase the legitimacy of an outcome. However, forms of citizen participation with minimal actual influence also exist. These participatory programs are used as a form of tokenism. Officials only use the process as an argument to why the outcome of a policy is legitimate, without actually incorporating the citizen opinions and input into the policy implementation. However, if such misuse is discovered by citizen, its effect on legitimacy is reversed and the trust in a governmental decision decreased significantly (Arnstein, 1969). And although Arnstein's study is of age, the concept presented within still occurs in modern society. For example, the advisory referendum in The Netherlands on the Ukraine treaty. 61 percent of the Dutch citizen voted against the treaty. However, Dutch politicians still passed the treaty and thereby ignored the opinion of the public. And although the outcome of an advisory referendum does not legally have to be honoured, it does showcase an example of how citizen participation can also have a negative effect on the legitimacy of a decision (Kummeling, 2016: 221).

Besides legitimacy and effectiveness, citizen participation also has the potential to enable higher levels of citizen inclusion. These participation tools have, in combination with the digitalization of public services, the ability to provide better access to the underrepresented

groups of society (Michels, 2011). The other, more traditional forms of public citizen interaction, such as voting, petitioning and lobbying are for the majority only used by specific segments of society. Those who do engage in these traditional forms of democratic acts are often the well-educated, employed, high earners of society. Academics have categorized this into the concept of citizens' social economic status (SES). The positive effect of SES on the percentage of citizen participation has been argued extensively (Verba, et al. 1995; Pattie et al., 2005; Dalton et al, 2003). It has shown that the outcomes of these traditional forms of political participation are dominated by citizen from higher SESs and thereby do not provide an accurate representation of the needs of society at large, resulting in an increases inequality gap between different SES levels (Dalton et al., 2003; Fung, 2006). "Many believe there is a link between the perceived inequality in participation and the type of outcome democracy produces" (John, 2009: p. 495). Apparently, at least some form of equality in terms of representation in political processes is symbolically important for the legitimacy of a governmental system.

However, due to the close relation between the citizens' participation and the outcome on the public services negotiations, underrepresented groups generally tend to be more motivated to express their opinion and help co-create the ideal solution. A responsive bureaucracy, in which officials are interested in the voices of citizen, creates a more active role for citizen and allows them to represent their interests (Roberts, 2008). This collaboration between public and government is not about representing and including individual representation but gathers all effected interests and incorporates them into the decision-making process. Citizen are involved directly in creating and providing the delivery of these public services, thereby decreasing the perceived inequality of democratic processes and increase the level of satisfaction of citizen (Barnes et al. 2007; Clarke et al., 2007). Moreover, citizens are more likely to participate in these local citizen participation process due to the active approach of the local organizations and community groups of those citizen. Citizen have a greater feeling of responsibility towards their own neighbourhood and its community. Results from their contributions are also noticeable, both physically and emotionally through the satisfaction of community members (Green & Gerber, 2005).

This however does have some complications for the level of representativeness of the general population in these citizen participation processes. The participating citizen are often recruited through the networks and communities that already make use of the services or are at least close related to them. This results in an overrepresentation of certain demographic groups and underrepresentation of others. These and other limitations are discussed in the following.

2.1.2. Limitations of citizen participation

Contrary to the benefits of citizen participation are the limitations and downsides of the phenomenon. First of all: costs. The infrastructure, coordination and planning that has to be implemented for citizens to express their opinion and ideas far exceeds the costs of a single, experienced and specialized civil servant, who is politically aware enough to estimate the effects of the outcome in advance. The participation processes put a heavy burden on the administrator's time and efforts, without having the guarantee of creating a better solution for the problem compared to when the civil servant would have made the decisions based on his own expertise. However, the costs do not take the possible increase on social-capital value into consideration nor does it take into account the possible increase on the effective policy implementations, due to the larger support of the public (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

A second obstacle in the citizen participation process is the aspect of complacency. Giving input to policy propositions and have influence in the policy formulation phase might sound interesting to the concerned citizen. However, working out the policy decisions and implementation details over a longer period of time, in which the citizen and administrators have to meet regularly, is far less attractive. Complacent community tend to have a strong preference for a top-down structure of the administration (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). According to research, citizens who acknowledge the mandate of the appointed civil servant, do value citizen participation as a necessary tool (Larence and Deagon, 2001).

A third limitation of citizen participation is its incompatibility with the representative democracy. These two types of democracy do not co-exist well together, due to their core differences in internal logical, such as accountability, legitimacy and steering. In finding a balance between representative democracy and direct democracy, administrators are confronted with the task to create political structures whose legitimacy is based on the dual claims to both voice the popular opinion as well as to abide by the principles of appropriate governing. Finding the right balance between both the representative democracy and the citizen participation is a challenging process, in which tensions will surely rise and no one-size-fits-all solution exists (Scarrow, 2001; Geurtz & Wijdeven, 2010).

A fourth limitation of citizen participation is the exclusion of demographic groups. Although citizen participations processes may have higher incentives for citizens to participate, it still fails to include all citizens' views. As argued earlier, citizens are often recruited through their social networks and communities. Those who are not connected to these specific communities have a harder time to get and remain in contact with the process. Informal information is often shared and distributed within these communities. Not being connected

could result in a backlog of information and thereby possibly decrease the level of engagement (Callahan, 2007). And besides, the minorities within these communities also have a more difficult time in pursuing and expressing their interests. Within these processes, the emphasis is placed more on those who express their preferences the most, thereby neglecting the views of the uncommon. This results in the fact that partial interests could take precedence over the public interest and thereby fail to produce a legitimate outcome (Kathlene & Martin, 1991). These and other complications on the representation of citizen participation processes will be discussed in chapter 2.2; Representativeness.

2.1.3. Online citizen participation

With the digitalization of public services, many citizen participations processes have also been given an (partially) online variant. Online citizen participation, also called E-participation, has the potential to revolutionize democratic participation and the delivery of these services, according to many researchers (Bertot et al., 2008). This transformation into the online world has been supported because of its perceived increases on accessibility, transferability and outreach (Komito, 2005). It arguably could reverse the ongoing degradation of traditional forms of citizen participation by using the internet as a bridge between citizen and government. With the internet, the online participation tools would reach the otherwise underrepresented groups of society, such as cultural minorities and young adults. These young adults are the largest segment of society who both use these online multimedia platforms and fail to be motivated to participate. Reaching them through these online communications will increase the legitimacy of political process outcomes and governmental trust (Breindl & Francq, 2008).

Since this research is focused on these young adults and their lacking participation in these public processes, it is therefore important to determine whether the implementation of these online variants of citizen participation also fulfil their potential. Current literature on the effectiveness of these online participation tools in terms of increasing participation is divided. On the one hand, research (Komito, 2005; Zheng, 2017a) has found that incorporating E-participation has had a positive effect on the citizen's willingness to participate. High-end, multifunctional applications tend positively influencing e-participation usage. The ability to adhere to the citizen's diverse preferences in one application motivates them to use these e-participation tools more frequently (Zheng, 2017b).

On the other hand, Scheufele & Nisbet (2002) argue that effect of the online tools in promoting citizen engagement is limited. Their findings show that respondents who are

frequently online, such as young adults, are not additionally inclined to act on their right of citizenship when exposed to some form of online participation. Support for the hype in regard to creating new standards for providing easy-to-access information to citizen and increasing engagements among citizen in political processes is very limited.

Also, Bertot et al. (2008) argue that implementing E-participation is costly and may require culture shifts within governments. Efficiency would be traded in for a user-orientated approach. This would improve the user interaction with the government, but also increase governmental expenditures on program and mediation management combined with an overall more time-consuming policy process.

Nevertheless, researchers do agree on the premise that online participation on itself is insufficient in establishing a higher level of citizen participation. Although traditional mass media communication should play a key role in promoting both online and offline citizen engagement, people's general disinterest concerning their political representation and contribution is not reduced by providing an accessible online tool. Investments in public education are necessary to improve the essential knowledge and competence of citizen, and thereby stimulate them to act upon their citizen rights and duties (Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002; Breindl & Francq, 2008).

2.2. Representativeness

The importance of a representative government has been acknowledged for decades. Theorists (Kingsley, 1944; Mosher, 1968) argued that class representation is essential for democratic rule and that the bureaucracy should reflect this approach within their own organization. Public organizations are expected to push the interests of the general public and can do so by establishing a staff composition that resembles the opinions and characteristics of the public. This used to happen through either democratic elections in which citizen choose their representatives through voting processes or by hiring public officials based on their characteristics and preferences. In this case, a representative organization is achieved by hiring personal based not only on their competencies, but also on their gender, age, heritage, sexual orientation and/or beliefs (Bevir, 2010; Riccucci & Van Ryzin, 2017).

A more recent option for establishing representative decision-making processes is through including the public into the policy formulation and implementation process. This concept is called citizen participation and is characterized by the involvement of local habitants

within municipal deliberation processes concerning the well-being and resource allocation of a neighbourhood or community. However, these citizen participation processes do not provide governments with a bullet proof solution for decreasing the perceived inequality on representation. The complications that accompany this form of civic engagement are elaborated in the upcoming paragraphs, after first distinguishing the different forms of representation.

2.2.1. Forms of representation

Citizen representation can be established through either an elected representative or through including people from all different existing demographics into decision-making processes of public policies. Having such a distribution is called *passive representation* and is known to have a positive influence on the level of social equity of a process or outcome, which is one of the fundamental elements of a successful public administration. Demonstrating values of equity, equality and fairness within public decision-making, processes as such may serve as model for similar decision-making standards throughout society (Ricucci & Van Ryzin, 2017). With the empowerment of social equity within these initiatives, policy outcomes gain additional benefits on legitimacy, citizen trust and overall organizational performance (Choi & Rainy, 2010; Childs & Lovenduski, 2013). The former elite character of the government diminishes and thereby creates a more approachable, relatable and appreciable organization. This results in higher levels of cohesion between populations and allows for a more peaceful and inclusive society (Meier 1975; Selden, 2006).

Including these underrepresented groups into the decision-making of bureaucracies is not only necessary for the principles of equity and equality. They are also capable of producing better policies and administrative outcomes for those underrepresented. This is called *active representation*. Women for instance are, compared to men, more likely to push for programs and policies directed to benefit women of the general population (Meier & Nicholson-Crotty, 2006). However, the linkage between passive and active representative may only exist under several conditions. Representatives must have enough discretion to act on their values during policy and decision-making processes. In addition, there must be congruence on policy between the representative and the population it represents. When both elements come together, citizen who passively represent a population are like to also produce better policies and outcomes for those it represents (Ricucci & Ryzin, 2016).

Passive representation may also lead to yet another form, called symbol representation. This variant assumes that representation may produce citizen trust and legitimacy among citizen when those who represent them within decision-making processes share the same social origin, regardless of their political preferences or personal agenda setting. This increased level of trust will lead to more cooperation from these citizens and eventually result in more effective and suitable policy outcomes (Gade & Wilkins, 2013; Riccucci & Ryzin, 2016). Moreover, symbolic participation is also perceived to have a psychological effect on the level of satisfaction on public policy outcomes. Minorities, for example Afro-American in the United States when Barack Obama was elected as president, tended to be more satisfied with the outcomes of policy processes when the decision was made by someone of the same skin colour, regardless of whether the choice in question also worked in their advantage (Carroll, 2006). But, when citizen perceive the level of representation as complete, citizen may become less likely to actively contribute to these citizen initiatives. Their contribution would feel unnecessary and unneeded, making them less eager to invest their personal time.

However, establishing full representation and collaboration from all groups of society is difficult. The negative consequences of not having full representation are not to be neglected or underestimated. Not feeling represented may result in a vicious circle that leads to even further underrepresentation. It would make them less inclined to participate and 'change the system', due to the perceived uncaring attitude of the government towards their demographic cohort (Carnes, 2012). Elements like equity, equality, effective outcomes, citizen's trust and legitimacy would decrease and could result in further sceptical attitudes towards public policy outcomes. This vicious circle is current active within the young adult segment of society, with several complication as result (Henn & Foard, 2012).

2.2.2. Representation of young adults in government

Age has been one of the key demographic variables within studies for representation. However, it is always accompanied and overshadowed by other demographics such gender, race, education and income (e.g. Anders, 2017; Brown & Kellough, 2019). Very few is written on the democratic (under)representation in citizen participation of specific age groups, despite the fact that similar normative claims for representation can be made as for demographics such as education, gender and ethnicity (Stockemer & Sundstrom, 2018: p 467; Tremmel et al., 2015). Young adults for instance may have different views on tax expenditures (e.g. young adults may

favour allocations towards education and welfare, where middle-aged citizen prefer a reduction in taxes).

Although less effort by governments has been put on adhering and including the preferences of different age groups, research does emphasize on the increasing problem of for instance losing the engagement of young adults, especially since their cohort is the largest group that is eligible to vote (UN, 2015). Young adults are less politically engaged and tend to be more sceptical of the democratic process and fail to connect to with politicians and their parties (Bhatti et al., 2012; Blais & Ruberson, 2013). Currently, a vicious circle exists between the declining political participation of young adults and the of lack of representation of their views within the policy formulation and implementation process (Henn & Foard, 2012). “This increasing political apathy renders the voice of young adults less important because parties and candidates gain relatively little from catering to the interests of a group with largely refrains from voting” (Stockemer & Sundstrom, 2018: p. 470).

Only recently, measures have been taken in attempt to break this vicious circle. The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) published several reports and have called for attention to the increasing lack of representation and participation of young adults in governmental and political processes (UNDP, 2014). In addition, countries have incorporated youth quota’s and even established youth parties - like the UK Youth Party and the Youth Party India (not to be mistaken with youth wings of traditional parties) - to represent the demands of the younger generation (Stockemer & Sundstrom, 2018). However, such measures are still only incorporated in the political discourse. Within the democratic decision-making of public service allocation, the lacking representation and thereby incorporation of young adults’ views remains untouched and preferences during the public policy deliberations is given to those who express their interests the loudest. The persistent absence of lacking active and symbolic representation maintain the vicious circle described earlier and thereby not only fails to include young adults but also decreases their level of governmental affinity (Bhatti et al., 2012).

Whether this vicious circle on the lacking attention from the government and decreasing affinity of young adults with government also explains their underrepresentation within citizen participation initiatives will be tested by the first hypothesis: *‘Young adults are not engaging in citizen participation initiatives because they do not feel involved by the government’*.

2.2.3. Representativeness of citizen participation

The level of representativeness in citizen participation projects is often subordinated compared to the number of total participants according to current research (Sjoberg et al., 2017, Yang & Callahan, 2007). The external communication of governmental organizations often put emphasis on approaching and recruiting as many people as possible, instead of equally including all different cultures, ages, educations, earning levels and genders. It is sometimes put away as if the inhabitants of a particular neighbourhood share the majority of the demographics. And although some degree of similarity between citizen of a neighbourhood exists, general claims as such do not hold and only ensure conservation of the current underrepresentation problems (Jun & Musso, 2013; Kang & Powell, 2010).

As one of the few, Michels (2011) did study the level of representation of citizen participation tools. She constructed a division between four types of citizen participation, which were categorized on whether citizens were approached in groups or individually and whether the input of the citizens is primarily focused on the outcome or on the process. These two distinctions resulted in four different citizen participation types, being: referendums, participatory policy making/interactive governance, deliberative surveys and deliberative forums. The one most commonly used -and also researched in this thesis- are the participatory policy making initiatives. This type incorporates the opinions and influences of the citizen who participated before making the actual decision. Through for instance online tools or municipality open council meetings, citizens are enabled to express their opinion and question uncertainties regarding a policy proposal (Michels, 2011). An example of such is the BIT program in Duinoord, The Hague. With this BIT-initiative, voluntary citizen stroll through their neighbourhoods and report on which points adjustments or improvement are needed. This program is part of the 'Burgernet' initiative, which in its turn is part of the local 'Action Plan Citizen Participation 2016-2020 The Hague' (Duinnoord, 2016; Baldewsigh, 2016). However, also in these plans, emphasis is put on recruiting as many people as possible, rather than including all different views from all different demographic groups.

As argued earlier, participatory policy making initiatives have the potential to increase the level of citizen representation and thereby the legitimacy of the outcome. However, Michels' (2011) research showed that this potential is not met in results. These participatory policy programs, out of the four types Michels described, had the lowest level of representation. Even though the availability of these (online) tools was considered high, only 33 percent of the cases showed an actual representation of the demographics of the local society. According to her results, cultural minorities and young adults were the relatively largest underrepresented

groups in most cases. And not only Michels (2011) showed this disproportionate distribution. Marshall & Jones (2007) showed similar unbalanced results. Their research on citizen participation in natural resource management showcased that participants were largely older, higher educated and prosperous men.

Establishing a group of participants that is representative for its community seems one of the most complex challenges citizen participation faces (Blue et al., 2012). Resolving representation problems for one group may lead to an underrepresentation of other groups, which in turn could lead to another vicious circle in which the specific group becomes sceptical of the policy outcomes that affect their life (Coursey et al., 2012). Finding the right balance is a delicate matter and is an ongoing process that should never lose its focus as long as representation is desired by the government. The theoretical assumption of John (2009) made earlier on citizen participation and its potential to increase the level citizen inclusion compared to the more traditional forms of citizen interactions (e.g. voting/petitioning/lobbying) seems to be not as successful as one argued. Apparently, a low-threshold and well-structured participation tool does not automatically guarantee inclusion and realistic representation.

However, these result on the unequal distributions cannot be blamed solely on the unsuccessful attempts of the government to involve all citizens. As argued earlier, governments have made several attempts increase the likeliness of citizens to get involved by for instance offering online citizen participation alternatives, increasing the communication output regarding the processes and through enabling citizen to express their preferences during open (online) municipality council meeting (Bertot et al., 2008; Den Haag, 2020). Another aspect that highly influences the likeliness of participation, are the participant's motivations and characteristics, which is discussed in the following chapter.

2.3. Citizens' motivations for participation

So, in order to understand why people do participate in voluntary citizen participation processes, we first need to examine which elements affect their decision. Hafer & Ran (2016) emphasized on the lacking research on the citizen perspective on citizen participation. Although prior research on the civil servant's perspective has been investigated thoroughly and its implications have been incorporated in the public participation processes, less is known on the inhabitant's motivation. The attention on the citizen perspective so far has resulted in some determinants for participation. For example, research argues that the psychological states of citizen's political interest are a cognitive motivational antecedent for participation (Verba et al., 1995; Neblo et al., 2010). Some more unconventional scientific research suggests that citizens are motivated to participate due to their initial distrustful attitude towards their government. Participation would create a sense of feeling in control and eventually lead to increasing levels of citizen's trust, after becoming familiar with the standard procedures and the appointed civil servants. However, inhabitants who do recognize themselves in this line of argumentation are often politically interested and concerned, well-educated citizen who do believe it is important to act upon their citizen's rights and duties (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; John et al., 2011).

Other research related to the motivational antecedents of citizen participation is derived from the literature on co-production. Finding show that citizens are more motivated to participate when they feel that their contributions will make a difference (Bovaird et al., 2015). Also, citizen motivations in healthcare planning and coproduction situations are more community-centred, rather than being self-centred (Van Eijk & Steen, 2014). However, self-interest focused motivations that are connected to the benefits received from coproducing, like receiving material extrinsic rewards or intangible intrinsic rewards have also been proven to positively influence citizen's motivation to participate (Alford, 2002; Hafer & Ran, 2016). These self-centred benefits may also be in the form of educational benefits. Citizen may want to increase their knowledge related to for instance democratic citizenship, learn about current social problems, or desire guidelines on becoming a better citizen (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

Research specified on the motivations of young adults for citizen participation is rather scarce. Studies by Malin et al. (2015) on adolescent moral motivations for generic civic participation concluded that young women were more civically involved than men. Young women were more likely to be civically engaged out of desire to help others, while younger men were often motivated to act upon their own values and beliefs. However, women were

persistently less active in political and civic activities that had the greater influence over policymaking (Schlozman et al., 1994). In addition, ethnicity of these young adults also affects their motivation to participate (or not) (Ballard et al., 2015). For instance, Jugert et al. (2013) researched the motivational antecedents for offline and online civic engagement of young adults. It used a sample of 755 young adults from native German, German Diaspora and Turkish ethnicities. Results showed a significant difference between ethnicities, that could be traced back to peer and parental norms.

Altogether, determining the motivational antecedents for citizen participation is difficult. Citizen display complex, inconsistent and individual specific motivations, making it hard to produce predictions on their participation (Evans, 2009). However, the Volunteer Process Model (VPM) of Omoto & Snyder (2008; 2010) attempted to fill this gap on predicting motivational antecedents. Their model was initially formulated to predict voluntary participation but appeared to also be applicable other to forms of civic participation (Burger et al., 2000; Omoto & Snyder 2010; Malin et al., 2015).

2.3.1. The VPM: background

The Volunteer Process Model of Omoto & Snyder (1995; 2002; 2010) combines the different stages of the voluntary process with the multiple levels of analysis. Although this model was initially introduced to predict participation of voluntary processes, more recent literature has proven its applicability to wider forms of civic activity, such as civic engagement and citizen participation (Burgess et. al, 2000; Omoto & Snyder, 2010). For example, the study of Omoto & Snyder (2010) on AIDS activism and civic engagement. This research concluded, based on the results of 624 respondents from the USA, that the other-focused motivations of the model were able to successfully predict participation. Other research, like one of Marta & Pozzi (2008) on young people and volunteerism incorporated the VPM in their model of Sustained Volunteerism. This study focused on 158 young adults with the goal to understand why young adults who did volunteer decided to continue. Results showed similar proof for the applicability of the VPM. Other-focused motivations, group integration and satisfaction with the organization turned out to be highly correlated with participants volunteer identity (Marta & Pozzi, 2008).

However, usefulness of the VPM in relation to civic engagement has also been questioned. Dávila (2009) concluded that the model was not adequate for predicting

environmental voluntary participation. Moreover, only the hand full of studies above have proven its applicability, without any citizen participation specific research. Therefore, the data collected from interviews on citizen participation might suggest that the VPM is not as applicable to such specific forms of civic engagement previous academics suggested. Nevertheless, investigating it in this context and deriving to such possible conclusions would be valuable and would only further develop the ongoing debate on this model and its applicability and usability for wider forms of civic engagement, as claimed by Omoto & Snyder (2008; 2010).

Levels of Analysis	Stages of the Volunteer Process		
	Antecedents	Experiences	Consequences
Individual	Personality, motivation, life circumstances	Satisfaction, stigma, organizational integration	Knowledge and attitude change, health
Interpersonal/ Social Group	Group memberships, norms	Helping relationship, collective esteem	Composition of social network, relationship development
Agency/ Organization	Recruitment strategies, training	Organizational culture, volunteer placement	Volunteer retention, work evaluation
Societal/Cultural Context	Ideology, service programs and institutions	Service provision, program development	Social capital, economic savings

Figure 1: Volunteer Process Model (Omoto & Snyder, 2010)

2.3.2. The VPM: the model

The VPM, as shown in figure 1, is a two dimensional table that shows both the different stages of the volunteer process combined with the multiple levels of analysis. The horizontal axis shows the first, beginning with the antecedent's stage. This stage primarily focuses on the beginning of the process and tries to identify the different motivations of an individual's decision to volunteer. These include personality characteristics, motivational tendencies and life circumstances. These antecedents can predict which type of people are most likely participate in such voluntary programs (Omoto & Snyder, 2008; 2010). The second stage is interested in the experienced gained during the voluntary program. Interpersonal relations will develop between volunteers and the staff members and recipients and thereby influence the volunteer's attitude towards the program. The final stage is focussed on the results and impact

of the voluntary process. These include knowledge and attitude changes, relationship development, work evaluations and changing social capita (Omoto & Snyder, 2008).

The vertical axis of the VPM describes the different interlocking levels of analysis. The individual level of the model focuses on the psychological processes of the individual volunteer. The interpersonal/social group level incorporates this individual analysis and adds the dynamics of the relationships established during the volunteer process. The agency/organizational level is associated with the goal concerning the recruitment-, management-, and retainment- processes. (Omoto & Snyder, 2010). The superlative societal/cultural level takes these individual, interpersonal and organizational levels into account and puts them into a societal and cultural perspective.

The goal of this research is to gather more in-depth information to why young adults in The Hague are underrepresented in these citizen participation initiatives. This means that it will need to investigate which antecedents are the basis for not wanting or being able to participate. The research will therefore focus on the antecedent stage on the individual and interpersonal levels.

2.3.3. The VPM: the antecedent stage

The antecedent stage of the model is focused on the identifying of relevant motivations, interpersonal orientations and personal traits and characteristics that influence people in getting involved. Key questions from this stage – like who are volunteering and why? – are specifically focused on individual and personality differences. However, a disclaimer must be made on the assumption that this model neglects external influences, such as environmental, situational and socialization causes. The VPM does not neglect the importance of these elements. Rather, this the model primarily focuses on the antecedent stage constructs related to the individual. It does so by adopting a broader understanding of the individual's characteristics, considering multiple systems and ways that people function, including individual's motivations, interpersonal orientations and personality traits (Omoto & Snyder, 2010).

2.3.3.1. *The motivations*

Functionalist theory on motivational antecedents has identified a wide variety of motivations that may cause people to participate in civic engagement. This functionalist approach argues that people will perform the same actions in service of different psychological functions (Clary et al., 1998: 1517). Examples of such motivations are affirming values, making new

acquaintances, mastering skills, assisting someone's community and enhancing self-esteem (Omoto & Snyder, 2008). Some of these serve an understanding function. Contributing allows the participant to grasp a better understanding of a phenomenon or skill. Other motivations have a value expression function, in which the volunteer can express deeply rooted values, dispositions and convictions. Another category of motivations serves an ego defensive function, in which the person buffers itself against undesirable or threatening truths about the self (Clary et al. 1998). Research suggests a strong resemblance within the sets of motivations across different demographic groups, ages of volunteers and for other forms of social actions, such as community leadership, organizational citizenship and the political and administrative participation (Finkelstein & Penner, 2004; Miller, 1981; Omoto & Snyder, 2008).

Strong motives turned out to be community concern and the desire to understand causes and consequences of a certain policy or challenge (Reeder, 2001). Especially older participants tend to be more motivated by wanting to serve and aid their community (Omoto & Martino, 2000). In general, people tend to make the conscious decision for participation when the circumstances and attributes of the program together give the impression that they will serve their personal motivations. If this is the case, people are inclined to continue their contribution as long as they perceive their motivations as fulfilled. Especially those with motivations based on values and social interaction tend to stay for a long period of time (Omoto & Snyder, 2010).

However, the results obtained from these studies cannot be automatically generalized to young adults. "Late adolescence and young adulthood are key periods for personal and social identity and voluntary commitment can assume specific meaning and characteristics as far as this period of life is concerned" (Marta & Pozzi, 2008). For instance, research shows that young adults' motivations are often more related to satisfying and achieving new interpersonal relationships. Creating new friendships with others from roughly the same age group tends to be a valid reason for participation (Omoto & Martino, 2000).

Having this as a key motivation could also indirectly explain the current underrepresentation of these young adults in citizen participation initiatives. People are stimulated to participate if they would be able to fulfil their motivational antecedents. However, if no people from their age group are represented with such initiatives, other young adults will not be able to fulfil these interpersonal relationship motivations, making it thereby less likely for them to participate. Testing this assumption brings us to the second hypothesis: *Young adults are not engaging in citizen participation initiatives, because of the absence of other young adults.*

2.3.3.2. *The interpersonal orientations*

The interpersonal orientations focus on attitudes, values and feelings that an individual has towards others in general, both familiar and unknown people. According to research of Bekkers (2005), citizen who participate have more human and social capital, are more interested in politics, have a more post-materialistic value orientation, vote on often leftist or Christian parties and show higher empathic concern for other (unknown) people.

Other important interpersonal orientation that positively affects the probability of participation is compassionate love. Sprecher & Fehr (2005) defined this interpersonal orientation as an encompassing term for being caring, concerned, tender and orientated towards the support, help and understanding of other individuals, including strangers. This altruistic attitude is qualified distinct from empathy and is found be positively related with higher forms of participation. Those who qualified as such were often more religious or spiritual experienced people. Research showed that the interest in religion or spirituality increased by age, making young adults far less inclined to show elements of compassionate, altruistic love (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005; Zimmer, 2016).

More specific, studies show that young adults who do participate have higher community concern, more positive attitude towards others and have a higher level of empathy and thereby more likely to participate in these citizen initiatives. They have a strong urge to act upon their values and rights citizenship, especially when the specific policy process will benefit others that are less fortunate (Marta & Pozzi, 2008; Omoto & Snyder, 2010). Studies indicate that a dispositional empathic behaviour is connect to the decision making of voluntary participation and to the experiences throughout the volunteering process (Davis, 2003). Nevertheless, these results also show that these participating young adults are in large minority. The majority fails to be motivated enough in order to participate. Therefore, these findings would imply that young adults have less empathy and less concerned with helping others in this stage of their life. The missing sense of concern for their community makes the probability of contributing to these citizen participation initiatives less likely. These theory-based assumptions have resulted in the third hypothesis: *‘Young adults are not engaging in these citizen participation initiatives, because they show relatively low concerns for their local community’*.

2.3.3.3. *Characteristics*

Research has shown that particular traits of personality are correlated with higher probability of people participating in civic engagement. One prominent theory on the understanding of personality traits is the ‘Big Five-principle’ by Costa & McCrae (1992). This study focused on the underlying structures of the five different fundamental human characteristics: extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability, conscientiousness and openness to experience. More specific, research on volunteerism has produced a set of personality characteristics that define the majority of participating young adults. These young volunteers are more extraverted, have less need of autonomy, have relatively high self-esteem, have greater internal moral standards, are generally positive and optimistic people, are emotionally stable and have higher empathy (Marta & Pozzi, 2008).

Translating and combining these personality characteristics of volunteers into the spectrum of predicting broader forms of civic engagement, Omoto and Snyder (2010) has found strong correlations between the extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Extraverts are more likely to participate in civic engagement; the level of agreeableness is higher for those who volunteer than paid workers; Conscientious people are expected to offer their assistance to others, especially when their view of good citizenship includes acting upon their civic duties and making a contribution to society (Omoto & Snyder, 2010).

These results show us which characteristics of human beings increase the likeliness of their contribution to citizen participation initiatives. Logically, the absence of such properties can therefore explain their lack of participation. In order to test this line of reasoning, the following hypothesis has been put forward: *Young adults are not engaging in citizen participation initiatives, because they do not share the same characteristics of an average volunteer.* This broad hypothesis actually consists of three elements, being extravertness, conscientiousness and agreeableness. Each of these components provided by Omoto & Snyder (2010) have been transformed into three different sub-hypotheses that together validate the general expectation of the fourth hypothesis:

1. H4a: Young adults do not consider themselves as extravert
2. H4c: Young adults do not consider themselves conscientious
3. H4e: Young adults do not consider themselves to be agreeable towards unknown people

This will be tested through a survey that questions their characteristics by a list of statements. These characteristics will at the end of the interview be linked with their previous answers, to determine whether they in fact influence and determine their participation. Further explanation on the method of research is given in the methodology.

2.4. Conceptual model

The different concepts of the theoretical framework have led to the following conceptual model. This model has incorporated all relevant variables needed to validate the hypotheses and ultimately the research question.

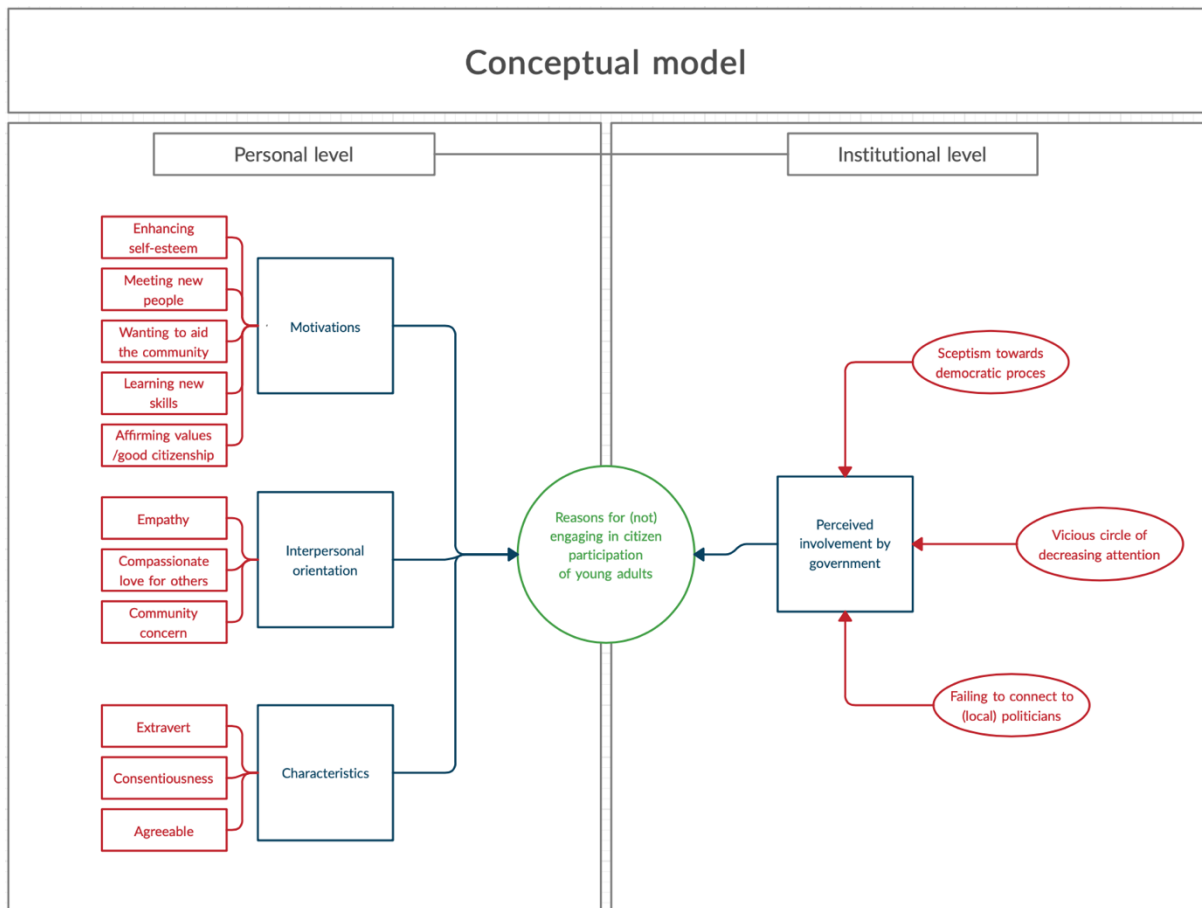


Figure 2: Conceptual model

3. Methodology

The methodology provided describes in short, the goal of the research, the research design and methods used, the background and rationale behind the methods and also evaluates the possible limitations accompanied with this setup.

3.1. Goal of this research

The goal of this research is to obtain more in-depth knowledge on why young adults are not motivated to engage in citizen participation initiatives. Current research shows that young adults (18-25 years old), the largest age group of society, are the least represented group within these initiatives. Prior findings state that young adults are less politically engaged and tend to be more sceptical of the democratic process and fail to connect to with politicians and their parties (Bhatti et al. 2012). However, their lacking participation has some serious implications for the level of representation, legitimacy of outcomes and citizen satisfaction of the public administration.

If governments want to tackle this problem, they first must determine which reasons young adults put forward for their unwillingness to participate. Existing literature has focused on the civil servant's perspective on underrepresentation of certain demographic groups, including young adults. The citizen's perspective of young adults has not been included yet. This research attempts to fill this gap by questioning twelve young adults from The Hague, including different sexes, education levels and ethnicities.

The research and the hypotheses are primarily based on the antecedent stage of the Volunteer Process Model (VPM) by Omoto & Snyder (1995; 2008; 2010). The model was originally established to predict the likeliness of citizen participating in voluntary work, but more recent studies have shown its applicability to broader forms of civic engagement. Besides answering the research question, this thesis will also test these preliminary findings of the VPM's usability towards citizen participation processes and determine whether future research on matters as such should incorporate the VPM.

3.2. Operationalisation of key concepts

This research is interested in discovering the reasons for the lacking involvement of young adults in citizen participation processes. To do so, it must first determine the specific indicators related to this question. These indicators are measurable translations from the more abstract concepts within the theory. These abstract concepts have resulted in the four hypotheses

mentioned earlier. Each hypothesis shares the same dependent variable, being the lacking engagement of young adults in citizen participation process. The following independent variables try to find an explanation for this phenomenon: the perceived insufficient involvement of young adults by the government, the inability to fulfil their interpersonal orientation motivations due to the lack of other young adults, the relatively low concerns for their local community and absence of key characteristics that are able to predict participative behaviour, such as extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness.

3.2.1. Concept 1: Perceived involvement by government

According to the theoretical framework, young adults have become less politically engaged and increasingly sceptical of traditional democratic processes. This is thought to be influencing their likeliness of participating. Therefore, questions have been developed in order to determine their perception of the government and the extent to which they feel engaged enough by them. Questions 4 to 8 were aimed at researching the aspect. The first questions focussed at establishing the level of familiarity with the concept of citizen participation within their living area, followed up by their opinion on the ambition of citizen participation to include the views and opinions of those living in the area the policy is directed at. Question 6 was aimed at determining whose responsibility it was to be actively engaged, being either the government's or the citizens' own responsibility. This helped with trying to understand whether they perceived the government's current efforts to be enough or not. The last two questions followed up on this direction and asked whether they believed the government was involving young adults enough and if they felt that the government was actually interested in their opinion. This combination of questions ensured that there was sufficient data to answers the first hypothesis.

3.2.2. Concept 2: young adults' interpersonal orientation motivations

Prior research has shown that young adults have different motivations for participations than older people. They tend to be more focussed on achieving new and maintaining interpersonal relationships with others. The lacking presence of other young adults could therefore be a valid reason for not being motivated to participate. This research design tried to explain this through several questions of the interview.

The first question (question 2 of appendix 1) on this concept tried to determine what kind of interpersonal relationships already existed within their neighbourhood, by asking the respondent his or her level of involvement and familiarity with the local community. The

question that was thereafter focussed this hypothesis tried to determine whether the respondent had the feeling that other young adults were currently sufficiently involved enough by the government. Although the possibility of answers was more of generic nature, it did showcase the degree of which they believed how many other young adults were currently active. Sub-question 10bI was, amongst other possible answers, also aimed at determining whether the respondents would be more likely to participate if other young adults were present within these initiatives. If an answer with a different focus were given, question 12 could again specifically test whether the presence of other young people would be of added value in the choice whether or not to participate. The last question that was partially aimed at this concept, question 13, asked the respondents for suggestions on what should be done to involve more young adults, with the possibility of answering with something in the lines of ‘bringing the young adults of neighbourhood together’.

3.2.3. Concept 3: Concern for local community members

The third concept that influences the dependent variable is the degree of community concern. Previous literature showed that the relatively few young adults who participated were often motivated to do so based on the positive effects that their efforts would have on the well-being of their community. However, the vast majority of young adults did not participate, and one could therefore argue that they did not feel this obligation to contribute towards their community. To test this hypothesis during the interviews, questions on the respondents’ concern for their community were included. These questions were placed at the beginning of the interview, partly because they functioned well as introductory questions to test the community knowledge and familiarity of the young adults, without immediately having to make the link with citizen participation.

The questions and sub-questions of 2 and 3 (appendix 1) were focussed specifically on this concept. For example, question 2 asked: “How known and involved are you with the people for you neighbourhood/community?”, followed up by one of the sub-questions: “how is this familiarity and involvement shown?”

In order to give the respondents a little more guidance on the formulation of their opinion and thought process about their neighbourhood, a sub-question was created that asked the respondents to give their personal description of the neighbourhood. This ensured that the respondent could form a more complete image in their head while talking, which (hopefully) made it easier to answer the other questions on this theme.

3.2.4. Concept 4: Characteristics of young adults

Unlike the other variables, the characteristics of the participants were gathered by using a short survey. This survey consisted of eleven statements that were related to the characteristics of the average volunteer. These specific set of characteristics were argued by Omoto & Snyder (2010) to be valid predictors for people who were very likely to participate. These were: Extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness. The statements in which these elements were transferred, were almost completely replicated from the research of Omoto & Snyder (2010). This allowed to test the applicability of the VPM as accurate as possible.

The respondents were given the list of statements in the second part of the interview. They had to rate each statement on a Likert-scale of 1 to 7 and also had to provide with a reasoning to why they believed it deserved that number. The goal of this element was not aimed at the generalization of the relation between the characteristics of a volunteer and their likeliness to get involved in citizen participation, but rather to give more in-depth knowledge on why young adults are not participating and whether their characteristics influenced their decision.

The statements themselves varied between both direct and indirect statements regarding the three key-characteristics. The more direct statements were for instance “I consider myself to be a conscientious person” and “I consider myself to be a warm and pleasant person (agreeable)”, while the indirect statements included more exemplary tones, such as “I spend a lot of time thinking about the well-being of humankind (conscientiousness)” and “I like to seek excitement and new experiences (extraversion)”.

3.3. Research design

The data for this study were collected through twelve in-depth interviews with young adults from The Hague. Many interviewees came from different neighbourhoods of The Hague, including: Laakkwartier, Duindorp, Bezuidenhout, Mariahoeve, Vogelwijk, Regetessekwartier and the centre of the Hague. It was possible to select this wide variety of neighbourhoods because the COVID-19 measures made it impossible to interview in the town hall. As a result, the personal network of the researcher had to be deployed, making it possible to select more precisely. This undoubtedly had an impact on the reproductivity, validity and trustworthiness of the study. A selection bias was inevitable and may have caused the results to be an inadequate display of the actual current situation. However, being aware of these complications

and taking them into account into our analysis has minimized the decrease in quality of the data. These and other limitation of this research are discussed in section 3.3.3.

Of the twelve interviewees, there was a perfect male-female distribution, in which two men and women of each educational level (MBO / HBO / WO) were interviewed. There was a proportional distribution of studying (4 men and 2 women) and graduated participants (4 women and 2 men). The ages ranged from 20 to 25 years old, with an average of 23.5 years old. Different cultures were also represented among the respondents, including Iranian-Dutch, Malaysian-Dutch, Surinamese-Dutch, German-Dutch. This was done on purpose, due to the proven indirect correlation between culture and a person's level of empathy. This is because of the fact that ethnicity is highly connected culture, which in turn is often connected to religion. Religion has been proven to affect the person's level of empathy and concern for others, which is a key explanatory variable according to the VPM (Bekkers, 2005; Sprecher & Fehr, 2005).

From the respondents, two people (men) still lived at home, which ultimately also affected their degree of participation. The other ten participants lived on their own, ranging from a period of three months to over three years.

Consent was given by the participants to record the interviews and the details and goals of the study were thoroughly explain beforehand. Due to the expectation that the concept of citizen participation was unfamiliar to the majority of the respondents, a short explanation of the concept and tools were given by email beforehand. This benefited the quality and depth of the answers provided by the participants. The realization of each variable of the conceptual model is explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

The Interviews took 32 minutes on average, by which the longest took 46 minutes and the shortest 22 minutes. A full overview of each of the respondents is presented in the figure 3.

Respondent's name	Age	Education level	Neighbourhood	Date of interview	Time of interview
#1: Edwin	25	MBO	Mariahoeve	11-06-2020	27:54
#2: Datillio	25	MBO	Duindorp	15-06-2020	22:19
#3: Maxime	20	MBO	Centrum	01-07-2020	25:47
#4: May	24	MBO	Laakkwartier	13-07-2020	37:46
#5: Nolan	21	HBO	Bezuidenhout	17-06-2020	31:27
#6: Carsten	25	HBO	Laakkwartier	14-07-2020	28:07
#7: Femke	23	HBO	Notenbuurt	02-07-2020	33:35
#8: Eline	24	HBO	Regetessekwartier	21-06-2020	27:19
#9: Ali	23	WO	Centrum	12-06-2020	31:16
#10: Pepijn	25	WO	Bezuidenhout	14-06-2020	46:08
#11: Leonore	25	WO	Statenkwartier	24-06-2020	29:12
#12: Mariani	25	WO	Statenkwartier	24-06-2020	32:01

Table 3: overview of participants

3.3.1. Municipality of the Hague

The municipality of The Hague has for several years been a strong advocate for including citizen's perspectives into the policy formulation and implementation phase. The official document 'Actieplan Burgerparticipatie 2016-2020: Samen leven is samen kiezen en samen doen' (The Hague, 2017) underlined this ambition. The document touched upon The Hague's aspiration to be a frontrunner and example figure to other municipalities and its obligation to the Dutch citizen as the city of politics and policy. This made The Hague the ideal city to conduct the research lined out in this thesis.

In detail, the action plan makes implicit references to the inclusion of all citizen and the equalization of the current skewed distributions. This indicates that The Hague is already making an effort in establishing sound representation within the citizen participation process. The large availability of different citizen participation tools for citizens of The Hague will enhance the likeliness of young adults' knowledge on its existence and increase the possibility of their participation.

Nevertheless, The Hague's action report only puts explicit emphasis on including the different cultures and income segments of society. There is no specific mentioning of the inclusion of young adults. This research design therefore tests whether this population segment

actually feels engaged into the participation process or whether they in fact feel forgotten and neglected.

3.3.2. Evaluation and limitations

As argued earlier, the outline for these research methods had several flaws and complication, of which some were assigned to the COVID-19 crisis restrictions. The selection of participants has been completely arbitrary, thereby seriously questioning the level of reproductivity and reliability of the study. Respondents were derived from using the personal network of the researcher and were contacted by sending out emails and having word-to-mouth communication. Although an effort has been made to include an appropriate distribution of different young adults, one cannot determine this selection bias as objective and integer and should thereby be taken into account while analysing the data retrieved from the participants.

However, the goal of this research was to provide more insights on how young adults could feel in terms of their underrepresentation in citizen participation processes. Results of this research will provide a foundation for future more quantitative based research, which is highly needed if government wants to determine whether current measurements are adequate in establishing a representative citizen participation process.

A second limitation of this research design is the possibility of obtaining desirable answers, rather than presenting the truth. People may tend to answer questions like the ones presented in this research untruthfully, because they feel obligated to the display good citizenship. I have tried to minimize this from occurring by asking value-free questions and emphasizing on the fact that there is no right or wrong answer. I assume that the likeness of giving such desirable answers is the highest with survey statements on their personality traits, because people tend to be insecure on their personal characteristics that deviate from their perception of the ideal citizen (Kim & Kim, 2016). I therefore transformed this part of the questions into statements and presented them in a short survey. Through this way, participants did not have to be uncomfortable and insecure in answering the questions, resulting in more truthful output.

A third possible complication of the research design is the fact that young adults might not even be familiar with the different participation tools within their municipality. The theoretical framework and the research design imply that young adults were at least aware of the existence of citizen participation initiatives. It thereby ignored the possible fact that young adults did not participate simple because they are not aware of the existence of such initiatives

or that they did not know that certain projects within their neighbourhood or community are labelled as such. In order to minimize this from happening during the interviews, respondents were emailed a short introduction on the concept of citizen participation and the current programs that active within the municipality of The Hague. In this way, respondents had some sense of knowledge on the subject and were able to give answers to at least the majority of the questions asked. However, a question was asked during the interview on whether they were familiar with the initiatives before receiving the information. In this way I was still able to determine whether citizen participation was known within this younger generation of society.

4. Results

This chapter will present the results gathered from the conducted interviews and categorized in the table of codes shown in appendix 3. The findings are presented in four different parts, being: 'Engagement and familiarity with citizen participation', 'Motivations for (not) participation', 'Involvement by the government' and 'Characteristics of respondents'.

4.1. Engagement and familiarity with citizen participation

Codes used: familiarity with citizen participation, responsibility to participate, suggestions for improvement, motivation for (not) participating, online citizen participation

Out of the twelve participants, three people (3 women) had once already taken part in one of the citizen participation initiatives. Coincidentally, two people were dealing with the same issue in different districts, namely the possibility of paid parking in their street. The other person once participated in collecting data on their financial situations of people within the district during COVID-19. Only one out of three persons has participated in such initiatives several times. Although this still took place in her old neighbourhood, she planned to pick it up in her new area as soon as she became more familiar with her neighbourhood. The other two people were less sure whether they would participate again in the future. As far as they were concerned, there had to be a particular personal benefit.

The level of familiarity with citizen participation was higher. Six out of twelve had previously heard of some form of citizen participation projects. This concerned specific cases in which someone had actually received a letter about one of the current projects within the district, as well as to more on the basis of general knowledge and experiences from educational courses. Most of the respondents said that this was only based on a single letter and that they felt that there was still much to be gained from public awareness of such initiatives, if they want to reach a larger group of people and especially if they also want to include and motivate more young adults to participate. For instance, the means of communication could be improved. This is evident from the quotes below:

"If I would be in a neighbourhood group, I would maybe organize an info meeting on the projects that are currently being held. Then you still have some sort of information and get together, without the

hassle of registering and stuff. This will be a more accessible way of getting information” (Femke, Research interview, 2 July 2020).

And:

“If a civil servant or someone from the government would visit doors and ask habitants in person how they would feel about certain idea’s, even if it is only or 3 minutes. I think these physical moments of contact would really work’ (Ali, Research interview, 12 June 2020).

Besides the recommendations shown in the quotations above, suggestions of the participants also showcased their limited knowledge on the current facilities regarding the citizen participation initiatives.

“I think that I would be easier inclined to participate if I would be able to fill in an online questionnaire. Going to a community place to contribute often takes a lot more time” (Edwin, Research Interview, 11 June 2020).

As shown, one participant suggested a digitalized form of citizen participation. This would increase the likeliness of him participating. However, this form already exists.

In total, eight out of the twelve respondents concluded that a simple letter through the mailbox is currently not enough to motivate the majority of citizen to participate. Some indicated that the current form – a letter directed to each household in a neighbourhood – is sufficient, but only if citizens are already engaged and aware of their responsibility to participate. However, one respondent actually argued the opposite. She was one of the three who had already participated in one of the initiatives and argued that participation was very easy:

“They are making it already very easily accessible. You just have to look up the link you receive in the mail on the internet and then you can just fill in the questionnaire online. Maybe they could send it through the mail, but that could also end up as spam” (Eline, Research Interview, 21 June 2020).

4.2. Motivations for (not) participating

Codes used: motivations for (not) participating, community concern, connection to community, level of satisfaction, suggestions for improvement, busy with other activities, helpfulness, familiarity with citizen participation, responsibility to participate and suitability for participation.

There was a variety of different reasons for the (lacking) participation of the respondents. To begin with the overall level of satisfaction with their current living place. All respondents were highly satisfied with their current living situation and the facilities in their neighbourhood. Most struggled with finding any downsides and eventually came up with aspects that would probably be better for others in their neighbourhood, instead of for their own situation. However, the few specific improvements that were mentioned included the installation of a glass deposit nearby and a community place for loitering youth. Due to this overall high level of satisfaction, respondents did not see the necessity to contribute to these citizen participation initiatives.

A second re-occurring reason for the majority of the respondents as to why they were not motivated to participate was their lacking knowledge on the subject at hand. Not only because of the scarce moments of communication by the government, but also because of their own lack of investigation. This in combination with their lacking motivation to participate resulted in the participants' unwillingness to participate, as shown the quote of Maxime:

".... then I fall back on that knowledge aspect. because I do not immerse myself enough and do not know much about it to start with, I do not participate easily" (Maxime, Research Interview, 1 July, 2020).

A third motivation that was found for not participating was the concept of temporality. Several respondents argued that they did not feel the need to invest their time into a neighbourhood in which they would probably only live for a few more years. Respondent Pepijn showcased this for example by stating the following:

.... besides that, I am not very active with it, if something comes through the post about changes in the neighbourhood or when they ask me to express my voice, I have something like, this is such an

intermediary residence. It all does not really matter that much to me (Pepijn, Research Interview, 14 june, 2020).

Other interviewees responded in the similar lines of argumentation. For example, references were made to future scenario's when someone would have kids and would be more inclined to provide better safety measures for theirs and other's children (Edwin, Research interview, 2020).

The remaining group of motivations for not participating included a number of reasons, varying from busy work and social lives to being just moved into the new neighbourhood and simply not feeling the need to invest the time (Femke, Research interview, 2020; Maxime, Research Interview, 1 july, 2020; May, Research interview, 2020).

4.2.1. Connection with local community

The data from the interviews also showed that most respondents perceived themselves as barely connected with their community. Everyone was able to provide an adequate description of the residents, but only two considered themselves to be somewhat connect to their local community members, beyond the direct neighbours surrounding them:

“Well, I also clean porches, our own and the two next to it, so I am involved with all those people. Saying hello and having a little conversation with everyone from time to time. However, I don't know that many people beyond the flats around me” (Nolan, Research Interview, 17 june 2020).

And:

“Familiar in terms of my and other faces for other community members, yes. I pretty much know everyone around me. However, I am not very concerned with others' well-being. I do like to help the people around me whenever I can, but it is not like a carry this out throughout Scheveningen” (Datillio, Research Interview, 15 june, 2020).

The remaining ten other respondents told that they had little to no personal connection with the people from their surroundings. Some blamed it on their own lacking efforts (respondents Pepijn, Carsten, Eline and Femke), while others also experienced it as a missed opportunity and something that they actually would want to increase, as showcased in the following quote:

Yes, because I am actually quite interested in what kind of people are living around me. I believe that there are in fact a lot of other young adults within this neighbourhood, which I do not speak to at all at the moment. It is something I would like to see and do more (Mariani, Research Interview, 24 June, 2020).

The respondents' scores on the set of statements also indicated a similar level of connection with the community. Statement 9: 'I feel connected with the people from my local community' scored the lowest average score. Only three people marked it as slightly true or higher, while the other nine scored an average of 3.5 (In between 'mildly disagree' and 'neither disagree nor agree').

4.2.2. Community Concern

The level of community concern is perceived as higher, based on the results from both the interview and the questionnaire. Almost everyone (11 out of 12) agreed on the premise that it is important to aid others in need and the importance of creating an environment that is comfortable for all residents, but especially for the elderly within the neighbourhood (e.g. May, Research Interview, 13 July, 2020). However, some distinctions were made between the known and unknown people within their area. Offering assistance and thinking of the well-being of the ones that were familiar to them occurred more frequently than those that were unfamiliar.

In addition, the small majority of the respondents (7 out of 12) perceived themselves as helpful and stated that they would gladly help people within their surroundings when asked but were less inclined to offer their personal assistance on their own initiative. Examples of such statements are shown in the following:

... if it turns out that someone from the neighbourhood is struggling and that someone is looking for a person to do the shopping for him, then I would like to commit myself, but it is not that I would like to set up the initiatives myself (Pepijn, Research Interview, 14 June 2020).

Moreover, the high levels of community concern were also displayed through the score on the set of statements, especially through the results on statements (1), (2), (7) and (11). The average scores were 6.2, 6.1, 5.7 and 5.6 respectively, with no grade lower than a 4, showcasing the overall perceived importance of a well-functioning community. The argumentation

accompanied with the individuals scores provides us with a more in detail explanation, like for instance the answers of respondent Nolan on the first statement:

“...Yes, I think that is important. Especially because I am still young and other people are older and might be less capable of doing certain stuff. I think I agree, so a 6. I think it is important to help wherever necessary” (Nolan, Research Interview, 17 june, 2020).

Another example was found in the interview of respondent Leonore, who answered the following on the eleventh statement:

“I agree (6). Because I can be quite busy with how it goes with someone else, what do they think when I say this or do this and try to accept or take it into account. I believe I am quite the empathetic person” (Leonore, Research Interview, 24 june, 2020).

Altogether, most respondents (11 out of 12) showed high concern for their community members. Only one respondent, Eline, who was a bit more moderate in her formulation, argued that she was busy enough in her own life and with the close people around her and that she was less concerned for the other people in general (Eline, Research Interview, 21 june, 2020).

4.3. Involvement by the government

Codes used: positivity towards citizen participation, scepticism towards citizen participation, involvement by government, familiarity with citizen participation, level of satisfaction, suggestion for improvement and democratic process.

All twelve respondents argued in favour of the government’s intentions to include citizen into the decision-making process of local issues. Many (10 out of 12) stressed that the surrounding citizen had the vital knowledge of an area and that they should therefore be included in such a process. Municipality officials often do not know the specific bottlenecks of a neighbourhood. Citizen who live there do. Combining forces allows them to create the most desirable outcomes.

However, there were some nuance differences between the different answers. Some of the answers contained somewhat of preserved undertone and warned for the possibility of including ridiculous ideas created by the official and that it would be desirable to always include citizens so that they could follow the process and see if anything unwanted is happening. For example:

“...but on the other side, suppose official Pietertje, he may come up with something, but it may well be that some other residents disagree with his idea’s. so, it is nice that you can take a look at the whole process and see what is happening, and that you can give your opinion when necessary.

Other answers aimed more at the fact that it was unfortunate that, despite the fact that such good initiatives existed, so little use was made of them. Simply because people were not interested and engaged enough. Respondent Leonore made a comment regarding this:

... It is unfortunate that a lot of Dutch people have the feeling that they are not being involved by the government and the politics, despite the fact that there are clear opportunities to actually do so. I believe that it is important to proactively engage these citizens to stress their possibilities and opportunities so that they actually will start interacting” (Leonore, Research Interview, 24 june, 2020).

4.3.1. Suggestions for improvement

What everyone did show in abundance were the ideas of how things could be better and how they would probably be more inclined to participate. These varied work-intensive alternatives such as organizing local neighbourhood meetings combined with social activities, personal door-to-door conversations and the inclusion of citizen participation initiatives as mandatory or optional course within educations to more smaller adjustments to the current form, such a providing an emailed version of the invitation or a more personalized letter to each of the residents. Although ignoring the feasibility of each suggested improvement, it does showcase the more general point the respondents tried to make for improving the likeliness of their participation.

4.3.2. Scepticism towards process

Although the municipality’s efforts in trying to include the local residents were highly praised, the actual realisation of it was less admired by the respondents. Most participants stated that they had simply never really noticed any efforts from the municipality, besides the one occasional letter. In addition, three respondents (3 out of 12) even reacted sceptically and questioned the actual effort of the local officials in including their opinions. These are shown in the following quotes:

... Maybe because they are skipping our home because we are students. Or maybe they only take certain parts of the street more than others. We are precisely on the dividing line between social

rent and owner-occupied houses, perhaps they are skipping the social rental part building. I don't know" (Femke, Research Interview, 2 July, 2020),

"Yes, I do believe that the government is interested in the opinion of young adults, but I also think that when it comes down to it, the government is also very busy with the realisation of their own plans and that during the process to little time is taken for involving the opinions of these citizen. That step might be sometimes forgotten" (Leonore, Research Interview, 24 June, 2020).

And:

"...No not really. I rather believe that these governmental officials think in the lines of something like; 'let it be done by those scholars who have trained for it. Asking the opinions of young workers at the Albert Heijn would not get you much further'. Like, I have a normal job and a good brain, but not everyone in the neighbourhood is like that. So, I think they are more likely to go to the high-educatedl scholars who understand it, rather than asking the normal young people from the ward" (Datillio, Research Interview, 15 June, 2020).

More specifically, the level of involvement of young adults by the government was never explicitly noticed by any of the respondents. Many (8 out 12) argued that they felt involved by the government just as any other citizen, but not as young adults specifically. Also here, some respondents came up with suggestions how to improve the involvement of young adults specifically, for instance:

"No, and I think that the government could pay a little more attention to it. Now we are part of the citizen in general and in my opinion that creates an attitude of: well, I am a citizen and this is not specifically aimed at me, so well. Someone else will do it. But if you demarcate that target group and send a more personal letter with a somewhat easier tone or more youthful tone. Then you could express the concern of the importance of participating and why it also concerns young adults" (Ali, Research Interview, 12 June, 2020).

Or:

"I have the feeling that, as a young adult, I am totally not involved. I have not heard anything about it. ... I think that is because of the municipality's way of approaching us. I don't think many young adults would see or respond to a letter through the mail" (Mariani, Research Interview, 24 June, 2020).

4.4. Characteristics of the respondents

Codes used: level of agreeableness, level of conscientiousness, level of openness to experiences, level of wanting to meet new people, level of empathy for others, level of helpfulness, level of community concern and level of protectiveness

As already mentioned, the questionnaire included in the interview posed statements that were more directly aimed at determining the characteristics of each of the respondents. The statements included the degree of helpfulness, empathy, protectiveness and aversion of injustice, desire to meet new people and make new friends, openness to new experiences and the level of agreeableness and conscientiousness. The most frequently scored number was six (6 = I agree). Only a single one and three twos were given, by two different people, but by two statements that were both aimed at the interpersonal orientation aspect. Those two statements had also the overall lowest average amongst all participants. A full overview is shown in the fourth appendix.

Overall, most participants showed similar results. Their perceived levels of empathy and levels of agreeableness were very similar across participants, with only a one-point difference at most. In addition, also the levels of studiousness and the desire to acquire new skills (statement 4) were closely together, with one exception (Respondent 1). Striking was the fact that the score on statement 10 (seeking new experiences) were more fluctuated, even though they seem close related to statement 4.

The statements that scored the lowest also had the largest differences in scores between respondents. However, these are the only two statements that did not receive a single seven and only four sixes in total. The reasoning that was given for the scores indicated that little effort was currently being made for it and that most participants did not desired to do so at this moment in time.

Altogether, the results from the statements showed various leads for motivating young adults to participate more in citizen participation initiatives. Although it only were twelve interviews, a relatively large number of young adults apparently attached great importance to a good community and to trying out and learning new skills. These elements could be used to make young people more aware of the benefits of participating. These and other recommendations will be discussed in more detail in the analysis.

5. Analysis

The analysis presented used the data from chapter 4: Results to compare it with the theoretical framework presented in chapter 2. It thereby was able to test whether the preliminary hypotheses were rejected or accepted. In doing so, it allowed us to determine whether the current literature was also sufficient enough for explaining the current behaviour of these young adults.

5.1. Overall appreciation of citizen participation

As mentioned in the literature review, one of the benefits of citizen participation was its ability to produce more public-preferred outcomes and thereby increase citizens' trust in the government and overall enhancement of the effectiveness and efficiency of public services (Irvin & Standbury, 2004; Fung 2015; Seltzer & Mahmoudi, 2013). The data from the interviews showed that young adults also agreed with this line of argumentation. According to them, citizen participation – when executed correctly – allowed citizen to interact and collaborate with governmental officials. Providing more detailed knowledge of the current situation and possible problems of a neighbourhood allowed them to co-produce solutions that best fit the current needs of the local community.

Allowing citizen into the policy formulation and implementation process did not only produce better solutions, but also enabled the more distrustful citizens to check whether the appointed governmental official is doing the right thing, according to the results. This sense of control increased the level of trust and thereby the overall knowledge and appreciation specific project and citizen participation in general (Hibbing & Theis-Morse, 2002; John et al., 2011). These claims were also supported by the data retrieved from the interviews. Respondents mentioned that by opening up the policy formulation and implementation to residents, the chance of undesirable plans being pushed through were minimize. The control of the community as a group would enable them to validate the plans of the officials and make adjustments wherever necessary.

Another appreciated aspect of citizen participation in its current form, was the availability of the online participation tools. Although not known for everyone, respondents who did use it emphasized on the high levels of convenience and ease of using it. Those not familiar with the online tools even suggested the use of such online alternatives for increasing the likeliness of participation of young adults.

Based on the interpretation of these first results, one could argue that these young adults appreciate and recognize the purpose and mission of these citizen participation initiatives. Collaborating with citizens is essential for finding the right solution.

But still, despite the fact that young adults also recognize this, they often still do not participate in these types of projects. How is that possible? Well, the facilities for properly organizing these types of projects are there, (e.g. online participation alternatives, open info meetings, easy understandable communication) but the young adults' sense of responsibility is not.

The results showed that, in particular, young adults perceived themselves as insufficiently informed about the civic participation projects in the neighbourhood in general, but also specifically on how they could participate, who they would help and why their contribution would be important. Blame was partially put on the perceived lacking attention of the government and partially on their own lack of interest to be more engaged with their own neighbourhood. Altogether, the awareness and responsibility to act upon their expressed community concern showed to be very limited. This is evident from both the personality test and the interview questions that were administered. The young adults have shown their concern for a good, pleasant and safe functioning community, but the step to actively contribute to this turned out to be missing. They would be able to contribute more actively, but that would be more likely to happen if they were approached personally, which is something that does not happen yet.

One of the consequences of the limited knowledge of young adults on the one hand and the insufficient involvement of the group on the other, is the development of more sceptical thoughts among these young people. Although not present among each of the respondents, it appeared that doubts had arose on the implementation of the citizen participation initiatives. Examples such as 'purposely not including certain houses', 'forgetting to involve people because of being too busy with other things' or 'only inviting people who have studied for it' showcased the underlying concerns that affect the trustworthiness of these citizen participation initiatives and thereby possibly influence the young adult's interest in and likeliness of participation. This could have a negative influence on the further knowledge gathering on this subject, making young adults even less aware of the different components of citizen participation, which in turn may lead to an even more sceptical attitude towards other citizen participation projects. This vicious circle of decreasing interest and increasing scepticism may further negatively influence the likeliness of the participation of young adults (Henn & Foard, 2012).

However, these consequences were not directly visibly present within the results of this set of respondents. Although suggestions for improvements were made, none of the participants did not participate based on these sceptical attitudes and thoughts. Nevertheless, it is evident that such ambiguities in regard to the citizen participation initiatives should be minimized at all time by providing people a transparent and complete form of information regarding the citizen participation project.

Looking back at the theoretical framework, we can state that the first hypothesis can be accepted. The theoretical assumption of “*Young adults are not engaging in citizen participation initiatives because they do not feel involved by the government*”, is found to be true. The limited involvement of the government has partly ensured that these young adults were not familiar enough with the concepts and responsibilities of citizen participation and were thereby not motivated to participate.

Many of the respondents were able to come up with appropriate recommendations for improvements. The most prominent and suitable adjustment was the personalisation of communication means. Directing the invitations for participation on the individual instead of the house numbers was suggested to increase the likeliness of participation. It would arguable make them feel that their specific contributions would be of significant importance and that it would be necessary in order to find the desired end result.

The effectiveness of this personal rapprochement has already been proven by previous literature. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Green & Gerber (2005) already discovered that the personal approach within local community groups has had a positive impact on the levels of participation. People within these group tended to be persuaded to contribute more regularly because of the given acknowledgements of their personal knowledge and skills. Creating this sense of indispensability and involvement made them participate more often. Apparently, these finding do not only apply for those members of the community groups, but also to the larger part of young adults within the neighbourhoods.

5.2. The interpersonal motivation of young adults

The second hypothesis was proven to be more difficult to accept nor reject. Its premise, being: “*Young adults are not engaging in citizen participation initiatives because of the absence of other young adults*” seemed to have some truth, but not as clear-cut as it originally was formulated.

None of the respondents gave the absence of other young adults as reason for their lacking participation. Those reasons consisted only of the municipality's failing efforts in involvement, their own lack of interest and knowledge, the concept of temporality of living and their overcrowded agendas that made them unable to participate.

However, when the scenario was presented in which other young adults also participated, it seemed that several of the respondents would become more inclined to participate. Getting into contact with people of their own age category, it turned out to have a lowering threshold for some. But on the contrary, other results from the questionnaire indicated that these young adults were actually not looking to build new friendship and relation within their neighbourhood. Their lives were filled with diverse groups of friends and simply did not seek to gain new ones within their neighbourhoods. The claims of Omoto and Martino (2000) and Marta & Pozzi (2008) in regard to the desire to create new friendships as a reason for participation did not hold. Apparently, some of these young adults like to be in the presence of people with similar demographic characteristics, because they can identify with them more and therefore feel more comfortable participating in these types of projects.

Others, on the other hand, said that the presence of other young adults would not influence their decision in whether they would participate or not. Some even argued that it would make them even less likely to participate, precisely because their demographic group would already be represented in such projects.

Altogether, the evidence in favour or against the hypothesis is divided. The presence of other young adults within these projects could be an incentive for some to engage more in participation, but this alone is certainly not the panacea that citizen participation needs to increase the involvement of young adults.

Speaking in terms of involvement, what however did seem to positively influence the majority of the respondents, was the effect of the conversation had taken place after the interview. By having a one-on-one conversation on the subject of citizen participation with someone of the same age, caused respondents to conclude that they were more interested afterwards and that they believed that similar conversations with someone of the same demographical category could work in establishing a more conscious and willing attitude towards such projects. However, it must be said that all respondents had to some extent a personal relationship with the researcher, with the result that such statements as mentioned above are strongly influenced by the relationship bias. It is impossible to conclude whether the same results had emerged as equally strong with completely unknown people.

The third hypothesis also concerned one of the interpersonal orientations that influence the likeliness of participation of young adults. The level of community concern is thought to be highly correlated with those who had previously participated. This does not only account for young adults who already participated, but also for the public in general (Reeder, 2001; Omoto & Snyder, 2010; Davis, 2003). However, due to the extreme low levels of participation of young adults, the opposite was expected to be the case for the large majority of this age group. This line of argumentation resulted the following hypothesis: *Young adults are not participation in these citizen participation initiatives, because they show relatively low concern for their local community.*

Results from both the interview and the questionnaire indicated that this did not seem to be the case exactly. The respondents did show a degree of community concern. For instance, by indicating how important they felt it was for everyone in their local community to feel comfortable within their current living area. In addition, many expressed the importance of helping others when asked, for example with the grocery initiative for elderly that had risen during the lock-down restrictions at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, the lacking participation was not partly due to the levels of community concern, but rather because of the levels of connection and involvement with local community members. While everyone could give a solid description of what kind of people lived in the neighbourhood, only a few could say that they were to some degree familiar and involved with people from their neighbourhood, beyond their immediate neighbours. Because of this lack of connection and involvement, the respondents were not fully aware of the challenges remaining within the neighbourhood and how their contribution could be of assistance. This, in combination with their limited knowledge of the subject and their perceived limited involvement of the government, ensured that these young adults often did not commit themselves to their neighbourhood, despite their explicit references on the importance of having a pleasant and safe neighbourhood.

Reasons for their very limited connection with the community members included three broad concepts, being: the temporality of the living location, perceived demographical difference between them and the other residents and their busy lives in which there was very limited time to invest in these community relationships. The temporality of living is one of the more logical reasons, as young adults move homes relatively quickly and are therefore less inclined to actively contribute to a community in which they would only live for a couple of years. The other two reasons were less substantiated and more based on intuition and prejudices in relation to the community characteristics and the efforts it takes to get involved. Ultimately,

this again boiled down to the limited knowledge on citizen engagement and the sense of responsibility of these young adults to participate.

Altogether, this small but important nuance difference enabled the third hypothesis to be rejected. It has allows us to not only grasp a better understanding of the levels of community concern perceived by the young adults, but it also provided us with an even stronger support for the previously stated fact that the reason for the lacking motivations of participations are partly due to the fact that young adults are insufficiently aware of the concepts and responsibilities of engaging in these citizen participation initiatives.

5.3. The characteristics of young adults

Another element that was expected to influence the likeliness of participation were the set of characteristics that a person did or did not possess. Research on civic volunteerism has produced a set of personality characteristics that defined the majority of participating volunteers (Marta & Pozzi, 2008). Omoto & Snyder (2010) translated these characteristics into the spectrum of predicting broader forms of civic engagement and concluded a strong relation between the levels of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and the likelihood of a person participating. The hypothesis related to these key-characteristics was formulated by a similar method as the previous three hypotheses, in which the opposite of the literature was chosen to explain the lacking participation of young adults (instead of actual participation). This produced the following hypothesis: *Young adults are not engaging in citizen participation initiatives, because they do not share the same characteristics of an average volunteer.*

Testing this hypothesis consisted of determining whether the three characteristics of Omoto & Snyder (2010) were in fact absent with the respondents. In order to stay as close to literature as possible, a similar set of statements related to these three personality concepts were used to determine the level of similarity with the respondents.

The first sub-hypothesis stated that young adults did not consider themselves to be extraverts. The results however showed no clear sign of such expectation. One respondent considered herself to be somewhat introverted. This became apparent, among other things, because she said that she felt that she would want to step out of her comfort zone more and wanted to get more familiar with her neighbourhood, but that this step was often still too big (Maxime, Research Interview, 1 July, 2020). Other respondents indicated that the level of extraversion had not to do with their lack of participation. Many others considered themselves to be outgoing, open to new experiences and to have no problems with making friends within

their personal lives. Altogether, the level of extraversion has no relation with the lacking participation of young adults, allowing us to reject the first sub-hypothesis.

The second sub-hypothesis concerned the level of conscientiousness. According to our theory, young adults did not consider themselves to be relatively conscientious. They were relatively self-focussed and not conscious of their responsibilities and duties as a human being. However, when compared to the actual results, it actually seemed not to be the case. Despite the fact that no comparison could be made with other age groups to determine the ratio, the majority of respondents considered themselves to be quite conscientious. Although the term itself sometimes needed some further explanation, many respondents made valid arguments to why they perceived themselves as such. Respondents For example mentioned: Pursuing your own standards and values of having no difficulty in standing behind those choices, being burdened by not being able to uphold your responsibilities or being consciously aware of the choices you make and thinking about the why of your action. Altogether, the young adults questioned in this research showed significant evidence for being conscientious and thereby given us sufficient data to reject the second sub-hypothesis as well.

The third and final sub-hypothesis was aimed at the level of agreeableness towards unknown people. The results show - similar to the first sub-hypothesis – no clear correlation between the level of agreeableness and likelihood of participation of young adults. Despite the respondents having many different personalities, they all considered themselves to be generally agreeable towards most people. There was, however, a difference between the known and unknown people, in which the degree towards the unknown was somewhat lower. The respondent that scored themselves the lowest on this subject was actually one of the few that had participated in one of these citizen participation initiatives (Eline, Research Interview, 21 June 2020). Making the assumption that voluntary participants are likely to be agreeable and thus – due to their extremely low level of participation- young adults not, seemed to be even more questionable. Others, for example the person who knew the least on citizen participation and was somewhat sceptical of the process, showed high levels of agreeableness towards the unknown. She even mentioned that getting in contact, helping and being open-minded towards unfamiliar people often gave much more satisfaction (Femke, Research Interview, 2 July 2020). Altogether, no support for this third and final sub-hypothesis was found in the results of the interviews.

So, on the basis of the three rejected sub-hypotheses, it can therefore be stated that the hypothesis about the characteristics of young adults in regard to the likeliness of their participation can be rejected. Although previous research has shown that the participants often

contained these characteristics, it shows that it does not necessarily have to mean that the non-participants do not. This makes the predictive nature of the Omoto & Snyder (2010) model less strong and suitable for estimating future participation of young people. There are apparently a number of complex alternative variables that have a stronger influence on whether or not young adults would participate.

6. Conclusion

The conclusion chapter will summarize and reflect on the key findings in providing the answer to the research question. It thereby also discusses the limitations of this research in particular. In addition, it will also make some suggestions for future research and recommendations.

6.1. Answering the research question

The goal of this research was to develop a better understanding to why young adults were hardly participating in citizen participating initiatives. Current literature has mainly investigated the potential of citizen participation in achieving higher level of citizen inclusion but appeared to have insufficiently researched the actual realisation of it. The academics interested in underexposed field of research mainly conducted qualitative researchers to showcase others that this potential is often not realised in practice. Especially young adults, one of the largest groups of society, fails to engage in these citizen participation initiatives and are thereby largely underrepresented in the decision-making process (Michels, 2011).

Rather than showcasing the level of underrepresentation, this research was mainly focussed at understanding the reasons for their lacking engagement. It did so by trying to provide an answer for the following research question: *Why are young adults not engaging in citizen participation initiatives?*

The research conducted twelve in-depth interviews with young adults (18-25 years old) from the Hague. There was both an equal distribution in gender, as well as for the different level of education. In addition, several different cultures were included, due to their expected influence on the persons level of empathy, according to prior research.

Results indicated that young adults were largely unknown with the concepts of citizen participation and the responsibilities and opportunities accompanied with it. There was some level of familiarity based on occasional letters and through educational courses, but only to a limited extend. Many argued that if they had known more about it, the likeliness of participation would have probably increased. Reasons for their limited knowledge was partly put on their own lack of efforts in getting more involved. However, the bigger part of the blame was put on the government and their insufficient efforts in trying to reach out and inform more people. Current efforts, like the occasional letter, were perceived to be outdated and unappealing methods of invitation. They were deemed to be too unpersonal and unattractive, making the young adults less inclined to make an effort. Suggestions like the personalization of invitation towards the individual instead of the house number or the contacting and informing through

mail and social media were thought to be effective alternatives that could potentially reach more young adults.

Also, young adults seemed to be very disconnected with their local community members. Despite the fact that the results did show some degree of community concern, it turned out to be more difficult to concretize and act upon when no connection existed between them and their neighbourhood members. However, it must be said that this was not necessarily something that the majority of the young adults were looking for or missing.

Another reason for their lacking participation was the temporality of their current living situation. Many young adults indicated that they expected to live in this current location for only few more years. This made them less inclined to invest their time into the quality of their neighbourhood. In several cases, it was mentioned that later, when the person would live in a place for a longer period of time and when they might have children, they would probably become more likely to participate. This would be because they expected to be able to enjoy from the benefits of their participation longer.

Contrary to what was expected, the characteristics of the young adults did not appear to determine their lacking participation. Young adults seemed to be plenty conscientious, agreeable and extravert, while still not wanted to participate. Other, more concrete variables as the ones described earlier have proven to be more suitable determinants for their lacking participation.

6.2. Suggestions for improvement

Instead of just criticizing, the young adults interviewed in this research also made various suggestions on how to improve the process with regard to approaching more young adults. For instance, the government could significantly improve their ways of communication. In particular, the use of a digital invitation and the personalization of these invitations were commonly suggested. Also, the local government should focus more on raising awareness on the concept of citizen participation itself. Letting the young adults become more aware of their responsibility and the possibility to participate would be essential if they wanted to increase their level of engagement. Combine this with some sort of informal social gathering within the neighbourhoods and you will have a recipe for success, according to some of the respondents.

6.3. Limitations and future research

Although the results of this research have given us valuable insights, it should not be forgotten that this set-up also contained some major flaws. For instance, multiple researcher biases. The researcher influenced the research in several ways. To begin with on the specific respondents that were interviewed in this research. Due to COVID-19, all respondents were collected from the personal network of the researcher. These relationships undoubtedly influenced the answers given by the respondents, thereby seriously negatively affecting the reliability, repeatability and trustworthiness of the research.

In addition, there was also a researcher bias due to the fact that the researcher himself was part of the target population. Undoubtedly, certain assumptions were unconsciously included in preparation of the research and research questions. And although efforts were made to stay as objective as possible, it was inevitable that these parts of the research have also been unconsciously influenced.

A third weakness of this research design was the fact that the results cannot be generalized at all for the larger population. Although the twelve participants often gave similar impressions, it cannot be said that this would be the case for all young adults. With such small numbers, it may well all have been a coincidence. It would therefore also be advisable to conduct a larger quantitative study based on the results of these findings. For example, it could be tested whether these results also apply to the entire population of young adults.

Other possible avenues for future research would be quasi-experimental studies. The young adults from this study have provided sufficient suggestions that would have made them more likely to participate. A municipality or district of city could start implementing these recommendations to test whether such improvements would actually have an effect on the participation rate of young adults. In this way, the ungeneralizable and questioning reliability of these results could still be of valuable use for understanding the motivations of young adults.

Finally, this research could also be carried out in other cities, so that the differences in municipality approaches can be compared to see where further benefits can be gained. In this way, the best practices can be shared with each other in order to eventually increase the participation of young adults.

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