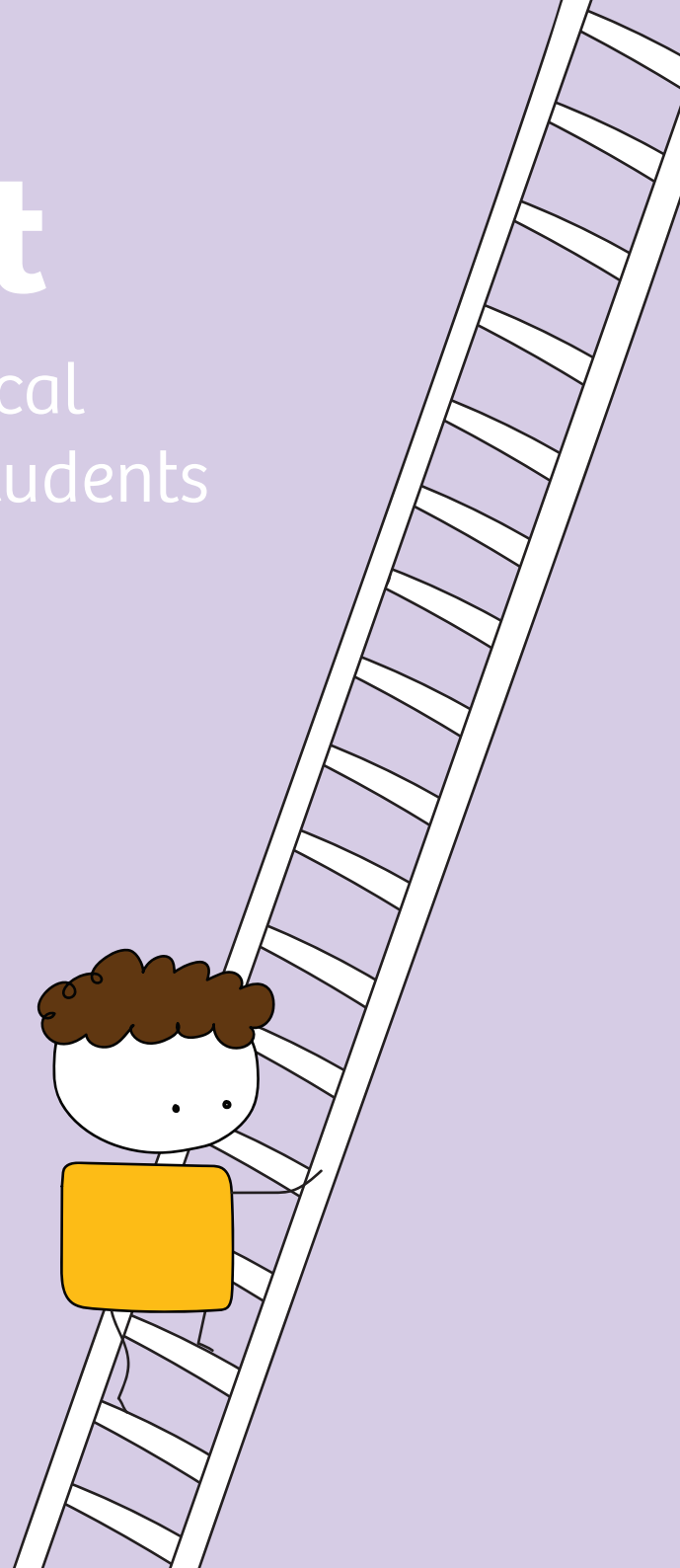
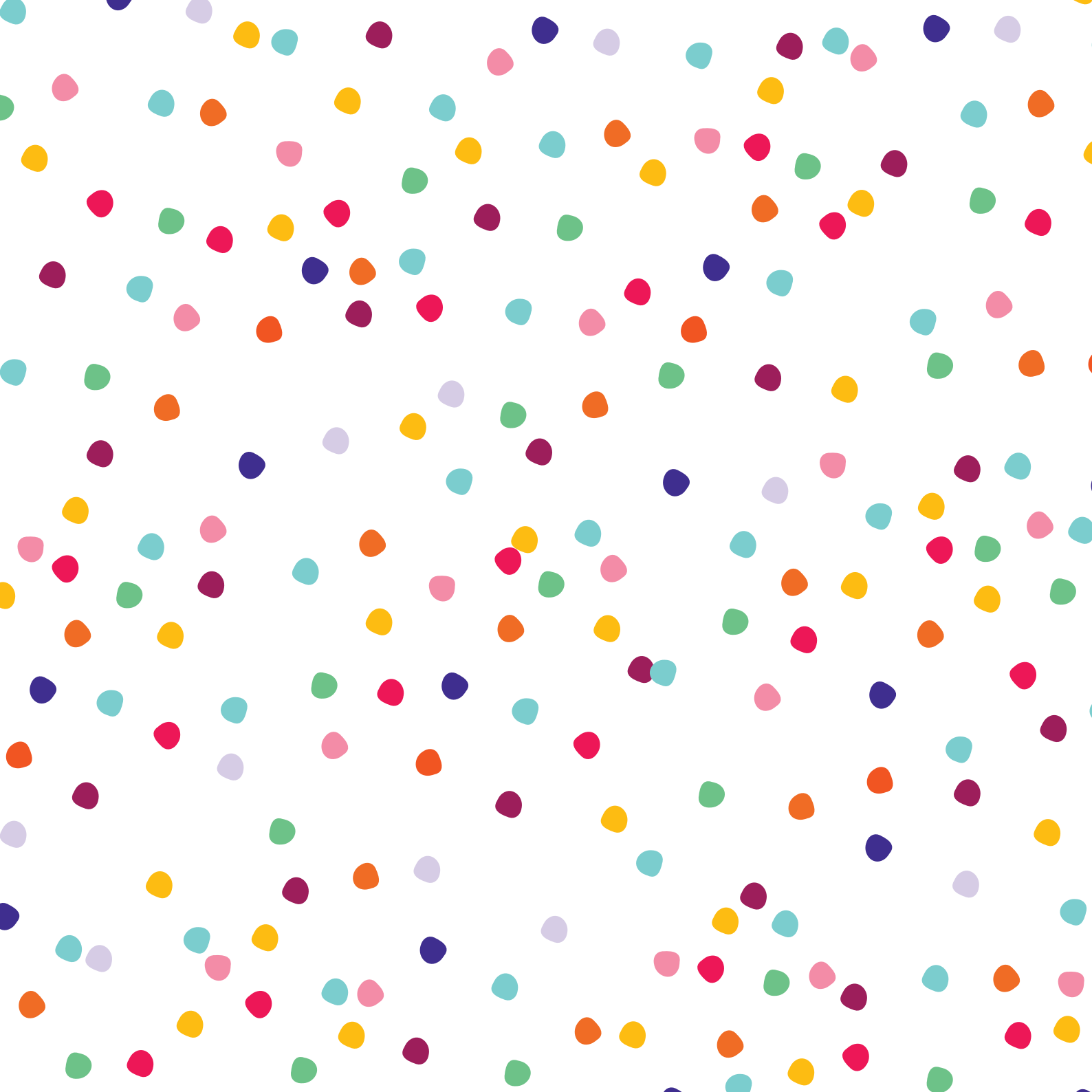


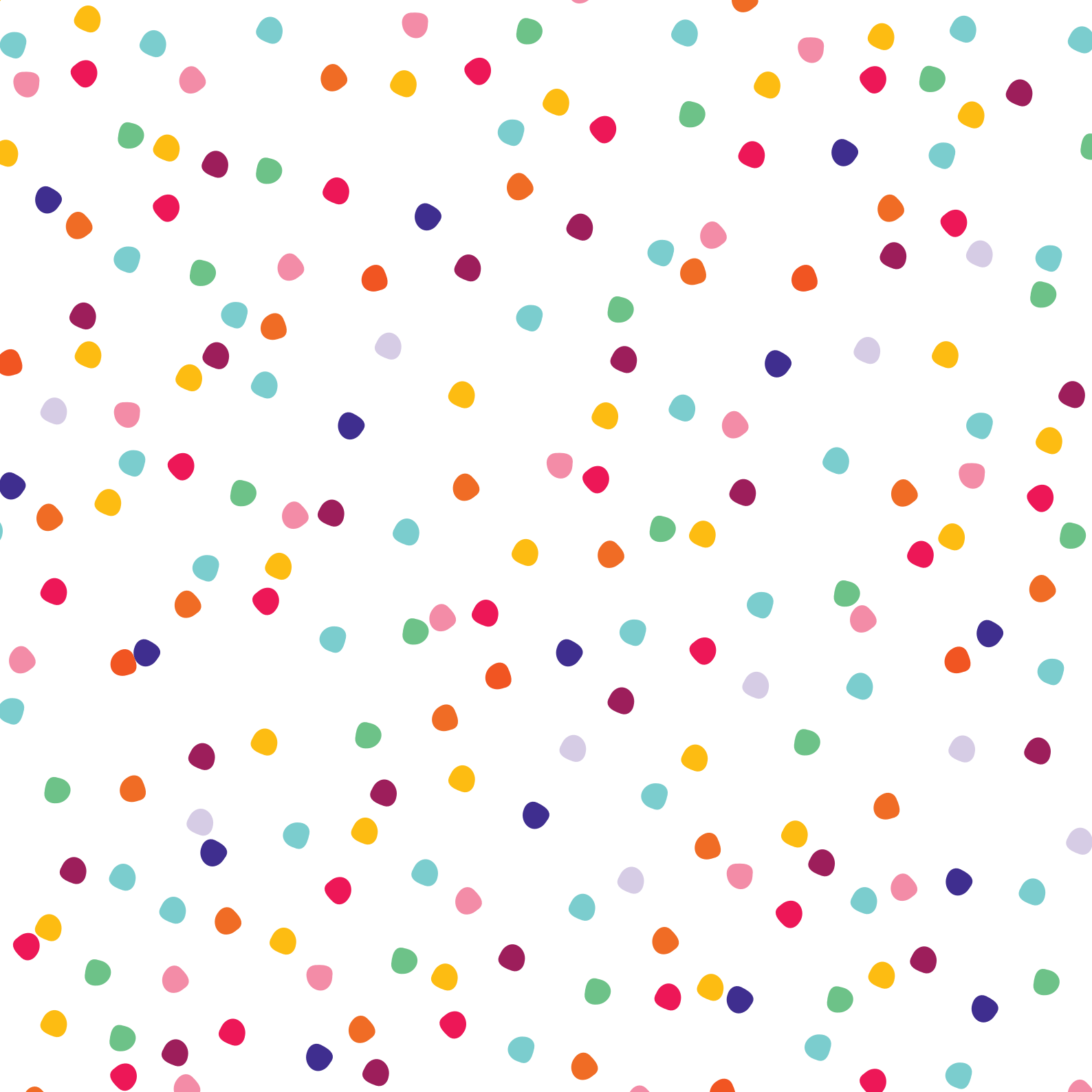
Rake Praat

Designing for the political participation of mbo-students

MASTER THESIS
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Master thesis

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“Everything is political”

- Paul Krugman, Nobel prize-winning economist



Fig. 2. The co-creation toolkit that is part of the design of Rake Practice.

Executive summary

Political participation of a group representative of society is essential for the legitimacy of a democratic system. But adolescents are not heard sufficiently and receive too little attention in contemporary democracy. Their political participation is very low and not representative for their age group, as politically engaged adolescents often enjoy formal education, do not come from vulnerable groups and have positive role models at home or at school. In the participatory society, which has become the Dutch norm, participation has become vital. Differences in level of participation can result in inequalities for groups who do not sufficiently bring up their concerns. The corona crisis has exposed this is the case for mbo-students.

Involving this group of underrepresented, under-involved and not-heard mbo-students is imperative to achieve the equality necessary for a legitimate democratic system. Increasing their participation will contribute to more social justice.

Despite efforts by the government, the political participation of mbo-students does not appear to be increasing.

The lack of participation of mbo-students is a complex problem with many causes. Mbo-students are incredibly diverse in age, ethnicity, interests, and so on, and 'the' mbo-student does not exist. There is a gap between politicians and mbo-students, and the current participation system does not fit students' needs. Furthermore, they have difficulties formulating opinions autonomously and do not know how to translate these into action.

The proposed design intervention is the concept *Rake Praat*. The process of Participatory Budgeting (where a municipality allocates a section of the annual budget to be spent by citizens) has been altered to more accurately facilitate the needs and wishes of mbo-students. Their experiences form the foundation for the process. With the use of integrated Creative Problem-Solving techniques, students and politicians define potential projects together.

With four co-creation sessions, each with its own focus, mbo-students and politicians navigate together from problem to solution. A session plan can be designed by the municipality and schools with the use of the Activity Cards. These describe different types of (creative) activities, allowing the participants to go through the different stages of the creative process: diverging, reverging, and converging. The activities are shaped so that the creative facilitation does not require experts, allowing students and politicians to go through the process autonomously.

The design makes creative problem-solving more accessible to non-designers, providing policymakers and politicians with the means to shape contacts with mbo-students. Simultaneously, the toolkit gives students the opportunity to express their views directly to people who can make a difference. This is necessary for both groups to understand each other better.

**“I have never tried that before,
so I think I should definitely
be able to do that.”**

- Pippi Longstocking

Dear reader,

Throughout this project, I had the support of many wonderful people and before we get into the content of this report, I would like to take a moment to thank them.

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisory team. Annemiek and Theresa, I have immensely enjoyed this rollercoaster ride with you. Thank you for your positivity, your constructive criticism and the freedom you have given me to pursue my passion and complete this project exactly as I imagined it. Your expertise and support has been of great value to me throughout the project. Annemiek, thank you for teaching me it is okay that I like to think. And as my mind likes to wonder, I owe special thanks to my coach Theresa, for keeping me focussed on the relevant and important things (and for 'not expecting me to become a neuroscientist in five months').

I would also like to thank everyone who collaborated with me on the project and showed me the way through the complex context: Maria Kefayati, Joanna Thijs, the Nationale Jeugdraad, JOB mbo and, of course, the students of the ROC Mondriaan Delft. Your insights and stories have been invaluable.

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Mom and dad, for supporting me and for providing a non-designer perspective when I needed it. I love you.

Charlotte and Jetske, who have been there for me ever since we met in the OWEE. You have shaped my time in Delft in ways you can't even imagine. Thank you for dusting me off after every low, and celebrating even the tiniest of successes with me. Time for balloons and cake!

The 'Eitjes', Joanne and Diana, who made me feel so at home and like I belonged at IDE. You made my study switch feel like a warm bath. I can't imagine my life without you anymore.

And last but not least, the Lijst Bèta family, for sparking my interest in politics and the great distractions you have provided during my studies (but especially during my thesis). I would not be who I am today without you.

Thank you.

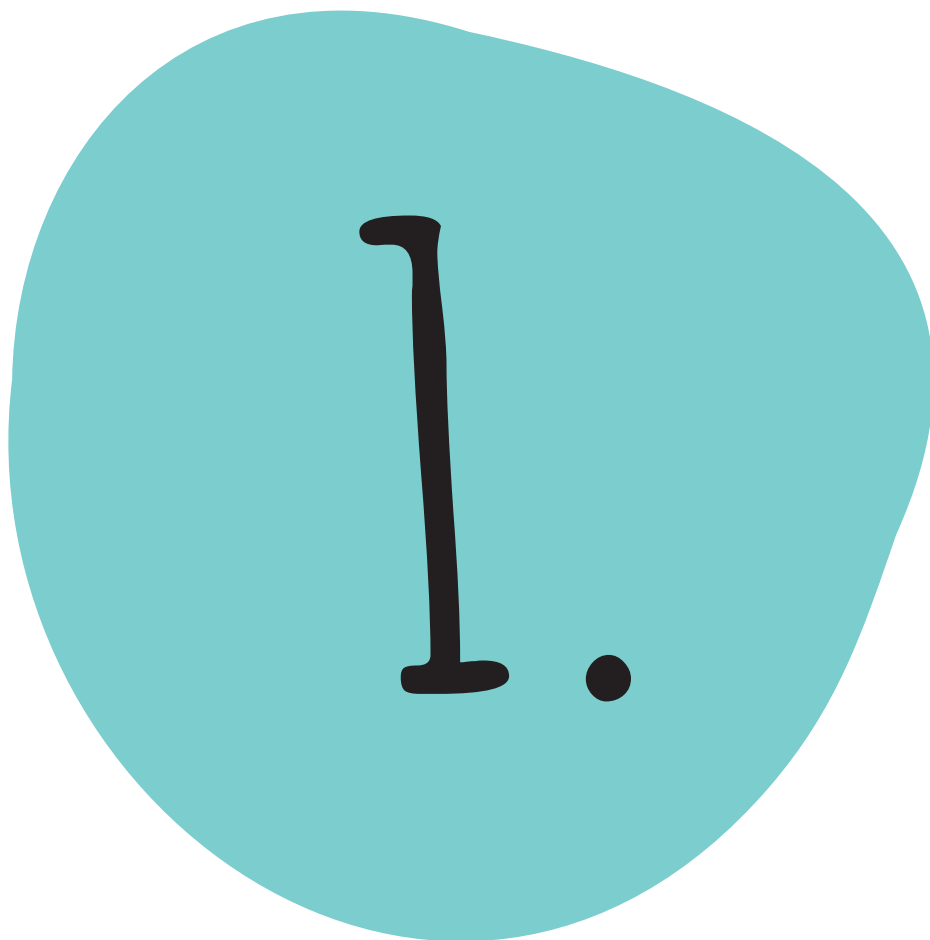
Marijn van Steen

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Table of contents

Executive Summary	7	Chapter 5 - Ideation & Design	92
Preface	9	5.1 Initial ideation	95
Chapter 1 - Introduction	12	5.2 Co-creation session	96
1.1 The participatory society	15	5.3 Ideation on contact	100
1.2 Adolescents & democracy	19	5.4 Iteration 1 - Shaping the contact	101
1.3 Involving mbo students is crucial for society	20	5.5 Iteration 2 - Merge existing processes	105
1.4 The government knows they have to act	24	5.6 Iteration 3 - Focus on co-creation	110
1.5 Existing initiatives to stimulate youth participation	26	Chapter 6 - Concept	112
1.6 Conclusion	29	6.1 Concept overview	115
Chapter 2 - Project definition	30	6.2 Rake Praat process	116
2.1 Problem statement	32	6.3 Co-creation toolkit	121
2.2 Project scope	34	6.4 Empathise cards	123
2.3 Project goal	39	Chapter 7 - Evaluation	128
2.4 Project approach	40	7.1 Evaluation approach	130
Chapter 3 - Empathise	46	7.2 Evaluation empathise cards	134
3.1 Research approach	48	7.3 Feedback on toolkit	136
3.2 Diversity	58	7.4 Results test context session	143
3.3 Discrimination & oppression	59	7.5 Conclusion	149
3.4 Transformation from child to adult	62	Chapter 8 - Limitations & Recommendations	152
3.5 Connected to society	64	8.1 Limitations	154
3.6 Mental capacity	67	8.2 Recommendations	156
3.7 The gap between mbo-students & the government	70	References	158
3.8 Conclusion	77		
Chapter 4 - Define	82		
4.1 Possible design directions	84		
4.2 Chosen design direction	86		
4.3 Design principles	88		



Introduction

This chapter describes the initial problem and the project's relevance. It introduces the context of the project and paints a picture of the status quo regarding youth participation.

- 1.1 The participatory society
- 1.2 Adolescents & democracy
- 1.3 Involving mbo-students is crucial for society
- 1.4 The government knows they have to act
- 1.5 Existing initiatives to stimulate youth participation
- 1.6 Conclusion

1.1 The participatory society

Political participation (e.g., voting, protesting, following the news, or attending sessions hosted by the municipality) of a group which is representative of the population is essential for the legitimacy of a democratic system (Herbots & Elchardus, 2010), as equality is a key principle of democracy (Kimber, 1989; Diamond & Morlino, 2005). Political participation allows citizens to voice their concerns and desires, and is essential in the feedback loop regarding legislation and policies (Crane et al., 2004; Herbots & Elchardus, 2010). This allows them to influence government priorities and processes (Slijkhuis, 2021).

In the past decade, Dutch society has shifted from a welfare state (verzorgingsstaat) to a participatory society (Nijdam, 2020). In this participatory society, citizens are expected to take responsibility for their own lives. They should not only perform their duties, but also actively use their rights. Tasks and responsibilities have shifted from government to society (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2012).

1.1.1 Knowing vs. doing

With this shift towards a more self-reliance based system, political participation has become increasingly important (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2012). Although citizens might want to take this responsibility to participate, that does not mean they are always able to do so under all circumstances (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, 2017).

In traditional policymaking, the government assumes a rationalistic view of citizens (figure 1, Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, 2017). There is a strong focus on *denkvermogen* (the ability to understand). If the citizen has the right knowledge, the right actions will be the result. It assumes everyone has sufficient mental capabilities to be self-reliant. This aligns with the views of the participatory society, as it places the responsibility to know the right things and to make the right choice with the citizens.

RATIONALISTIC

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT MENTAL CAPACITIES:

- EVERYONE HAS SUFFICIENT MENTAL CAPACITY
- EXCEPTION: A FEW VULNERABLE PEOPLE
- FOCUS ON 'DENKVERMOGEN'

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT BEHAVIOUR:

- KNOWING LEADS TO DOING
- SELF-CONTROL IS UNLIMITED

REALISTIC

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT MENTAL CAPACITIES:

- NORMAL DISTRIBUTION (SOME SCORE HIGH, SOME LOW)
- GROUP OF (VERY) VULNERABLE PEOPLE
- ATTENTION FOR 'DOENVERMOGEN' AS WELL

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT BEHAVIOUR:

- KNOWING DOESN'T ALWAYS LEAD TO DOING
- LIMITED SELF-CONTROL

Fig. 1: Rationalistic and realistic perspectives, adapted from the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR, 2017)

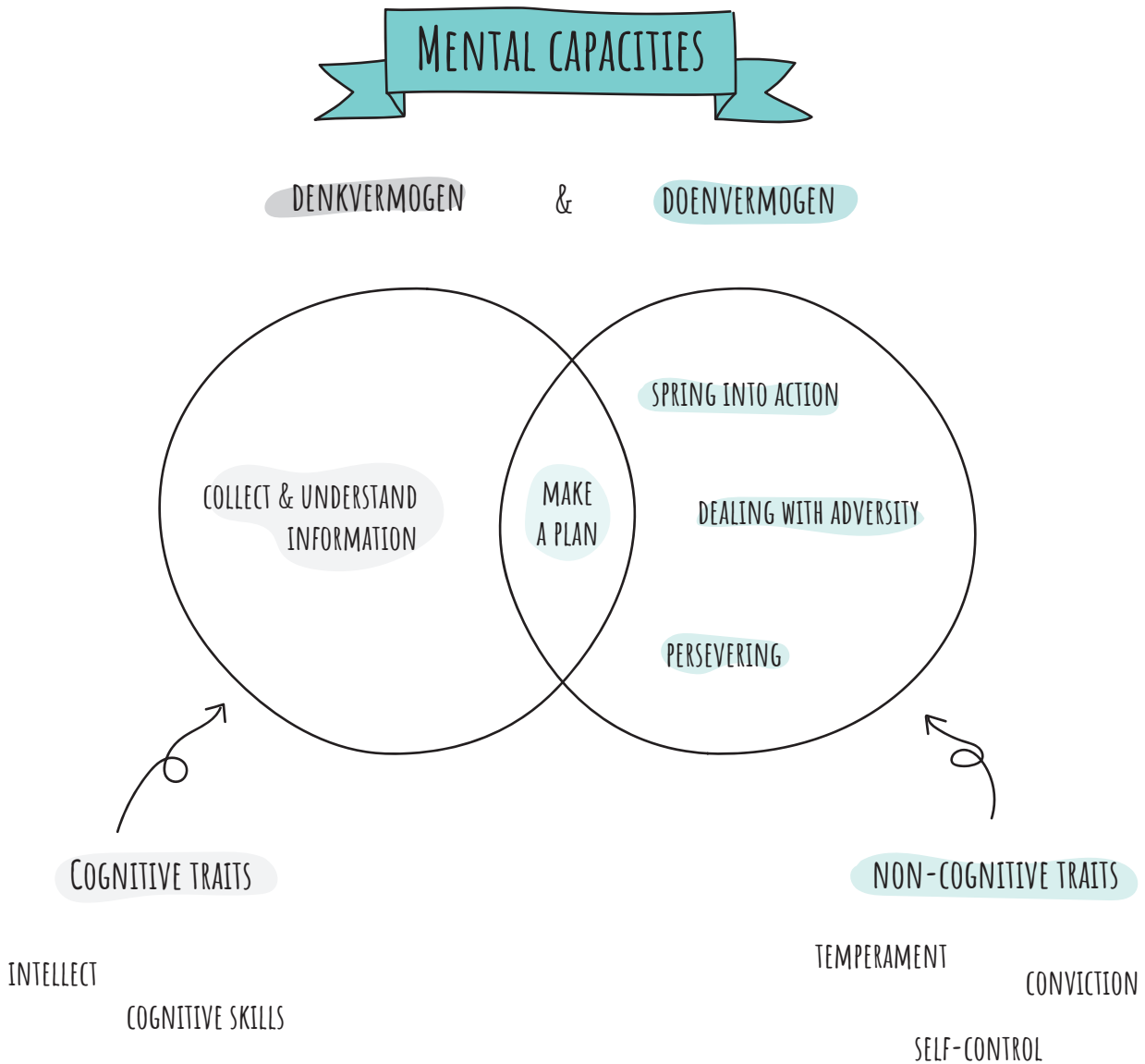


Fig. 2: Denkvermogen and doenvermogen, adapted from the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR, 2017)

In practice, this turns out to be an unrealistic perspective, as behavioural sciences show that people's ability to judge information and make rational choices is limited (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, 2017). Knowing something does not mean being able to do it. By focussing not only on cognitive abilities, but on non-cognitive abilities as well, a more realistic perspective can be created (figure 1, Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, 2017).

The Scientific Council for Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid) makes the distinction between mental capacities as follows (see figure 2):

Denkvermogen is the mental capacity to collect and judge information, and draw relevant conclusions from it. This requires cognitive skills, such as intelligence, memory and abstract thinking.

Doenvermogen (the ability to act) refers to the mental capacity to make plans, initiate and pursue actions and deal with adversity. *Doenvermogen* comprises personal traits such as temperament, self-control and someone's convictions. This non-cognitive capacity is often diminished by stress, while stressful circumstances place a high demand on one's *doenvermogen*.

This governmental focus on *denkvermogen* has resulted in a stronger segregation between citizens based on their abilities and the opportunities they get to take this responsibility. Citizens who lack the skills or means needed to participate in the feedback system the government created get overlooked, are not heard, or not taken seriously (Slijkhuijs, 2021).

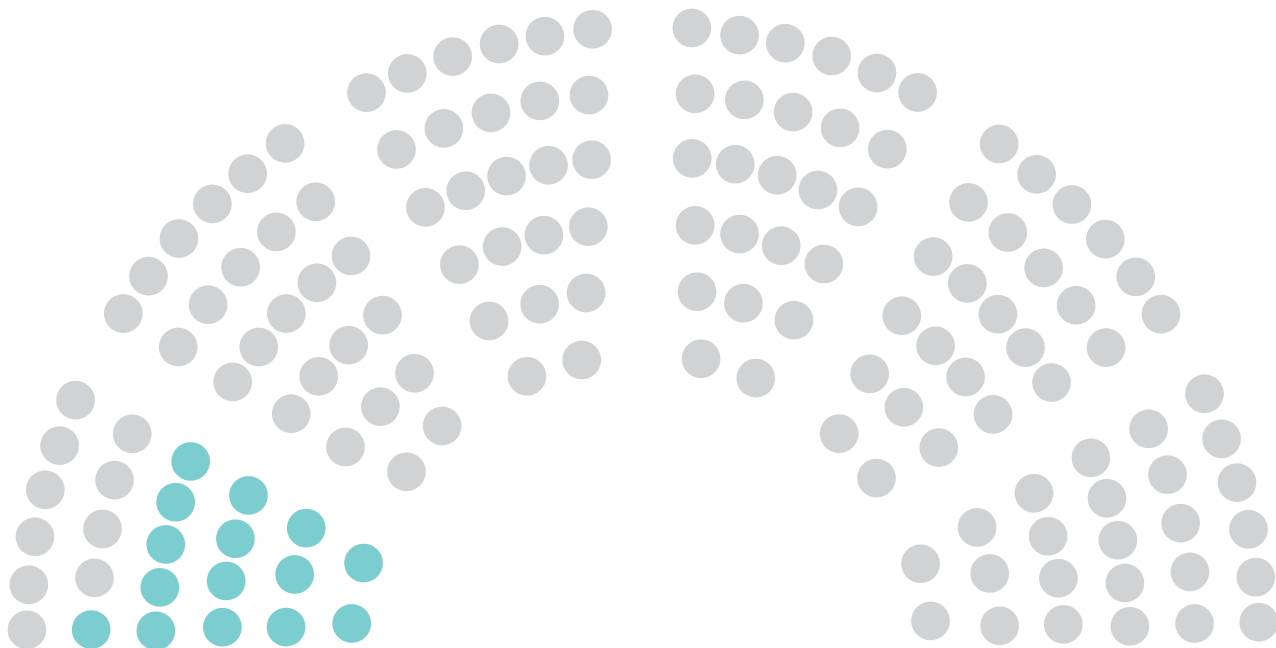


Fig. 3: The number of seats adolescents would decide in the House of Representatives if the entire population would vote (Hoogendoorn, 2021).

1.2 Adolescents & democracy



Fig. 4: Highest education level attained by the Dutch population (25-64 year-olds) with in blue mbo-levels (based on CBS, 2020).

In 2018 the state committee 'Parlementair Stelsel' was appointed to evaluate the parliamentary system and democracy. They concluded that the voices of children and of adolescents are underrepresented in contemporary democracy. Adolescents are weakly organised, and therefore receive less attention in the Dutch polder-democracy, thus the committee. The Dutch children's Ombudsman has expressed their concerns regarding the matter as well (Kinderombudsman, 2018).

If all people between 18 and 25 years old would vote, they would determine fifteen seats in the House of Representatives (Tweede Kamer) (Hoogendoorn, 2021; see figure 3). However, six out of ten adolescents (age 18-25) have little to no interest in politics (CBS, 2019). This is reflected in the voter turn-out of this age group, which is the lowest turn-out of all age groups (relative to the size of the group). And even if they vote, this only happens once every four years, leaving gaps between their moments of involvement.

Adolescents who are politically engaged often enjoy formal education, do not come from vulnerable groups and have positive role models at home or at school (Save the Children, 2020). Regarding voting, the education level is the most decisive factor: someone with formal education is more than twice as likely as

someone with secondary vocational education to vote in elections (Schmeets, 2017). Since the majority of the Dutch population did not receive formal education (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020; see figure 4), the group of politically active adolescents is not representative for this age group. These differences in participation levels can result in inequalities for those who do not sufficiently bring up their concerns (Slijkhuis, 2021).

The corona crisis has exposed that this is often the case for students of secondary vocational education (middelbaar beroepsonderwijs, mbo). The mbo-students do not feel heard by politics (RIVM, 2022). For example, the restrictions often mentioned high schools and universities, but mbo-institutions were rarely considered. This resulted in uncertainty for both institutions and students (Save the Children, 2020).

"In the beginning, I also got very irritated because of course these press conferences were always about universities of applied sciences, secondary schools and universities, and then I thought [...] yeah, guys, what's this? [...] If there's something important, I'll hear it from school, because I don't have to assume that I'll hear it from the RIVM or from Prime Minister Rutte."

- a niveau 4 mbo-student (RIVM, 2022)

1.3 Involving mbo-students is crucial for society

Involving this group of underrepresented, under-involved and not-heard mbo-students is imperative to achieve the equality necessary for a legitimate democratic system. Increasing their participation will contribute to more social justice. Only if they are structurally allowed to think along and make decisions, their needs are heard and can be met (Number 5 Foundation, 2021).

1.3.1 Why mbo-students should be involved in democracy

Next to the legitimacy of the democratic system and increased social justice, there are several other benefits to involving adolescents and especially mbo-students in democracy:

- Diversity in participation increases the quality of the output. Adolescents have new views and a lot of power to change (Van Hal & Kanne, 2021). When policymakers and adolescents shape society together, the solutions become more innovative and sustainable (Nationaal Jeugdinstituut, 2021).
- Adolescents have unique experiences in society. They can offer perspectives that are necessary to get a more complete image of life in our society (Number 5 Foundation, 2021). As their experiences are different from e.g., a policymaker, they will run into different problems.
- Adolescents deserve a say in policies that affect them. It is often said that young people are the future. But they are more than that. Today, they are equal citizens with their own opinions (Number 5 Foundation, 2021). Involving them makes the environment a better fit for this group of citizens (Hart, 1992).
- Participation teaches adolescents skills that are valuable in a broader context. Learning to think along, listen to each other, understanding what's going on, forming one's own opinion, being able to discuss those and coming to a decision together are cornerstones for a well functioning democracy (Number 5 Foundation, 2021). The development of their autonomy is stimulated by social situations in which rules need to be established based on equality and mutual respect (Hart, 1992).
- Scientists stress the importance of active participation in society from a young age (Number 5 Foundation, 2021) as this gives them the opportunity to become more competent and confident members of society (Hart, 1992).
- Participation has intrinsic value for human life and well-being (Sen, 1999). Being able to participate and finding meaning in life are essential for health and well-being (Institute for Positive Health, 2020). Participation can contribute to society and to connection with others and thus is a way to fulfill the basic human needs for community, impact and purpose as defined by Desmet and Fokkinga (2020).

“Participation not only allows a child the right to have a voice; it is equally valuable in enabling children to discover the rights of others to have their own very different voices.”

- Roger Hart, 1992

1.3.2 Legal foundation

It is important to note that 65 percent of the students who start an mbo-education are younger than 18 years old (Van Engen, 2017). Therefore, a large part of the mbo-population does not have the right to vote yet. The involvement of underaged adolescents and children has therefore a different legal foundation than the involvement of adults. Their rights are documented in the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR, 1989). For example, children and adolescents have the right to voice their opinion and the right to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings that affect them.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

- 1.** States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
- 2.** For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

1.4 The government knows they have to act

The government recognizes the lack of youth participation and its importance. Currently however, the Netherlands does not have a national youth strategy (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). To turn this around and explore possible approaches, the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations started the project 'Democracy & Adolescents' (Democratie & Jongeren). The Number 5 Foundation was appointed to lead the project. The goal of the project was to create a broad movement around youth participation in our democracy (Number 5 Foundation, 2021). They started a dialogue between adolescents and administrators, politicians and civil servants. The project has led to five tangible results:

1. A report describing quantitative research on what adolescents expect from democracy, executed by I&O Research (see Van Hal & Kanne, 2021)
2. A report describing a qualitative research on the views of both adolescents and administrators on the desired contact between them, executed by I&O Research as well (see Koomen & van Straaten, 2021)
3. The 'Guide to Sustainable Youth Participation', meant for municipalities to use when they don't know how to get the participation started or how to shape it (see Nationaal Jeugdinstituut et al., 2021).
4. The #MyVoiceCounts manifesto (MijnStemTelt), signed by five pilot municipalities, in which adolescents together with the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG) call for action. The manifesto describes how adolescents want to be involved (see appendix B).
5. The report by the Number 5 Foundation, in which they summarise all their findings of the 'Democracy & Adolescents' project (see Number 5 Foundation, 2021).

“Citizenship can’t be taught, it has to be experienced.”

- Micha de Winter, *professor of pedagogy*

1.5 Existing initiatives to stimulate youth participation

Apart from the 'Democracy & Adolescents' project, there are several other earlier attempts by (semi) public organisations to stimulate youth participation. These will be discussed in the following section. This is a non-exhaustive list and aims to sketch an overview of the variety of initiatives.

1.5.1 Citizenship education

Legally speaking, the education of the mbo has a triple qualification, and trains students for (1) a profession, (2) further education, and (3) to be citizens who are able to participate fully in society (de Moor, 2022). This last qualification goal has been embedded in the mandatory course on citizenship. The skills needed to fully participate in society have been split up in four dimensions (see figure 5). The socio-cultural and the political-legal dimension actively focus on increasing participation, and will be briefly discussed.

The political-legal dimension aims to stimulate the willingness and ability to participate in political decision-making (de Keijzer, 2020a). This concerns participation in the formal sense (voting in official elections) and more (inter)active forms of involvement in decision-making at different levels (European, national, regional, municipal, neighbourhood). But also contemporary, more issue-oriented forms of political participation, such as sustainability, security, internationalisation, entrepreneurship, interculturality and ideology can be touched upon. This dimension

seamlessly fits the definition of participation as used in this thesis (see chapter 2.2).

The socio-cultural dimension relates to the willingness and ability to be part of the community and to make an active contribution to it (de Keijzer, 2020b). It is about functioning adequately in one's own home and living environment, in care situations and in school; about accepting differences and cultural diversity. This includes knowing and applying widely accepted social etiquette in different situations. The student has insight into the characteristics of different cultures. In their views and behaviour, they show respect for cultural diversity. This dimension links more to what the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) defined as societal participation (see chapter 2.2).

1.5.2 Municipal youth councils

Youth councils and child mayors are one of the most prominent and obvious forms of youth participation. The council is used as a sounding board, but in some municipalities they can set their own agenda as well. The age range of the councils differ per municipality as well, but is, in general, centred around 10 to 12 year-olds. The youth councils meet a few times per year in official, public meetings, which are internally prepared in meetings as well. They are supervised by municipal employees, who chair and prepare the meetings and guide the children with, for example, the development of ideas.



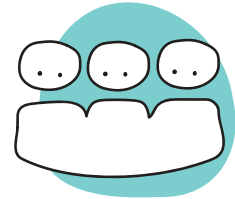
POLITICAL-LEGAL DIMENSION



ECONOMIC DIMENSION



VITAL CITIZENSHIP



SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSION

Fig. 5: The four dimensions for citizenship education

1.5.3 Guide to Sustainable Youth Participation

As described in chapter 1.4, one of the more tangible results of the 'Democracy & Adolescents' project is the Guide to Sustainable Youth Participation (Nationaal Jeugdinstituut, 2021). The document aims to support municipalities in setting up youth participation in a quick and sustainable way. In the document the relevance is addressed, and a 'route' is proposed, explaining the process in smaller steps.

1.5.4 ProDemos

ProDemos is the 'House for democracy and law'; an organisation with the aim to explain the rules of democracy and law, and shows what citizens can do to exercise influence in the municipality, the water board, the province, the country and in Europe (ProDemos, 2022). They collaborate with municipalities, courts and provinces throughout the country and provide schools with educational materials, guest lectures, political tours and even role plays, all relating to current topics in the field of democracy and law.

1.5.5 Youth organisations

There is quite a variety of youth organisations working on the engagement and representation of adolescents. These organisations are often run by adolescents. The National Youth Council (NJR) and Youth Organisation Secondary Vocational Education (JOB mbo) are great examples (see next page), but there is another category worth mentioning: political youth organisations (Politieke Jongerenorganisatie, PJO). These are associations for adolescents between 14 and 27 years old, often linked to a specific political party (Politieke jongerenorganisaties, n.d.). Political youth organisations have three direct goals: education, recruitment and promoting the interest of adolescents in the political landscape.



The National Youth Council (NJR) is a national organisation with the objective to encourage and support participation of adolescents in all layers of society. They want to ensure that adolescents know about, develop and use their strengths for a better future for themselves and others. Their policy is to offer adolescents opportunities and stimulate them to take those and to inspire other organisations to join their mission. (Nationale Jeugdraad, 2022)

Maurice Knijnenburg, chair of the NJR, explained that in order to achieve this, they focus on two main activities (see appendix C for the interview transcript). The first is stimulating youth participation by shaping policies in a way that adolescents are involved in the processes. As an umbrella organisation, they support a wide variety of organisations with similar objectives. Secondly, they help adolescents find their strengths, and teach them to use those to their advantage. The NJR believes that by focusing on the unique qualities individuals have, they can make the biggest impact.

“ We want everything we organise to be a ‘Success Experience’ for the participants.”



- Maurice Knijnenburg

Fig. 6: Maurice Knijnenburg.



“ JOB makes sure the voice of the student doesn’t get lost in the mbo! ”

The Jongerenorganisatie Beroepsonderwijs, or JOB mbo, is an organisation that stands up for the rights and interests of all mbo-students. They function as an umbrella organisation for participation councils (medezeggenschapsraden) at all mbo-schools in the Netherlands. Their activities include informing councils on their rights, representing mbo-students towards the media and politics, and the organisation of a wide range of events (Jongerenorganisatie Beroepsonderwijs, 2022). On top of this, every two years the ‘JOB monitor’ takes place. This is a large scale survey among mbo-students on all sorts of relevant topics. The last edition was filled in by an impressive 262.629 respondents (52,7% of the total student population).

The organisation is run by a part-time board, consisting of five mbo-students. The board members follow their education full-time next to their board responsibilities (interview, see appendix F).



Fig. 7: Quin Blokzijl.

1.6 Conclusion

Political participation of a group representative of society is essential for the legitimacy of the democratic system (Herbots & Elchardus, 2010). But adolescents receive too little attention in contemporary democracy (Staatscommissie Parlementair Stelsel, 2018). Their political participation is very low (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2019) and not representative for the age group, as politically engaged adolescents often enjoy formal education, do not come from vulnerable groups and have positive role models at home or at school (Save the Children, 2020). In the participatory society, which has become the Dutch norm (Nijdam, 2020), participation has become vital. Differences in level of participation can result in inequalities for groups who do not sufficiently voice their concerns (Slijkhuis, 2021), which seems to be the case for mbo-students (Save the Children, 2020).

Involving this group of underrepresented, under-involved and not-heard mbo-students is imperative to achieve the equality necessary for a legitimate democratic system. Increasing their participation will contribute to more social justice.

The government seems aware of the lack of youth participation and started the project 'Democracy and Adolescents' to turn this around (Number 5 Foundation, 2021). This led to two research reports by I&O research on the view of adolescents on democracy, the #MyVoiceCounts manifesto, a Guide to Sustainable Youth Participation and a report describing the process and project. Apart from the project, there are several other initiatives by the government to stimulate youth participation, such as youth councils and citizenship education.



Project definition

In this chapter, the research gap is identified and a problem statement is formulated. Next, the project scope is defined, including used definitions. The project goal is stated and finally, the project approach is explained.

2.1 Problem statement

2.2 Project scope

2.3 Project goal

2.4 Project approach

2.1 Problem statement

Despite efforts by the government, the political participation of mbo-students does not appear to be increasing. The political interest of people with a secondary vocational education has even slightly decreased since 2016 (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2020). As established in previous chapter, their participation is essential for the functioning and legitimacy of our democratic system. The lack thereof is therefore problematic.

The conducted efforts do not seem to have enough positive impact to overcome this status quo. In the following section, a selection of signals illustrating the probable root-causes is listed.

2.1.1 Mbo-students not on the radar

It appears mbo-students are not on the radar of the government as much. In recent research on youth participation (e.g., the reports from I&O research or by the Number 5 Foundation), they are not specifically mentioned. These reports talk about 'the' adolescents, but 'the' adolescent does not exist. By overlooking the differences between adolescents, the different needs and skills that they have are ignored, as well as the different barriers they might experience in participation.

2.1.2 Mismatched & scattered offer

When these students are not on the radar of the

government, this could result in a mismatch between the current initiatives to stimulate youth participation and the needs and wishes of mbo-students. Such a mismatch is problematic, as it holds the students back from participating in the governmental feedback system.

Besides the government, many organisations and individuals seem to be aware of the lack of participation of adolescents and are eager to do something about it, but initiatives are scattered and an overview appears to be missing. All these initiatives are working in isolation and seem unconnected to each other.

As a large part of the mbo-student population is underaged, their political participation should be embedded through mechanisms other than voting. This does not seem to be something the government is highly aware of, and there appear to be little to no initiatives specifically targeting this group. Consequently, this group of underaged mbo-students are sidelined.

2.1.3 Focus on national politics

Even initiatives that are a part of the daily lives of the students, such as citizenship education, appear to have a stronger focus on national rather than local politics. Issues closer to home and more specific to the students' everyday context could be overlooked this way. This could make politics feel quite abstract for mbo-students and detached from their daily lives.

2.1.4 The right tools are lacking

As the Number 5 Foundation mentioned about the *'Democracy and Adolescents'* project: *'the process is the result'* (2021). And although there is merit in that principle, it is critical not to stop there. The Guide for Sustainable Youth Participation shows great ambition from a governmental perspective, but lacks translation into useful tools for policymakers. This makes it more difficult for policymakers and politicians to go off the beaten track and look at youth participation in an innovative way. It does not challenge policymakers to try to see things from the perspective of adolescents (let alone mbo-students), with the risk of mismatches in participation shape and actual needs of adolescents. On top of this, tools to measure progress regarding participation rates are lacking (Number 5 Foundation, 2021).

2.2 Project scope

The problem appears to be rather complex, and many factors seem to come into play. Designers can play a role in facilitating the translation from this complex issue into a concrete solution. With a complex and layered project like this scoping it down is imperative to make the project achievable within the set timeframe. This sub-chapter will discuss the initial scoping. This includes scale choices, choices regarding inclusion and exclusion of stakeholders and providing definitions as used for the project.

2.2.1 Participation in local politics

A focus on local politics has been chosen. On this smaller scale effects of design interventions will be more visible and measurable. Earlier and more direct impact is expected on this scale, making the project more feasible. Furthermore, this scale fits in better with the identified gap, as more of the current initiatives target the national level.

2.2.2 Underaged mbo-students

As explained in chapter 1, mbo-students are severely underrepresented in politics. As a significant part of the mbo-population does not have the right to vote yet (see chapter 1.3), different means are necessary to take their voices into account. As these means currently seem to be lacking, a focus on mbo-students between 16 and 18 years old has been chosen.

The to-be-designed intervention could be applicable to a broader audience, but initially should not rely on the right to vote.

2.2.3 Partici-what-now?

As the term *participation* can be used in many different contexts and its meaning changes accordingly, it is important to define it in the context of this project. Several existing definitions will be discussed, after which participation as used in this project is defined.

The Oxford Dictionary defines participation as '*the act of taking part in an activity or event*'. This does not quite cover the complexity of the processes concerned. The Dutch are widely known for '*poldering*', and the definition of participation in the Dikke Van Dale exposes this cultural difference: '*het hebben van aandeel in iets*' (contributing to something).

Hart (1992) defines participation as '*the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives*'. Although I like the sentiment of this definition, it is a bit too broad for this project.

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research distinguishes two types of participation (SCP, 2020). **Societal participation**, such as volunteering, informal help, and collective action (e.g., protests), on the one hand and political participation on the other. **Political participation** includes for example voting or following the (political) news. In order to scope and focus the

participation

noun, uncountable

the contribution of citizens to democracy
by making their opinions or beliefs known
with the aim to influence public policy

project, this distinction can be valuable. However, I do not agree with which activities have been allocated to both categories. Collective action like protesting could be considered a rather political action.

Conge (1988) defines political participation as *'individual or collective action at the national or local level that supports or opposes state structures, authorities, and/or decisions regarding allocation of public goods.'* It is important to note that the action can be verbal or written, violent or non-violent and of any intensity (Conge, 1988). Although I like the sentiment of this definition, I miss the *'why?'* in it.

From Van Deth's search for a minimal definition of political participation (2014), three criteria can be derived. In order to call something political participation it has to be an action (1), it has to be voluntary (2) and, in order to distinguish it from actions by politicians etc., it has to be done by citizens (3).

In this project I will be using the following definition: *participation is the contribution that citizens make to democracy by making their opinions or beliefs known with the aim to influence public policy.* This does include activities like voting, protesting, signing a petition, boycotts, and speaking to the municipality or politicians, but excludes volunteering, and informal help. The project does not specifically focus on one of these activities, but aims to bridge the gap between moments of voting.

“Doing it by yourself might be faster, but doing it together gets you better results.”

- Maurice Knijnenburg, chair NJR

2.2.4 The ladder of participation

Apart from recognising different types of participation, distinguishing different degrees of participation is imperative too. Hart (1992) defined eight degrees of participation (see figure 8). Hart's publication focuses on children's participation. However, the principles are applicable to mbo-students too, and have therefore been adapted for this section.

Manipulation, decoration and tokenism are forms of non-participation. This is what the Number 5 Foundation refers to when saying that adolescents are no checkbox: talking to adolescents just because it is on your to do list (2021). In non-participation, adolescents can be heard, but they do not have actual influence or even a meaningful role.

In order to call something participation there are four requirements according to Hart (1992):

- The mbo-students fully understand the intentions of the project.
- They know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and they know why this decision was made.
- They have a meaningful, or maybe even shaping role, rather than a decorative one.
- They volunteered for the project after the project was explained to them.

Assigned but informed and *consulted and informed* are two degrees of participation, but these lack decision making power for the students. It is only in the degrees of true participation that they get to have an actual say in the decision making part of the process.

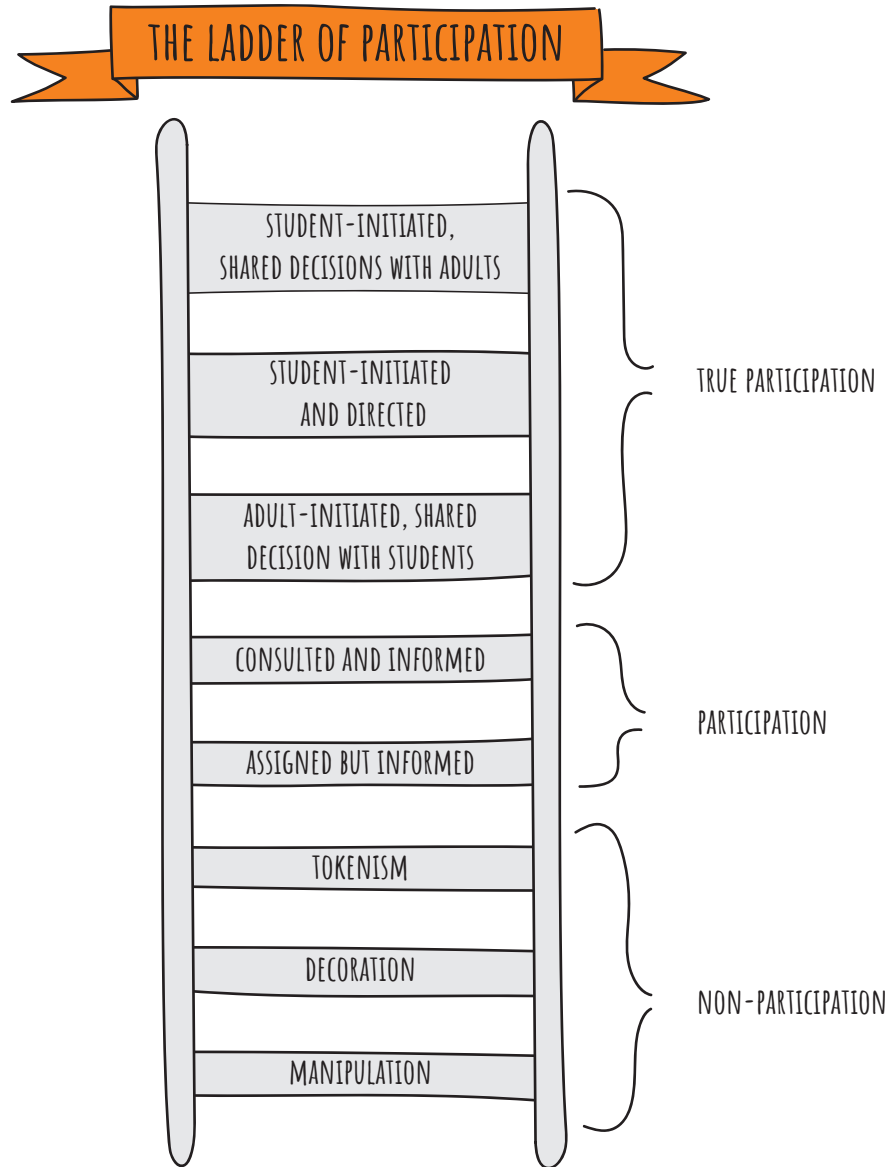


Fig. 8: The eight degrees of youth (non-) participation, adapted from Hart (1992).

In prevention of non-participation, the National Youth Council (Nationale Jeugdraad, NJR) sets seven requirements for meaningful participation (expertisebureau jongerenparticipatie, n.d.).

In meaningful participation, adolescents should:

- Experience no or only low thresholds to participate.
- Realise they are capable of more than they thought.
- Experience control (zeggenschap) and ownership.
- Feel connected with others.
- Be able to mirror themselves on peers, learn from their peers or be an example for them.
- Find a match with their own values and interests.
Feel safe.

For this project, the aim is to contribute to the degrees of true participation. This creates a buffer towards non-participation.

2.3 Project goal

Taking this scoping into account, the project goal can be defined as follows:

The project will aim to make the municipal democratic system more legitimate and sustainable by increasing true political participation and impact of underaged mbo-students on a local level.

2.3.1 Research questions

To achieve this goal, the following research questions are relevant:

- Why are the current efforts to increase participation insufficiently effective and to what extent is this recognized by the local government?
- What are the needs and wishes of underaged mbo-students regarding participation?
- What does the experience world of mbo-students look like?
- How do underaged mbo-students currently experience the participation system?
- To what extent are underaged mbo-students aware of the opportunities to participate?
- What do underaged mbo-students expect from the government regarding participation?
- What obstacles does the government experience in their contact with mbo-students?
- How can participation be designed so it leads to true participation?

2.4 Project approach

This chapter describes the general approach and mindset that formed the foundation for this project and how this approach serves the context. Per phase, the used methods and approach are briefly highlighted in the corresponding chapters.

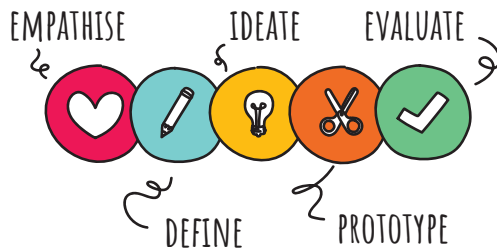


Fig. 9: The five phases of design thinking.

The design process is used as a tool for integrated creative problem solving and to translate research insights into more concrete and usable results. The used design approach combines elements of several renowned approaches. The five phases of design thinking as illustrated in figure 9 form the basis of this process. In every phase, the order of diverging, reverging and converging is followed as suggested by Heijne and Van der Meer (2019), see figure 10. Each phase has different needs and opportunities, but the general mindset is the same throughout the project.

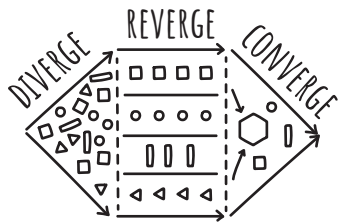


Fig. 10: The creative diamond with a diverging, reverging and converging stage (based on Heijne & Van der Meer, 2019).

2.4.1 Inclusion

The keyword for the chosen design approach, connecting all different approaches and the motivation for this project, is inclusion. As this project aims to improve the contribution the target group makes to democracy, the selected project approach needs to be equitable and democratic as well. Only then maximum and realistic benefits are to be expected. Inclusion broadens our perspective on problems worth solving and it sparks our creativity (Holmes, 2018). To be able to do so, inclusion and an inclusive design process have to be defined in relation to this project.

Every activity, group, or product could be represented by a circle (figure 11, Holmes, 2018). People who can participate are included within that circle, while those outside of it cannot. The circle represents the barrier that excludes these people. These barriers could be rules or more tangible obstacles. Inclusive design is concerned with widening that circle so that more people may participate.

“In inclusion it is about making sure all people can participate in society, regardless of their diversity in physical, cognitive (including lingual) and psycho-social capabilities, and the circumstances they live in.”

- Gebruiker Centraal, 2022

However, exclusion is not necessarily a bad thing, as long as it is an 'intentional choice rather than an accidental harm' (Holmes, 2018). By focusing on mbo-students, rather than all adolescents, their participation can be facilitated and it will strengthen their position

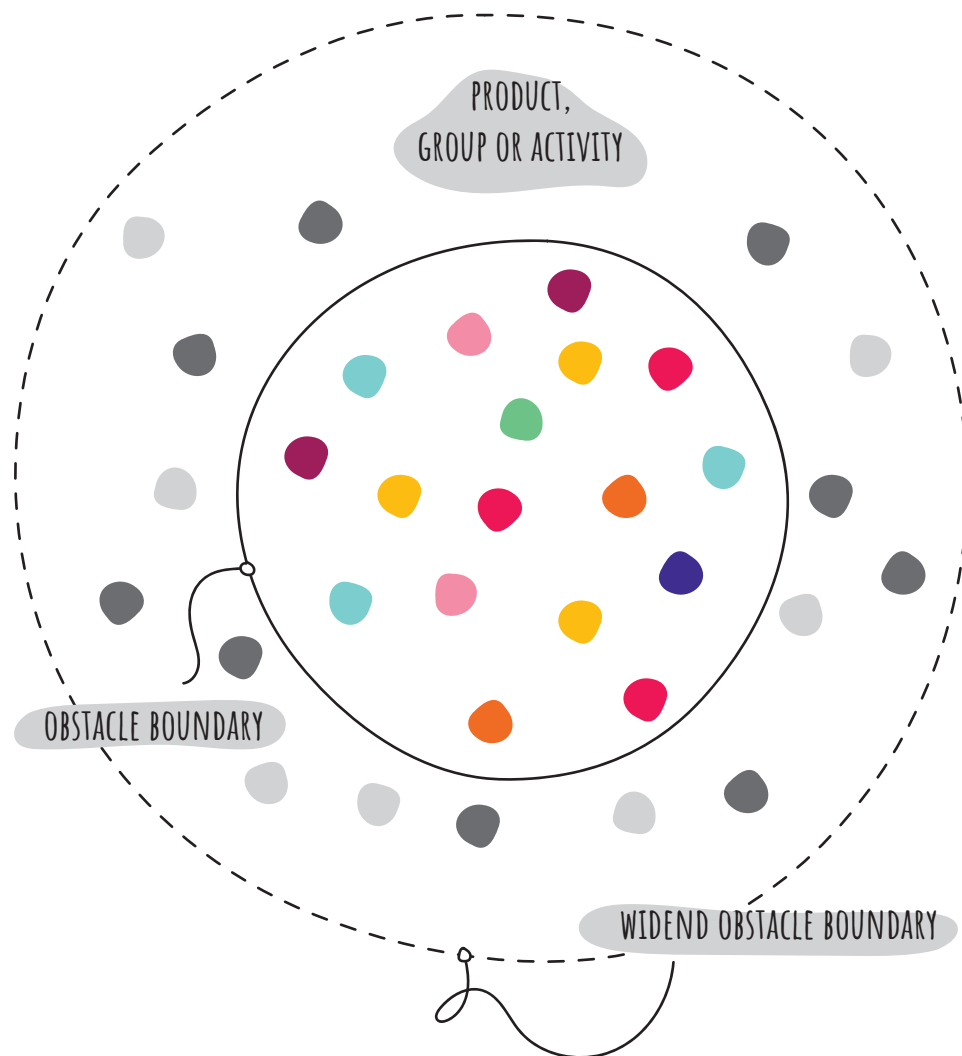


Fig. 11: The 'shut-in-shut-out' model explaining inclusion, adapted from Holmes (2018).

within society. In this case, by excluding people from the process, the result is a more inclusive society as a whole.

2.4.2 Research approach

To be able to empathise with mbo-students, it is important to do research on and with actual students. Quantitative methods can only provide insights in general aspects about the target audience (Streefkerk, 2022), but the real stories and experiences of the students are necessary to truly understand their motivations and needs. Therefore, the focus will lay on qualitative and creative research methods such as interviewing and generative techniques. These can provide the more in-depth insights that are necessary to fully immerse in the context (Streefkerk, 2022).

2.4.3 Design approach

Inclusion in relation to the project approach means that approaches which deal with inclusion in different ways are combined throughout the process.

Human-centred design

First and foremost a human-centred approach is taken. The user (and other stakeholders) are put at the centre of the research and design activities. By designing together with them rather than just for them, I aspire to design something that provides actual value for them. Their involvement not only contributes

to a deeper understanding of the problem, it would increase support for and provide realistic expectations about the proposed solution. As the outcomes of the project might affect them, it could be considered unethical not to involve them. Stakeholder interviews and focus groups are used methods that contribute to this approach.

Co-creation

Co-creation refers to design activities where designers invite users, other stakeholders and/or experts to collaborate in the creative process to the extent that they become actors in the process (Van Boeijen et al., 2020). As many (so far unsuccessful) attempts have been made to increase youth participation, involving the target audience throughout the project is key to make sure the design will fit their needs and wishes.

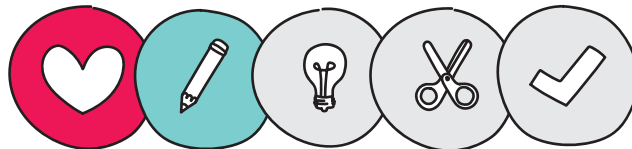
Social Implication Design

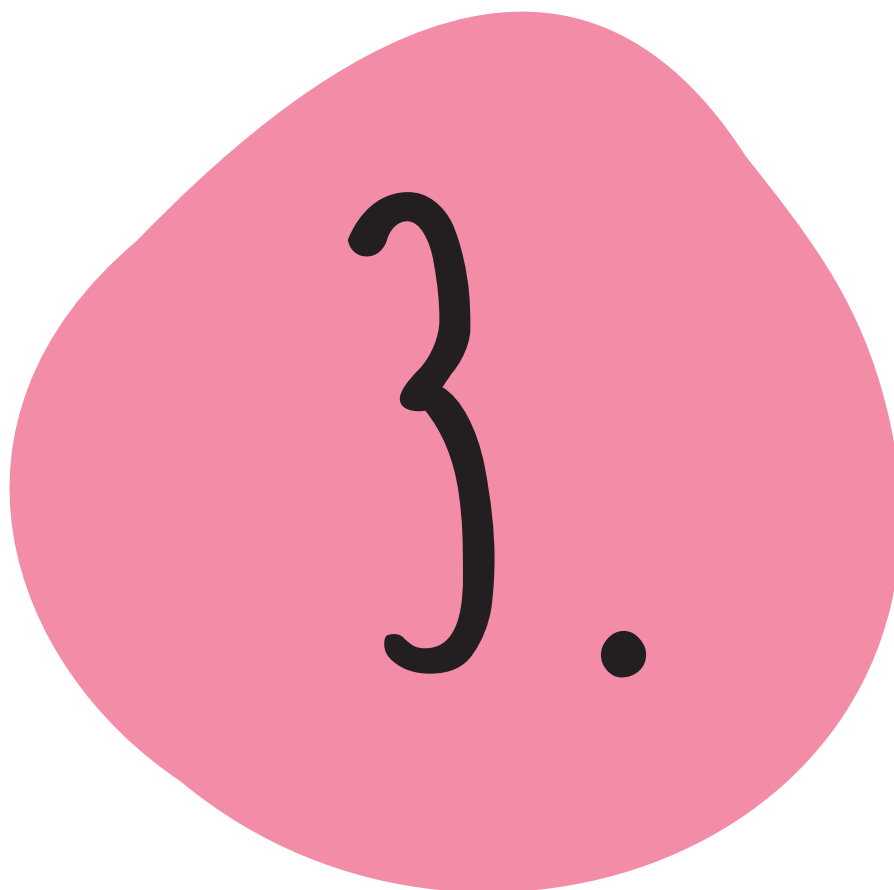
As the project is strongly motivated with the desire to make societal improvement, the approach of social implication design contains very valuable elements for my process. 'Social design is design that exists to improve society above all else.' (Tromp & Hekkert, 2019). Social Implication Design encourages designers to align societal goals with user needs and desires. It is an effect-driven approach, meaning it has a strong focus on behavioural change. Not only does this open up a whole new realm of possible solutions, behaviour is key for a design to contribute to societal change (Tromp & Hekkert, 2019).

2.4.4 Project as an experiment

As the ambition is to involve mbo-students throughout the project, the project itself can be used to gain insights regarding dos and don'ts in youth participation. Their participation in the project is a way to get new insights on the difficulties 'outsiders' might experience when approaching the target audience. The successes, failures and obstacles in trying to involve mbo-students in this project will be documented and used in the design.

Phase one: Empathise & Define









Empathise

This chapter explores the context through various qualitative research methods. It will dive into the experiences of mbo-students and their placement in the participation system. After the research activities are explained, the findings are discussed. The findings have been clustered in themes, rather than chronologically.

- 3.1 Research approach
- 3.2 Diversity
- 3.3 Discrimination & oppression
- 3.4 Transformation from child to adult
- 3.5 Connected to society
- 3.6 Mental capacity
- 3.7 The gap between mbo-students & the government
- 3.8 Conclusions

3.1 Research approach

In the first phase of the project, the focus lies on empathising with the target group and other stakeholders, familiarising with the context and defining the problem into more detail. This is done with the help of a set of diverse qualitative research methods. The research activities contribute to one or more of the following goals that were established for this phase:

-  **Empathise** with mbo-students and other stakeholders.
-  **Problem:** Define why mbo-students don't participate in politics as much.
-  **Status Quo:** Identify what is already done to stimulate participation of mbo-students.
-  **Networking:** Make connections that could be valuable for future steps and help with embedding the project in society.

3.1.1 Research activities

In figure 12, an overview of the research activities of phase 1 can be found. Per type of activity the relevance and procedure will be described in the remaining part of this section. These research activities have helped to identify themes that relate to the problem or context. The findings will be discussed per theme in the rest of the chapter.

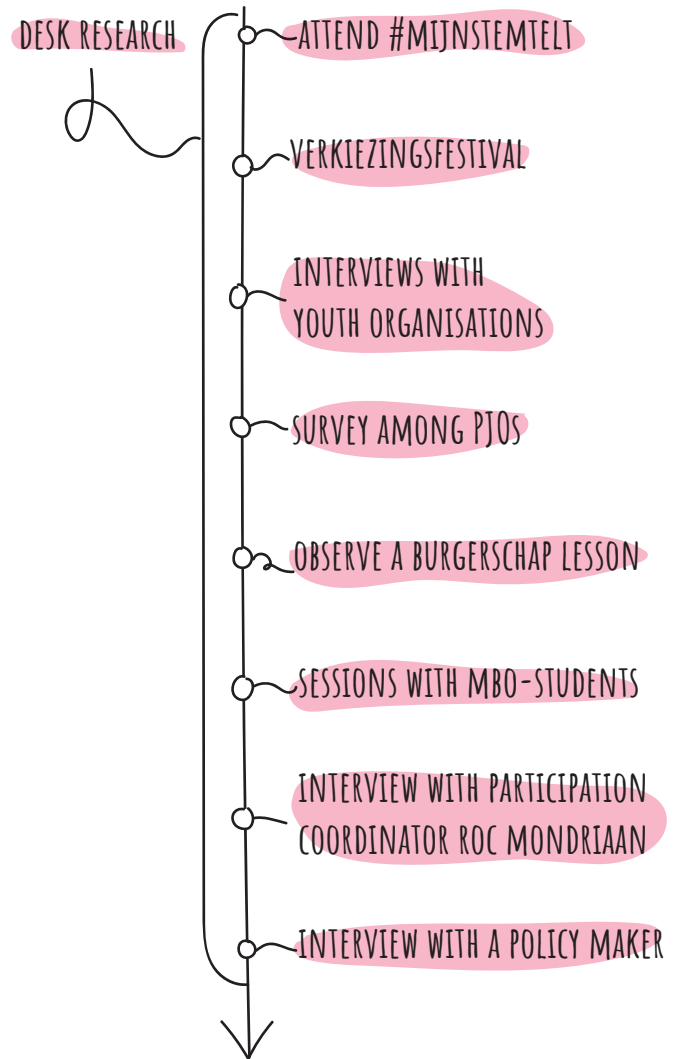


Fig. 12: Timeline of the relevant research activities of phase 1.

Desk research



Desk research is done throughout the first phase to gain insights on terms such as participation and democracy, the government's view on youth participation and on current efforts to involve mbo-students. The most important sources include the report describing the 'Democratie & Jongeren' process and the independent research that was conducted as part of the project.

While reading the reports and papers, relevant findings were documented to ensure traceability and clustered to find topics worth pursuing further. These findings formed the basis for other research activities, such as the interviews with youth organisations or the sessions with mbo-students.



#mijnstemtelt festival



The festival was an online event with lectures, debates and music organised by the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), in order to inspire municipalities and other stakeholders to boost their youth participation. The pinnacle of the event was the presentation of the #mijnstemtelt manifesto (see appendix B), in which adolescents and five pilot municipalities call for action.

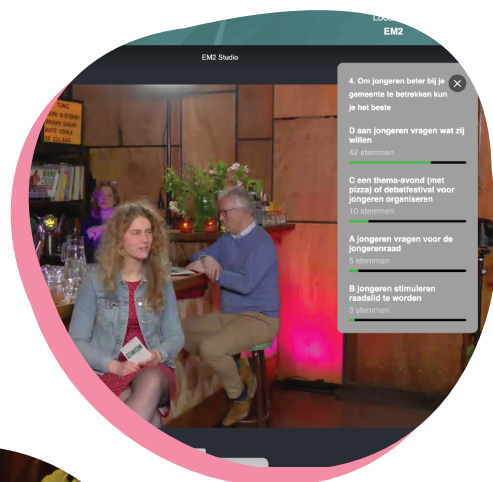


Fig. 13: Impression of the #mijnstemtelt festival

Verkiezingsfestival



The National Youth Council (NJR) and ProDemos organised so called 'Verkiezingsfestivals' at ten different mbo-institutes throughout the country. The event was meant to motivate students to vote for the city council elections and help them make a choice who to vote for (while staying politically neutral). This was done with several games, stands for political youth organisations (PJOs) and a debate at the end of the day.

As a volunteer, I helped out with several activities during the festival at the Albeda College in Rotterdam. This was a great opportunity to talk to a lot of students and get a feel for the obstacles they experience, as well as to get inspired by the work of the National Youth Council. To get the most out of the day, a list with conversation-starters and follow-up questions was made. In these conversations, I tried to be engaging yet neutral, to avoid steering their preferences. After engaging conversations, notes were made. Some pictures and videos of the different set-ups were made. At the end of the event, a short recap was written in which the overall impression of the day was given. The findings are combined in appendix K.



Fig. 14: All volunteers of the Verkiezingsfestival



Fig. 15: An impression of the Verkiezingsfestival

Interviews with youth organisations NJR & JOB



As both of these youth organisations are run by a student-board, and the board members speak to a lot of active mbo-students, they might be able to provide insights into what drives (politically) active students. Furthermore, they can share their knowledge on the current efforts to stimulate participation, and share their best practices.

To gain these insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the chairpersons of the boards of the organisations. The interviews took place at their offices and lasted about an hour. The interviews were recorded and transcribed (see appendices C and F). During the interview, I only took notes for follow-up questions or important insights, so I could be focused on the conversation. An infographic with reasons why mbo-students do not participate as much was used as a tool to stimulate discussion if the participant did not know what to say anymore. The main goal of this addition of the infographic to the interview was to check it for completeness and get confirmation regarding the content. The used version of the infographic can be found in appendix C.

Interview topics:

- Personal motivation to become involved
- Causes for the lack of participation
- Experienced obstacles for mbo-students
- The role their organisation plays in stimulation participation
- What topics mbo-students find important

Observation of students during a citizenship class



Fly-on-the-wall observations were made during a citizenship class for entry-level students at the ROC Mondriaan (an mbo-school in Delft). The goal of the observation was to get a better understanding of the educational level of mbo-students, and learn what their knowledge level is regarding politics and democracy. During the class, notes were made. To avoid drawing too much attention, the notes were made on paper, and digitalised afterwards (see appendix D). After the class, the teacher showed the online platform she uses for her lessons. Remarks regarding the platform are included in the notes as well.

Survey political youth organisations



Most political parties in the Netherlands have an affiliated youth organisation. These political youth organisations (or PJOs) organise conventions, debates and other (politically oriented) events for example. But they represent the voice of adolescents towards their parent party and more broadly in politics as well. These organisations might play an important role in the participation of mbo-students, as it is in their interest to increase youth participation. More insights on whether the mbo-students are on the radar of these organisations and what they do to involve mbo-students specifically is needed to determine what role the organisations could play.

To gain these insights, a short survey of five open questions is spread among twelve political youth organisations. These political youth organisations are selected to represent a wide range of political preferences and different sized parent parties. The survey was made digitally and emailed to the secretaries of the national boards of the organisations. The following political youth organisations were approached:

- CDJA (CDA)
- Dwars (GroenLinks)
- JFVD (Forum voor Democratie)
- Jonge Democraten (D66)
- Jonge Socialisten (PvdA)
- JOVD (VVD)
- Oppositie (Denk)
- PerspectieF (Christen Unie)
- Pink (Partij voor de Dieren)
- Radicaal (Bijl)
- ROOD (SP)
- SGJP (SGP)

The survey can be found in appendix E.

Interview with a participation coordinator



Two years ago, the ROC Mondriaan appointed Michiel Steegers as participation coordinator, who was responsible for reshaping their participation system and the medezeggenschap. His experiences in restructuring the medezeggenschap could be valuable, as it might be possible to translate principles

he used to local politics. Simultaneously, his learnings and successes could be built upon. Lastly, he could provide more insights about mbo-students, as he sees them regularly and knows what they care about and what they are capable of.

A semi-structured interview was held over Zoom and lasted about 40 minutes. During the interview, notes were taken and a report of the interview can be found in appendix H.

Interview topics

- The school's motivation to change the structure
- Their new approach
- Obstacles that played a role in the reshaping
- Theoretical foundation or used methods for the new system
- Opportunities for collaboration

Focus groups with mbo-students



To get a clearer idea of the perceived world and interests of mbo-students, their perception of politicians, and how they would like to participate, focus groups with students from the ROC Mondriaan in Delft were held. Twelve students participated, spread over three sessions. One of the sessions was with a so-called *language class*, in which newcomers get their start qualification and learn the language. The two other sessions were conducted with entry-level students (mbo level 1). These students did not finish high school and follow a six month program to get their start

qualification, so they can start a level 3 or 4 study.

The focus group was a group interview with generative elements. To make the threshold to participate as low as possible, the sessions were conducted during school time, in a classroom. The sessions lasted ninety minutes and the audio was recorded and transcribed (see appendix G). During the session, some pictures were taken and afterwards the generated materials were photographed. Throughout the session, students were encouraged to speak their minds and think out loud. The laddering technique was used to ask questions and identify underlying needs and wishes. Regularly, they were reassured to ask questions if they did not know something. All generated materials of the sessions can be found in appendix G.

Session agenda:

- Introduction and warm-up
- Agenda of civil servant
- Worst possible civil servant
- Ideal civil servant
- 'Sterke punten test' and scenarios
- Wrap-up

Agenda of a civil servant

Students had to list all things they thought a civil servant from their municipality works on. A template was provided and if necessary an example was given to get them started.

The worst/ideal civil servant

To identify what students expect from the government, students had to compose a civil servant who would not do their job well (the bad one), and one who would do

everything they would like (the ideal one) with the help of a template. They started with the appearance of the civil servant. They could choose a cut out person with the skin tone of their preference and choose an outfit and hairdo. A wide variety of materials was designed for them to choose from, including some blanco materials they could draw on (see figure 16). They were also told they could cut into the materials or draw on them if they wanted to. Next, they had to decide on the civil servants personality. A list with options was given, including some blanco cards for their own options again.

After the civil servant had been created, the students were asked which of the topics of the agenda of a civil servant from the previous assignment would be on the mind of this civil servant. Lastly, they were asked to write down in what actions these thoughts would be visible: What does the civil servant do to work on these topics? An example of the results of this assignment can be found in figure 17.



Fig. 16: The used materials for creating the worst/ideal civil servant.

'Sterke punten test' & scenarios

Students were asked to fill in the 'sterke punten test' created by the National Youth Council (NJR). After their strong points were discussed in the group, they were presented with three scenarios, and asked how they would deal with those and how their strong points could help them. The scenarios are all about a situation in which they are ignored or not heard, in different contexts.

- You want the attention of your teacher, but she is ignoring you. How do you get her attention?
- The municipality is not taking your housing needs and wishes into account. How do you tell them what you need?
- On a national level it is decided to increase the minimum legal age for alcohol and tobacco. What do you do?



Fig. 18: Students doing the 'strong point test' on their phones.

Interview with a policy advisor



To get a governmental perspective as well, policy advisor of the Province Utrecht, Joanna Thijs, was interviewed. Thijs is a policy advisor regarding culture participation and education. Although this is a different area of participation, she could provide insights on the governmental perspective in general. Furthermore, concepts applied in culture participation might be transferable to political participation.

A semi-structured interview was held over Zoom and lasted approximately an hour. The interview was audio recorded and transcribed. The protocol and transcript can be found in appendix I.

Interview topics

- Her role and function description
- The steps her team follow when setting up a project
- Thresholds she experiences in setting up participation
- The difference between youth participation and mbo-student participation
- Her ideas on involving mbo-students

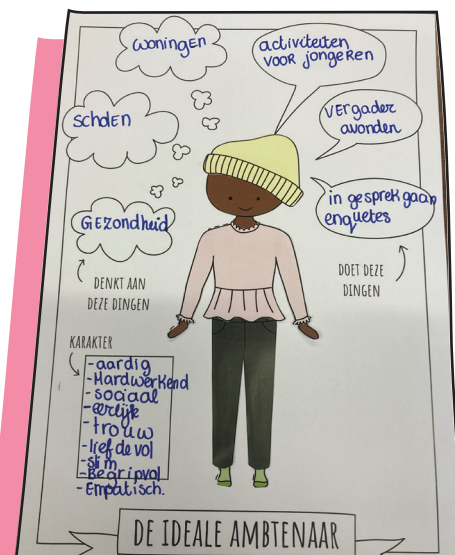
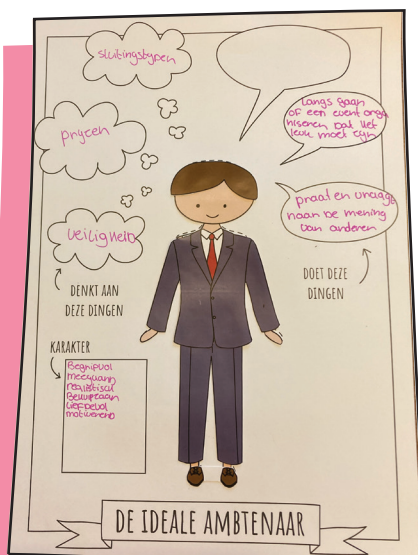
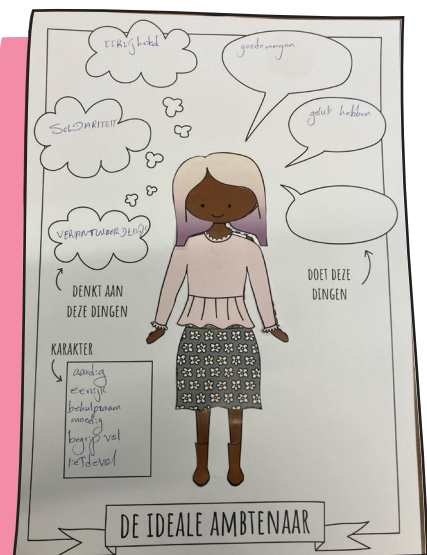
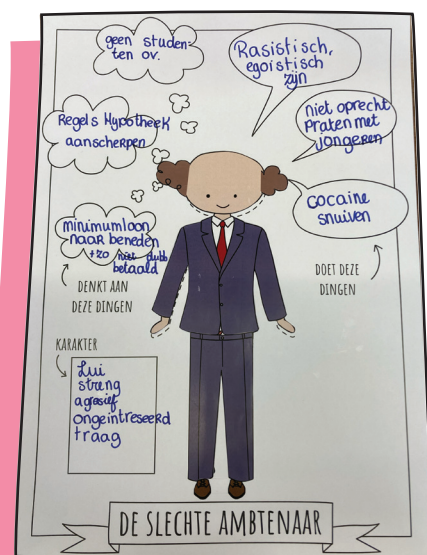
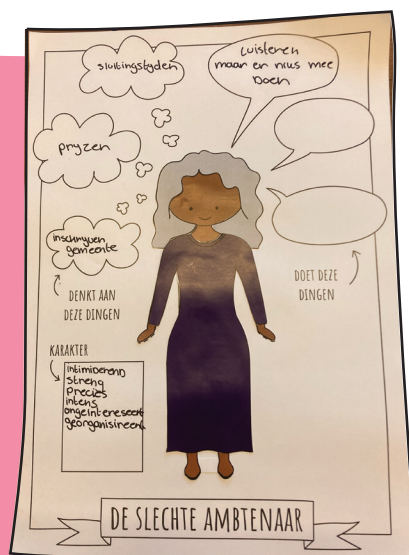
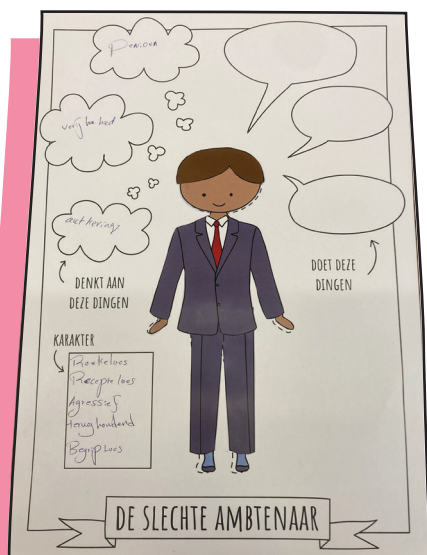


Fig. 17: The worst and ideal civil servants created by the three different focus groups.

Identified themes

In the remaining part of this chapter, the results of the described research will be discussed. The results have been analysed and clustered into themes relating to the problem or context using an inductive approach, looking for patterns and being open to new insights, rather than trying to prove a hypothesis (Braun, 2006) (see appendix J for the clustering). The findings will be discussed per theme in the rest of the chapter.

3.2 Diversity

It is crucial to recognise the diversity of mbo-students. The mbo is the most culturally diverse layer of the Dutch education system (Bakker, 2022). As it is a very large group, there is a lot of variety in age, ethnicity, study, lifestyle, personal interests and so on. As a result, in a class a 16 year-old who lives with their parents can sit next to a 25 year-old who has two children at home and a job next to their education to try to provide for their family (observation verkiezingsfestival, see

appendix K). The collage in figure 19 shows a glimpse of this diversity between students.

Individual preference will always come into play and 'the' mbo-student does not exist. That being said, there are themes that emerge from the research that seem applicable to large sub-groups. These findings will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Fig. 19: A glimpse of the diversity of mbo-students.



3.3 Discrimination & oppression

3.3.1 The image of the mbo

According to the wheel of oppression by Goodwill (2020), the mbo-students are by definition an oppressed group regarding their level of education. Thus oppression is something they all have to deal with to a certain degree. Consequently, they often get stereotyped by more privileged groups. Just to name a few:

“An mbo-degree is kind of worthless right?”

“Doing mbo is a waste of your brain.”

“Yes because mbo-students are not fun at all.”

- from Stuij (2021)

These prejudices lead to exclusion from, for example, student bars or housing (Visser, 2022).

This image of the mbo (or vmbo for that matter) is something these students have dealt with throughout their lives. Where vwo-students get told they ‘are the leaders of the future’, vmbo-students are told throughout their high school career that ‘some things are not for them’. This image can be internalised. Their education level becomes part of their identity and influences self-esteem (Visser, 2021). In the case of mbo-students, this image leads to insecurities regarding their intellect and capabilities.

These insecurities can result in hesitancy, waiting to see how others do something or even avoidance

of a task and anxiety, as they are scared to confirm the stereotypes they get confronted with on a daily basis. For example, during the observations of the citizenship class, students were hesitant to answer questions. If they did engage, they would speak very softly (observation citizenship class, see appendix D).

Because of these insecurities, they have a stronger need for affirmation. When they do get a compliment or other affirmation of their work, it means a lot to them and motivates them to stay involved (interview participation coordinator, see appendix H).

“When they get applause at the end, it does so much for them, that’s really important.”

- Participation coordinator ROC Mondriaan

During the verkiezingsfestival, students were more open and motivated to engage in a conversation about politics after some sort of personal connection was established (observation verkiezingsfestival see appendix K). This was done through giving a sincere, personal compliment or some chit chat about their day and how they were doing. It is important to show genuine interest in them during these conversations.

3.3.2 Effects of discrimination

On top of this, the mbo-population is more ethnically diverse than the hbo or wo (Bakker, 2022). Therefore, a large part of the mbo-students have experienced discrimination. As a result of this they care deeply about inclusion themselves. This becomes apparent

through the research of the Number 5 Foundation (2021), in which participants repeatedly stressed to involve a diverse group of adolescents. Additionally, mbo-students seem much less judgemental when it comes to for example appearance. During the focus groups, two out of three groups rebelled against the exercise in which they had to create the appearance of the worst and best policymaker they could imagine. (observation focus groups, see appendix G)

“ I don't really look at the appearance. That says nothing about how that person is. ”

- Focus group participant

“ But you can't really do that with looks or clothes, can you? That is a bit of a prejudice, isn't it? ”

- Focus group participant

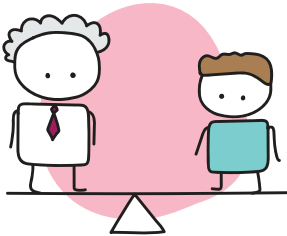
Next to being less judgemental, mbo-students seem to be more empathic than their 'higher' educated peers. They seem to be better at placing themselves in someone else's shoes, and more aware of the circumstances that can lead up to being in a certain place in life (Visser, 2022)

“ But sir, I'm *only* an mbo-student. ”

- One of Johannes Visser's students (Visser, 2022)

3.3.3 Take-aways 'Discrimination & Oppression'

STRONG NEED TO
BE RESPECTED



NON-JUDGEMENTAL &
OPEN-MINDED



INSECURE ABOUT THEIR
KNOWLEDGE & ABILITIES



NEED FOR AFFIRMATION



STRUGGLE WITH THE
IMAGE OF THE MBO

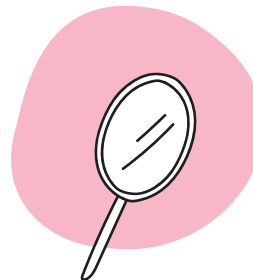


Fig. 20: Take-aways from the theme 'Discrimination & Oppression'.

3.4 In transition from child to adult

“If you're young and growing up, many things get decided for you. If you live with your parents, you're not used to thinking that your opinion matters.”

- From Hoogendoorn (2021)

With the majority of mbo-students being 16 to 20 years old, they are in a transition from child to adult. In general, they are a bit younger than their hbo- or wo-peers who started their follow-up education. As a result of their age and place in their lives, they view themselves more as children rather than adolescents or adults. For example, during the focus groups they would often refer to themselves as children, even when a question was phrased to concern adolescents (focus groups, see appendix X).

very crowded in comparison to other stops.

The majority of mbo-students come from a low or middle socioeconomic background (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2021). Even if they have the opportunity to participate, chances are they have to set other priorities, such as working a part-time job to provide for their family (interview NJR, see appendix C). Many of the participants of the focus group had a part-time job, for example as a food deliverer or in retail. These jobs seemed more of a necessity than something they particularly enjoyed.

“Yes it's not really fun but it brings in money.”

- Focus group participant

3.4.1 Living situation

Most mbo-students still live with their parents. On the one hand they find themselves too young, and think they'll move out once they move on to a job or hbo-study (interview JOB, see appendix F), but the motivation is also financial, as most housing is too expensive for them and they are not eligible for student housing (interview NJR, see appendix C; Visser, 2022).

Since mbo-schools are scattered all over the country, students often have to commute a lot. All students who participated in the focus group travelled to school with public transport (focus groups, see appendix G). Personal observations at the ROC Mondriaan confirmed a lack of bikes or cars at the school yard, and during rush hour, the tram stop in front of the school is

3.4.2 The teenage brain

Throughout adolescence, the brain is in full development (Crone, 2008). Neurological connections that are often used are strengthened, and neglected ones are removed. As a result, adolescents are able to learn new skills relatively quickly. These developments also cause them to react driven by emotions rather than by reason. Adolescents will mainly base their decisions on positive consequences on the short-term and take less account of potential negative consequences on the long-term. In other words, they are more likely to give in to instant gratification and are more sensitive to rewards than to punishments. This age group also has a harder time planning and evaluating their own behaviour.

In general, teenagers and adolescents are in search for more autonomy, which often happens through turning against their family, and searching for connection and belonging with friends (#mijnstemtelt; Youngworks, 2022). As a result, they are a bit more sensitive to peer-pressure and tend to go along with a group instead of sticking to their personal beliefs.

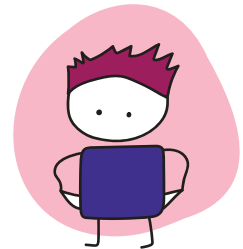
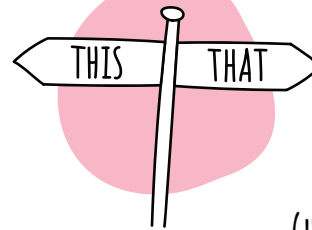
Several scholars have identified an increase in need for autonomy in adolescents (Inguglia et al., 2014). The adolescents struggle to get more freedom and are more likely to rebel against their parents for example. Independency and both the desire and ability to make their own decisions increase. This can result in the well known rebellious behaviour of this age group.

In addition, adolescents are experiencing an increased need for relatedness (Crone, 2008). Relatedness concerns both feeling loved and cared for by others and the need to love and care for others (Deci & Ryan, 2003). Since they are detaching themselves from their parents (Crone, 2008) they are extra sensitive to influences by the behaviour of their peers. Furthermore, a recent study shows that supporting adolescents' need for relatedness enhances their task learning (Kaefer & Chiviackowsky, 2021).

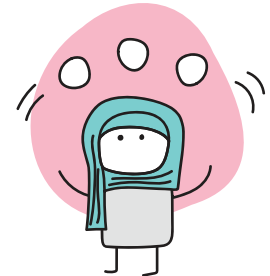
3.4.3 Take-aways 'In transition from child to adult'

LOW TO MIDDLE
SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS

LEARN TO MAKE THEIR
OWN DECISIONS



(HAVE TO) SET OTHER PRIORITIES
THAN PARTICIPATION



VIEW THEMSELVES
AS CHILDREN

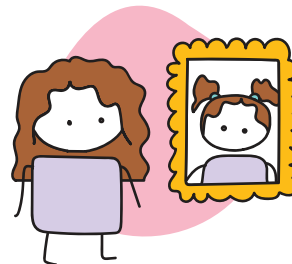


Fig. 21: Take-aways from the theme 'In transition from child to adult'.

3.5 Connected to society

In their own way, mbo-students have strong ties to society. Although adolescents do not really follow the news (Reuters Institute, 2020), current affairs such as the war in Ukraine have a big impact on their lives and mood (observations Verkiezingsfestival, see appendix K). This can at least partially be explained through digitalisation. As they grew up with (or in) the digital world, this environment plays a big part in their lives. Because of the internet, someone in, for example, America can feel closer to them than their own neighbours. For this generation, there is less distinction between the digital and physical world (Number 5 Foundation, 2021). This is also visible in the physical world, as they are on their phones a lot, and in class it's not unusual for them to wear earphones (observation citizenship education, see appendix D).

This also partly explains why they are more connected to the Netherlands as a whole than their own neighbourhood (Van Hal & Kanne, 2021). On social media and television etc., they are confronted more frequently with national news than the developments in their own municipality or street (personal observation). National news will reach them anyway through all sorts of channels including social media, while for the local news, following their local news channel or municipality is more of an active choice.

The mbo-students really see themselves rather than society as a whole as a starting point for participation (Van Hal & Kanne, 2021). They want to talk about what they find important, and stay very close to their experiences. This became evident during the focus groups as well. Several hypothetical scenarios

were discussed on different scale levels, from in the classroom to national politics. For every scenario, the question was if they would do something about it, and if so, what they would do. When the national scenario, increasing the legal minimum age for alcohol and tobacco, was discussed, an intense discussion arose. Students who were affected by it, had a very strong opinion and came up with counter arguments, while a 16 year-old did not care as much.

“Yes, of course, they have changed the age very often and then I think, yes, you are 18, you are an adult, why should they make it even higher? And it is actually now because you are 18, you can make your own choices. I like going out, I smoke, and if they want to increase it, they will create a lot more problems, I think.”

- Focus group participant

“Suppose it is indeed for this purpose, then I think I would participate. Because these young people already have very little and more and more is being taken away. So I would participate, yes.”

- Focus group participant

“Yes, so far it doesn't bother me very much at my age, so for me it's not that important. Maybe when I'm older, when I'm 18.”

- 16 year old participant of focus group

On the next page, an overview of topics mbo-students care about can be found (observation verkiezingsfestival, see appendix K).

ramadan
official holiday discrimination
public transport taxes
tuition fees housing quality
affordable housing
war in Ukraine gas prices
internship compensation
corona increase minimum wage
living costs more community centers

Fig. 22: Topics mbo-students mentioned at the Verkiezingsfestival (see appendix K).

3.5.1 Take-aways 'Connected to society'

WANT TO BE INVOLVED IN
RELEVANT DISCUSSIONS



DON'T REALLY FOLLOW
THE (LOCAL) NEWS



MORE CONNECTED TO NL THAN
TO THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD



SEE THEMSELVES AS A STARTING
POINT FOR PARTICIPATION



ONLY CARE ABOUT TOPICS
CLOSE IN THEIR LIFEWORLD



DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL
WORLD ARE MERGED

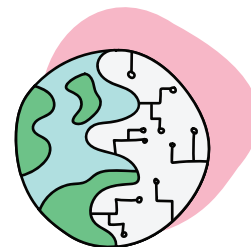


Fig. 23: Take-aways from the theme 'Connected to society'.

3.6 Mental capacity

In paragraph 1.1, it is explained that the government has unrealistic expectations of citizens' mental capacity. This also has influence on their capacity to participate and thresholds for mbo-students arise.

With the way the current youth participation system is set up in most municipalities, a lot of responsibility is placed on the adolescents. As the mbo-students are hardly on the radar of politicians and policymakers, and the system is tailored to the world of the politicians and policymakers, this results in a mismatch between the expectations of the policymakers and the *doenvermogen* of the mbo-students.

Three characteristics of mbo-students in relation to this mismatch are important to discuss as policymakers and politicians might not be aware of these: formal language can be a barrier, students have a hard time formulating their opinions autonomously and they do not think in existing governmental structures.

3.6.1 Formal language can be a barrier

“But also the use of language determines whether you can find connection as a politician.”

- (Koomen & Van Straaten, 2021)

Politicians and policymakers mention they have a hard time understanding the language of young adults (Van Hal & Kanne, 2021). Simultaneously, mbo-students struggle with language that is too formal or specialised (Hoogendoorn, 2021).

“Also just language, the fact that sometimes those election programmes are just 200+ pages long. That doesn't really make it very accessible to our tiktok'ing, everything-must-be-quick generation.”

- Titia Hoogendoorn (2021)

The Dutch *Foundation for Writing and Reading* has set-up guidelines for understandable language (Stichting Lezen en Schrijven, 2022). Originally these were created to make language more accessible for illiterate people, but if politicians and policymakers apply these principles, their communication can become more effective for many other target groups, including mbo-students.

The guidelines include the following tips:

- Use short sentences
- Avoid the use of jargon or very formal language
- Avoid using too much imagery or symbolism
- Use images to support your communication
- Take the receiver of your communication seriously, simple language does not have to be childish

Within the focus groups, regularly asking whether they had questions and if everything was clear was a good way to ensure that the students understood everything. This established a safe environment in which students felt comfortable to ask questions and started doing so more and more. When more clarification was needed, giving examples was an effective way to explain what was meant (focus groups, see appendix G). The downside of doing this, is that examples steer them in a certain direction. This could be avoided by giving several, distinct examples.

3.6.2 Need help formulating their opinions

When asked what their opinion is on a certain topic, the initial reaction of many mbo-students is to shrug and say 'I don't know.' (focus group, see appendix G; verkiezingsfestival, see appendix K). However, after asking follow-up questions, they are actually quite opinionated and start telling stories and giving examples of events in their daily lives that relate to the topic.

This is something that Michiel Steegers, the participation coordinator of the ROC Mondriaan recognises:

"That is something they really need help with; you really have to keep asking questions, otherwise it will remain superficial."

3.6.3 Do not think in existing governmental structures

To find out how mbo-students would approach getting attention and learn what they know about civic rights such as protesting, three hypothetical scenarios were discussed with them during the focus groups as explained in chapter 3.1 (see appendix G).

In both the classroom scenario and the national scenario, they had a clear idea of what their options were and how to approach it. For example, someone

mentioned they would join a protest against lowering the minimum age for alcohol, and in the classroom it is common to put your hand up. However, on the municipal level, the participants were a bit more hesitant and clueless. On this level, the code does not seem clear.

"I would almost say: make fuss with the municipality, but that is not a good plan."

- Focus group participant

"I have no idea, talking to them or something?"

- Focus group participant

Apart from the code regarding participation, the entire political process is rather complicated for adolescents. Even when they are aware of the system, they often do not fully understand it.

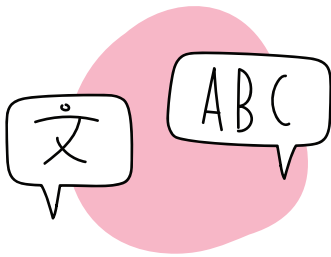
"We do have interest and it's not too slow, but what politicians do is too complicated."

- participant in the research of Van Hal and Kanne (2021)

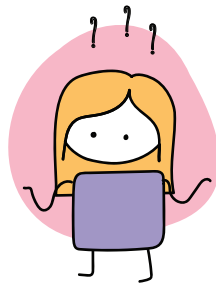
As they are not aware of these structures, they are also not limited by them. Policymakers and politicians who do work with adolescents recognise their creativity, and praise them for it (Number 5 Foundation, 2021). At the same time, these ideas often do not fit existing governmental structures, which makes them hard to implement.

3.6.4 Take-aways 'Mental capacity'

(FORMAL) LANGUAGE CAN
BE A BARRIER



CAN'T FORM(ULATE) THEIR
OPINIONS AUTONOMOUSLY



DON'T THINK IN EXISTING
GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURES

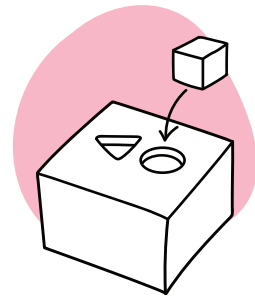


Fig. 24: Take-aways from the theme 'Mental capacity'

3.7 The gap between mbo-students and the government

A gap between the world of adolescents and politicians' and policymakers' perception of this world has been identified by Van Hal and Kanne (2021) and further explored by Koomen and Van Straaten (2021). This gap becomes visible through several characteristics (see figure 24). Assumptions, insecurities and even prejudices between both adolescents and politicians/policymakers form obstacles for making contact (Koomen & Van Straaten, 2021). This lack of contact maintains the gap and even widens it. The (negative) effects of this lack of contact will be discussed in the coming paragraphs.

Fig. 25: Characteristics of the gap between the government and mbo-students

DO NOT FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH
NEW MEDIA SUCH AS TIKTOK

"I'm on the old social media, not on Instagram, for example. I don't want to act like a young person, that doesn't suit me."

-Administrator (Koomen & Van Straaten, 2021)

POLITICIANS DO NOT SEEM AWARE OF THE STATUS
DIFFERENCE ADOLESCENTS EXPERIENCES

MBO'ERS ARE UNDERREPRESENTED
IN THE GOVERNMENT

"This leads to underrepresentation and misunderstanding. The result is simply: unequal treatment."

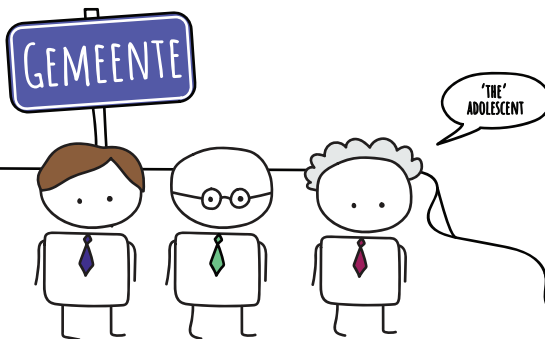
- Quin Blokzijl (NOS, 2022)

POLITICIANS HAVE A HARD TIME EMPATHISING
WITH MBO-STUDENTS

"Start by talking about our perceptions, what we experience and how we view things."

-Adolescent (Koomen & Van Straaten, 2021)

THE GOVERNMENT ASSUMES ADOLESCENTS ARE NOT
INTERESTED OR DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH KNOWLEDGE...



ADOLESCENTS EXPERIENCE A STATUS
DIFFERENCE WITH POLITICIANS

HAVE DIFFERENT VIEWS ON DEMOCRACY

LACK POLITICAL ROLE MODELS

FEAR FOR TOKENISM &
NOT BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY

“If they are not going to do anything with it then they don't need to talk to us. I am not going to talk for something that it is not going to happen.”

-Focus group participant

DO NOT UNDERSTAND
EACH OTHER WELL

“They don't really empathise with our generation and don't really go through the same things we do.”

-Adolescent (Koomen & Van Straaten, 2021)

STUDENTS ARE INSECURE
ABOUT THE PROCESS

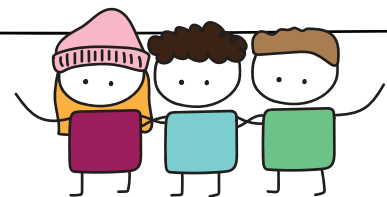
“A youth council, for example. You must know a lot for that, I probably can't do it.”

-Adolescent (Koomen & Van Straaten, 2021)

... BUT ADOLESCENTS HAVE DIFFERENT
INTERESTS THAN THE GOVERNMENT EXPECTS

“We do have interest and it is not too slow, but what administrators do is too complicated.”

-Adolescent (Koomen & Van Straaten, 2021)



3.7.1 Mbo-students in the blindspot

As people with an mbo-background are structurally underrepresented in government and policy (interview NJR, see appendix C; NOS, 2022), mbo-students are more likely to be in the blindspot of the government than hbo- or wo-students. Although youth participation is increasingly on the agenda of governments, too often they speak about 'the' adolescents, and mbo-students hardly get mentioned specifically (see chapter 2.1.1). Since these civil servants have probably been a hbo- or wo-student themselves at some point, this is their frame of reference and bubble. The gap between government and mbo-students is therefore even bigger than with peers who enjoy formal education. This is visible in other areas than just their political participation. For example, very little research has been done into their mental wellbeing (RIVM, 2022), while this is a hot topic in hbo-institutes and universities.

The underrepresentation of people with an mbo-background results in a lack of political role models (Save the Children, 2020), which strengthens the image these students have that politics is not for or about them. Furthermore, it makes it more difficult for them to get involved, as they do not have people in their surroundings who can explain how to approach that effectively.

3.7.2 The right topics do not get addressed

Making contact with a group that you are not actively aware, that have different needs and wishes, can be very difficult. In general, policymakers and politicians mention they find it hard to empathise with adolescents (Koomen & Van Straaten, 2021). As the mbo-students are in their blindspot, empathising with them might be even harder for policymakers and politicians. As a result, politicians and policymakers do not really know what topics mbo-students find important.

Furthermore, they have to balance the interests of many different groups of citizens. Since adults are a more stable group of voters, it is tempting to focus on them instead in order to book political successes (Hoogendoorn, 2021). This combination results in that the issues that mbo-students find important not (or hardly) getting addressed.

As the topics relevant to mbo-students are not addressed, they strongly feel like politics is not about them and feel misunderstood by the government. On top of this, they feel like they do not matter to politicians.

“Politicians do not consider adolescents important. At least, that's the feeling among adolescents.”

- A 20-year-old (Van Hal & Kanne, 2021)

Politics can be a rather abstract concept, even though many aspects of daily life are determined in The Hague or in city councils. As mbo-students are mainly focused

on their own lifeworld and things very close to them, and are busy enough with their own lives, they don't want to be involved in things that don't concern them (see chapter 3.5). It is important to start from their interests, rather than talk about a broad and abstract concept like 'politics'. Once they realise it does affect them and they can influence it, they want to be involved in discussions.

“Everything is political, rather ask what someone thinks is important in life.”

- Titia Hoogendoorn

“I don't think they would care about adolescents' opinions.”

- Focus group participant

3.7.3 Current forms do not match

The current efforts to increase youth participation as described in chapter 1.5 have been insufficiently effective, as participation has not been increasing (see chapter 2.1). In this section, an explanation is given.

Citizenship education seems promising as a concept, but is very susceptible to the view and approach of the teachers and could lack real-world application. The shape of traditional education might also not be a great match for mbo-students, as they have less of a theory-focus. *ProDemos* tries to break through this with a wide variety of educational materials such as lectures, films, assignments, cases and games. However, in a random sample from their repository

(ProDemos, n.d.), most materials appear to be focused on a classroom setting, with just the students and a teacher. Although this might be useful to inspire and support teachers, it lacks a link to action students can take themselves.

Youth councils do not seem to attract mbo-students. This form of participation is quite formal and detached. Generally, it does not attract adolescents from vulnerable groups or adolescents without formal education (Save the Children, 2020).

“And also already just a bit of playful activities, so maybe working together in groups and not that very basic meeting at a table in a white collar shirt. That image does prevail.”

- Quin Blokzijl (interview JOB, see appendix F)

Even though adolescents attribute value to inclusive processes and belief that involving a diverse group of adolescents is vital (Koomen & Van Straaten, 2021), the mbo-student does not seem to find much connection with the *political youth organisations*. Out of all adolescents, only 2,0 percent is a member at a political organisation (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020). The survey spread among political youth organisations showed that they estimate 5 to 35 percent of their members to have an mbo-background (see appendix E). Thus, the balance between education levels at political youth organisations is skewed in favour of those with formal education, especially since the mbo-population is larger than those of the hbo and wo combined (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020). From the survey answers, this imbalance does not

seem to be high on the agenda of the political youth organisations (see appendix E).

The National Youth Council (NJR) does manage to enthuse adolescents, even if it is only on a small scale. Their formula for success is mainly in trying to make it fun and lower the threshold as much as possible for adolescents, even if that means extra work for them (interview NJR, see appendix C):

“We very much assume everything we do must be a success experience for the participants. [...] And I think there is also a very important condition in that, it should not only be interesting in terms of content, it should especially be a lot of fun and certainly more fun than what you would normally do with your time.”

- Maurice Knijnenburg, chair NJR

“Adolescents should actually always get more than they give.”

- Maurice Knijnenburg, chair NJR

3.7.4 Lack of trust in the government

Students do not seem to have a lot of faith in the government. For example, they expect that their input will not change the outcome of the process and seem scared not to be taken seriously:

“Nitpicky on their own opinion. That they really do stick to their own opinions.”

- Focus group participant

“If they [officials] stick very much to their own point, discussion will be impossible.”

- Focus group participant

Research by Save the Children (2020) confirms that mbo-students find politicians unreliable. This can at least partially be explained by the lack of communication from the government. In reports such as the *‘Bondgenoten in Democratie’* by the Number 5 Foundation, and the Guide to Sustainable Youth Participation, readers are often tipped to communicate what will happen and has been done with input from involved parties. This implies that currently, this type of communication is lacking. As a result, students do not always understand why decisions were made, lowering their willingness to participate (Save the Children 2020).

In his book *‘Why young people don’t vote’*, Agg (2016) mentions a different reason why adolescents often find politicians unreliable. According to Agg, politicians are often in the news in a negative way, sketching an image of lying and manipulating people who only look after themselves running the country.

Another explanation can be found in the anonymity of the municipality. During the focus groups, students had a hard time creating the civil servants, and mentioned they had no idea what *‘those people look like or what they do’* (focus groups, see appendix C). This is in line with the research by Koomen and Van Straaten (2021). One of their recommendations is to show adolescents who work at the municipality and improve their visibility and accessibility.

3.7.5 Lack of initiative

As a consequence of the gap between mbo-students and the government, neither party takes the initiative. Because they do not know how to do it, where to start and have to set other priorities because it is incredibly time consuming. Therefore, there is no contact, and assumptions and prejudices continue to exist.

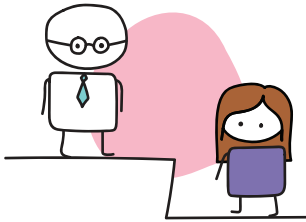
Politicians vs. Policymakers

On the governmental side, there is shared responsibility, leading to uncertainty as to who is responsible for involving this group. As both politicians and policymakers are responsible for involving mbo-students, ambiguity arises about who should take the initiative from the governmental side.

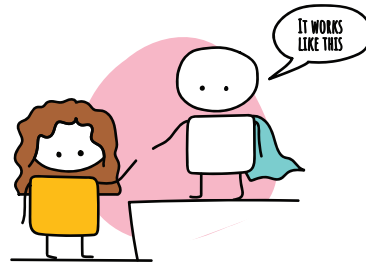
On the governmental side of the political decision making process, there are different stakeholders involved in different stages. A distinction between the decisive power and executive power can be made (interview policymaker participation, see appendix I). Politicians have the opportunity to set the agenda, address problems and come up with solutions (Politiek en Beleid - Politieke Besluitvorming, 2017). Next, it is up to policymakers to define these solutions more specifically, or to execute the approved policies. In this step of the process, there is space for youth participation, but it is not setting the agenda to the extent politicians do (interview policymaker participation, see appendix I). On top of this, policymakers often have to integrate the needs and wishes of many different types of citizens. In politics there is more space to focus on one group, as, for example, seen with the current nitrogen discussions concerning farmers in the Netherlands.

3.7.6 Take-aways 'Gap between mbo-students and government'

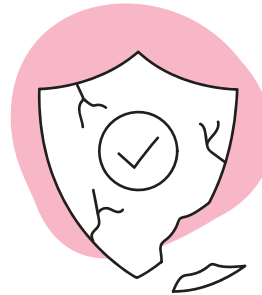
EXPERIENCE A STATUS
DIFFERENCE WITH POLITICIANS



LACK POLITICAL
ROLE MODELS



DON'T TRUST
POLITICIANS



SCARED TO NOT BE
TAKEN SERIOUSLY



Fig. 26: Take-aways from the theme 'Gap between mbo-students and government'.

3.8 Conclusion

3.8.1 The needs, wishes and experience world of underaged mbo-students

Mbo-students are extremely diverse in age, ethnicity, study, lifestyle, personal interests and so on (observations, see appendices D, G and K; Bakker, 2022). It is crucial to recognise that 'the mbo-student' does not exist. However, there are some characteristics and themes that seem to be common.

Many students seem to be struggling with the image of the mbo as they get stereotyped by more privileged groups (focus group & interviews with experts, see appendices C, F, G and H; Stuij, 2020; Visser, 2021; Visser, 2022). The students internalise these negative stereotypes and their education level becomes part of their identity and influences self-esteem (Visser, 2021). This results in hesitancy and (task) avoidance (focus group and observations, see appendices D and G) and has led to a stronger need for affirmation (interview participation coordinator ROC, see appendix H). Because of the discrimination they frequently have to deal with, mbo-students appear to be less judgmental, more open-minded and better at empathising than their academically educated peers (focus group, see appendix G; Visser 2022).

The majority of the mbo-students who start an mbo-study are underaged (Van Engen, 2017). Students seem to view themselves more as children than as adults (focus group, see appendix G). A large part of the students lives with their parents (interview youth organisations, see appendices C and F). As they often do not study where they live, they make use of

public transportation to commute to school or their internship (focus group, see appendix G). The majority of the mbo-population comes from low to middle socioeconomic backgrounds (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2021) and therefore have to set other priorities than participation in their free time (interviews youth organisations, see appendices C and F), for example working a job to provide for their family.

Although they do not follow the news much, current affairs such as the war in Ukraine dominate conversation and keep their minds occupied (observation verkiezingsfestival, see appendix K). Local news does not seem to interest them and they feel more connected to the Netherlands than to their own neighbourhood (focus group, see appendix G; Van Hal & Kanne, 2021). This can at least be partially explained through digitalisation. As they grew up with contemporary technology such as social media and smartphones, there is less of a distinction between the digital and physical world (observation citizenship class, see appendix D; focus group, see appendix G; Number 5 Foundation, 2021). Students are most comfortable and interested in conversations that play close in their lifeworld (focus group, see appendix G) and see themselves as a starting point for these conversations, rather than society as a whole (Van Hal & Kanne, 2021).

The government has unrealistic expectations of citizens' mental capacity (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor Regeringsbeleid, 2017). This also has an influence on students' capacity to participate and thresholds arise. A mismatch between the expectations of the policymakers and the *doenvermogen* of the mbo-

students is the result. The language used by the government can be quite formal and abstract (Koomen & Van Straaten, 2021; Hoogendoorn, 2021), which the students have a hard time understanding (focus groups, see appendix G; Hoogendoorn, 2021). Asking many questions and using short sentences free from jargon seemed to be effective to counter this (focus groups, see appendix G; Stichting Lezen en Schrijven, 2022). Furthermore, mbo-students have a hard time forming and formulating their opinions autonomously (observatie verkiezingsfestival, see appendix K; focus group, see appendix G; interview participation coordinator ROC, see appendix H). Support can be offered by asking many follow-up questions and using the laddering technique (focus group, see appendix G; interview participation coordinator ROC, see appendix H). Lastly, adolescents do not really think in existing government structures (focus group, see appendix G). As a result, their ideas often do not fit the plans of the government and are less likely to be used (Number 5 Foundation, 2021).

Empathise cards

Being able to communicate these insights in a captivating manner would be helpful as it allows 'outsiders' to empathise more with the target group. Since the group is so diverse, personas would not be able to communicate all insights properly. Therefore, a new tool to communicate these insights had to be developed.

Characteristics which were common, but not per

definition applicable to all students, have been collected and translated into a card deck (see figure 27 for an impression and appendix L for the entire deck). Every card describes one of these characteristics supported with an illustration and quote or insight. On the back of the cards, dos and don'ts are listed, providing the user of the deck with some hands on tools.

The characteristics are clustered into themes, which are explained on the cluster cards. These provide a bit more explanation of the cluster, giving the user of the cards a better understanding of why this theme is relevant to mbo-students.

The empathise card deck can not only be used to communicate these insights, but might work as a tool useful to policymakers or politicians as well. For example, they could use it to prepare themselves for an encounter with mbo-students. The cards will therefore be translated into Dutch and tested during the project.

3.8.2 There is too little to gain for mbo-students in participation

Mbo-students are generally speaking not on the radar of the government (observation literature, e.g., Number 5 Foundation (2021) or Van Hal & Kanne (2021)). This is partly due to their low representation on both the decisive (politics) and executive (policy) levels in the government (interview NJR, see appendix C; NOS, 2022). As a result, politicians and policymakers have a



Fig. 27: Impression of the Empathise Card deck.

hard time empathising with this group of adolescents and don't know what they find important (interview policymaker, see appendix I; Koomen & Van Straaten, 2021). Topics the students care about therefore do not get addressed (Nationaal Jeugdinstituut, 2021). The feeling mbo-students have that politics is not about them is therefore at least partly justified, as in a way, (municipal) politics is not about them. This could feed into their lower self-esteem and the feeling that their voice does not matter.

Current forms of participation are either too complicated, not fun and/or too time-consuming (interview youth organisations, see appendices C and F; Save the Children, 2020). Since adolescents often do not have a say in shaping the process (Nationaal Jeugdinstituut, 2021), they can not change this themselves. On top of this, the used language does not match their used language (focus group, see appendix G; interview NJR, see appendix C; Hoogendoorn, 2021), and adolescents have different views on democracy than politicians/policymakers (Koomen & Van Straaten, 2021). As adolescents, but especially mbo-students do not think in existing governmental structures and systems and are not aware of the municipal code regarding participation (focus group, see appendix G), their ideas often do not fit the current processes (Number 5 Foundation, 2021). The current participation system simply does not fit their perceived world (leefwereld).

As politics is not really about them, and the process does not match their needs and wishes in both content and shape, it can be concluded that there is too little

to gain for mbo-students in the current participation system. This results in a vicious circle (see figure 28) in which other factors come into play as well.

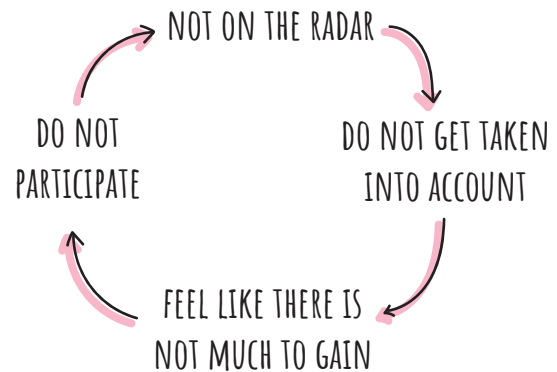


Fig. 28: Mbo-students end up in a vicious circle.

3.8.3 Requirements for successful participation

Based on the definitions of participation and true participation and the identified themes regarding the lifeworld of mbo-students and their relation to the participatory system, a list of requirements for successful mbo-student participation can be distilled.

The process is transparent

Students know who made the decision concerning their involvement and why this decision was made. Initiative takers should be transparent about their

intentions to involve mbo-students, their intentions with the project and be driven by genuine curiosity. Students should be kept in the loop and progress and results should be shared with them on a regular basis.

Mbo-students experience control and ownership

Mbo-students have a meaningful or shaping role (rather than a decorative one) have the opportunity to set (parts of) the agenda and are involved in designing the process. They are at least involved in decision making. They volunteered for the project after it was explained to them. Students who want to, should be able to be involved in the next steps of the project.

Mbo-students experience no or only low thresholds to participate

The process should either be low in time-investment, or more fun than what students normally would do with that time. The more fun the project is, the more time it can cost the students. It should be easy (rather than complicated) to participate. Topics that affect them have to be the starting point.

Participation is a learning opportunity for all stakeholders

There must be space to make mistakes for both students and politicians/policymakers. Participants

should feel safe. The process should be structured, but flexible and open for ideas participants get during the process. Students should be able to mirror themselves on peers, learn from their peers or be an example for them. The (hidden) strengths of individuals are a good starting point to shape the process and divide roles. This allows students to discover they are capable of more than they thought.

Participation is be balanced

The ideal collaboration is balanced and equal. Politicians/policymakers should be willing to share if they expect mbo-students to be open. The discussed topics are relevant and clear to all interlocutors.

Students feel heard and taken seriously

To achieve this, the dialogue should be binding and the input should be used. There should be a system to translate insights into concrete results. If a decision is made which does not align with the input of the mbo-students, it should be explained to them why that decision was made. During conversations, their dialogue partner should show them they are actively listening (e.g., avoid being on their laptop to take notes but be in the moment instead).



Define

Now that a greater understanding for the context and problem has been gained through the research as described in the previous chapter, the design brief can be defined more clearly. First, a diverse range of solution directions are put forward through divergence methods. Then, one of those directions is chosen and the design goal is formulated and explained. Lastly, design principles are formulated to base choices on in later stages of the design process.

4.1 Possible design directions

4.2 Chosen design direction

4.3 Design principles

4.1 Possible design directions

Breaking the vicious circle of not participating can be approached from different angles. As many factors come into play, with these factors influencing each other, and with many underlying issues, the problem is rather complex. It is unlikely that one solution will solve all these underlying problems and it is hard to predict what the effect of a solution that focuses on one area will be on another area. Therefore, a smaller focus area or approach has to be chosen. This paragraph describes several directions that could be this focus. The directions have been identified through brainstorming focussed on the identified themes from chapter 3.

4.1.1 Teach mbo-students about the current system

As most students do not know the municipal code, teaching them how it works, and where to address their issues, could be a step in the right direction. This could be done in several ways.

Reshape the *medezeggenschap*

Focus on participation within the school. By shaping the '*medezeggenschap*' (participatory boards at school) in a way that is comparable with the code of municipalities, the students learn the system and needed skills in an environment that is known to them. If they scale up to the municipal level later in their lives, they can be involved with more confidence.

Lesson plan

A lesson plan could be designed in which students learn how to approach it if they have an issue, where they can sign up for projects and how to get in contact with the municipality. This could be done with guest lessons from e.g., policymakers. To make sure it fits the needs of the students, an (interactive) programme could be made, rather than a 'dry' set of powerpoint slides.

Serious game

To take it out of the classroom, a serious game in a different context could be made. As many mbo-students have negative associations with school, it could be very interesting to try to convey this knowledge in different contexts, such as at home with their parents, at sports clubs or in public transport.

Awareness campaign

Sharing success stories of other mbo-students could inspire students and inform them about opportunities to speak up. An awareness campaign could increase their self-efficacy.

4.1.2 Redesign participation

Current forms of participation are not a good fit for mbo-students for several reasons, as described in

chapter 3.7.3. Therefore, redesigning the system to fit the needs and wishes of mbo-students is a persuasive option. Different focusses could be taken.

Facilitate contact

Currently, mbo-students and politicians neither take the initiative for contact for various reasons. By facilitating the initial contact, this is surmountable. Furthermore, having contact is the most effective way to diminish the prejudices and assumptions both mbo-students and politicians experience regarding each other.

Match their experiences

The current forms of participation do not match the interests and skills of mbo-students. By bringing it closer into their environment, there might be a better match and the students might actually enjoy doing it. By taking the needs, wishes and mental capacities of mbo-students as a starting point, participation can be designed in such a way that the mbo-students are no longer excluded.

4.1.3 Facilitate for politicians/ policymakers

As it is in the government's interest to make participation representative and accessible, they could

take more initiative in this. However, policymakers experience thresholds in the process too. By mitigating their thresholds, it is more likely they will take this responsibility.

This could for example be done by translating the Guide to Sustainable Youth Participation into more concrete actions or usable tools for setting up participation.

4.1.4 Participation platform

As many initiatives to increase participation are currently scattered, bringing them in contact with each other can be very valuable. Providing a platform for these organisations and individuals to get in touch allows them to share ideas and experiences, and bundle forces.

4.2 Chosen design direction

The design directions as laid out in the previous paragraph all tackle different aspects of the problem. In order to make a decision about which direction to take, the aspect with which the most impact can be made is selected. Next, a design direction and focus points are chosen. These form the basis for the design statement in chapter 4.2.2.

4.2.1 Choosing a direction

The issue that mbo-students don't feel like politics affect them and their voice matters is quite fundamental. Broader issues like their low self-image come to play in these issues. Most of the other identified reasons for lack of participation are problems within the current participation system, and contribute in other ways to the vicious circle. This will therefore be the starting point for the design exploration.

In order to give mbo-students the feeling politics is about them, it is paramount to actually make politics about them. Therefore, the participation system should seamlessly fit their needs, wishes and interests. If they care about the topics that are addressed, they are more likely to have an opinion on something and might realise the importance of participation. To actually achieve this shift in relevance for mbo-students of topics in politics, their opinions and ideas should reach politicians. Having direct contact (rather than indirect, one-way contact) hits two birds with one stone, as it is an opportunity to diminish prejudices and assumptions, and creates a direct line of communication. It also contributes to the prevention

of non-participation, as it is easier for the students to hold the government accountable.

By choosing to focus on facilitating this contact with politicians, rather than with policymakers, more space is given to the ideas and needs specific to the students. This supports the idea of keeping it close to their experiences. The policymakers have a more executive role, shaping the policies through pre-defined projects in which the needs and wishes of all kinds of citizens are taken into account. Having to balance the needs and wishes of different stakeholders, there is less space in these projects to focus on the specific needs and wishes of the students or on topics they really care about. Politicians on the other hand have the power to set the agenda for the policymakers. In these conversations, the mbo-students can be placed at the centre. This can facilitate the necessary shift to make politics more about mbo-students.

As adolescents are weakly organised (see chapter 1.2), school is one of the few places where a large group of students can be approached at once. It is in their comfort zone as it is an environment familiar to them. Therefore it is relatively low in threshold. Giving the intervention a place within citizenship education makes it easier to free up time for this than at, for example, a sports club as it has a strong link to the content and goal of the class. A more diverse group of students can be approached this way as well. Designing the intervention to take place during school hours creates opportunities to make it 'more fun than what they would normally do with their time', as many mbo-students currently do not seem to particularly enjoy their citizenship classes.

4.2.2 Design statement

Thus, the design direction 'redesigning participation' is chosen, with attention for both facilitating direct contact, and matching the lifeworld of mbo-students. This has led to the following design statement:

To enable underaged mbo-students to participate in local politics, I wish to make them understand politics is about them and their voice matters by designing an mbo-student-centred participation tool which facilitates contact between mbo-students and local politicians at school.

Underaged mbo-students

16-18 year-olds following education at an mbo-school.

Participate

The contribution citizens make to democracy by making their opinions or beliefs known with the aim to influence public policy.

Mbo-student-centred participation tool

A tool which facilitates participation that is tailored to the needs and wishes of mbo-students and in which their lifeworld is the central starting point.

Facilitate contact

The thresholds to take initiative should be mitigated by facilitating the contact for them.

Local politicians

Mayor, aldermen and city council members of the corresponding municipality.

At school

The intervention should take place at school.

4.3 Design principles

In addition to the requirements for successful participation (chapter 3.8.3), design principles are formulated. These principles aim to scope down the design space, and help in later stages to take position in case of design dilemmas. They are chosen based on what is expected to work well for mbo-students. These expectations are grounded on the research insights and personal beliefs of the designer.

Mbo-students come first

In scenarios where the needs or wishes of students and politicians are clashing, the mbo-students will get priority. The thresholds the students experience should be as low as possible. This, for example, means that the initiative for the contact will explicitly be laid upon the municipalities. It is the government's responsibility to have a legitimate democratic system in which everyone can participate. The thresholds politicians experience in this should of course be taken into account and mitigated where possible, but are not the priority of this project.

Appreciate strengths and limitations

All students have their own strengths and limitations. These should be taken into account in the process. Their strengths should be used and they should get support in overcoming their limitations, in order to increase their self-efficacy regarding participation. This would, in the long term, be beneficial for their feeling of self-worth.

Ideally, this is done through their contact with peers. They should be able to mirror themselves on peers, learn from their peers or be an example for them. The role division can also be a useful tool. For example, a student could be the facilitator during a conversation if they are great a listener, or help with setting everything up if they are good at planning. Their teacher might be able to help with this division as they know their students quite well.

Some limitations are more common, such as their struggle with expressing their opinions autonomously. Supporting them in developing this (life) skill empowers them to participate more, even if they are not on the radar of politicians. The design should support them in this.

Flexible yet pre-defined process

The participation tool should offer students space for their own ideas and to wander off the beaten track. This is especially important since the target audience is so diverse. There is no one-size-fits all solution. But since this age-group benefits from (or even needs) structure, leaving too much open and flexible is not going to work either. Some boundaries are necessary to make the contact valuable and useful for both the students and politicians.

Flexibility also means students can decide in which elements or stages of the process they want to be involved without the process depending on their choice. Apart from the actual contact moment with

the municipality, they should be able to help with the planning of that moment, and be involved in developing the outcomes if they want to. The intensity of their involvement should also be flexible: from just a check-in by the municipality, to being a (co) project lead.

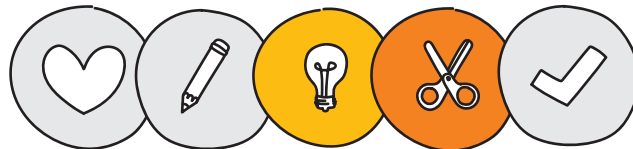
Interaction as a two-way-street

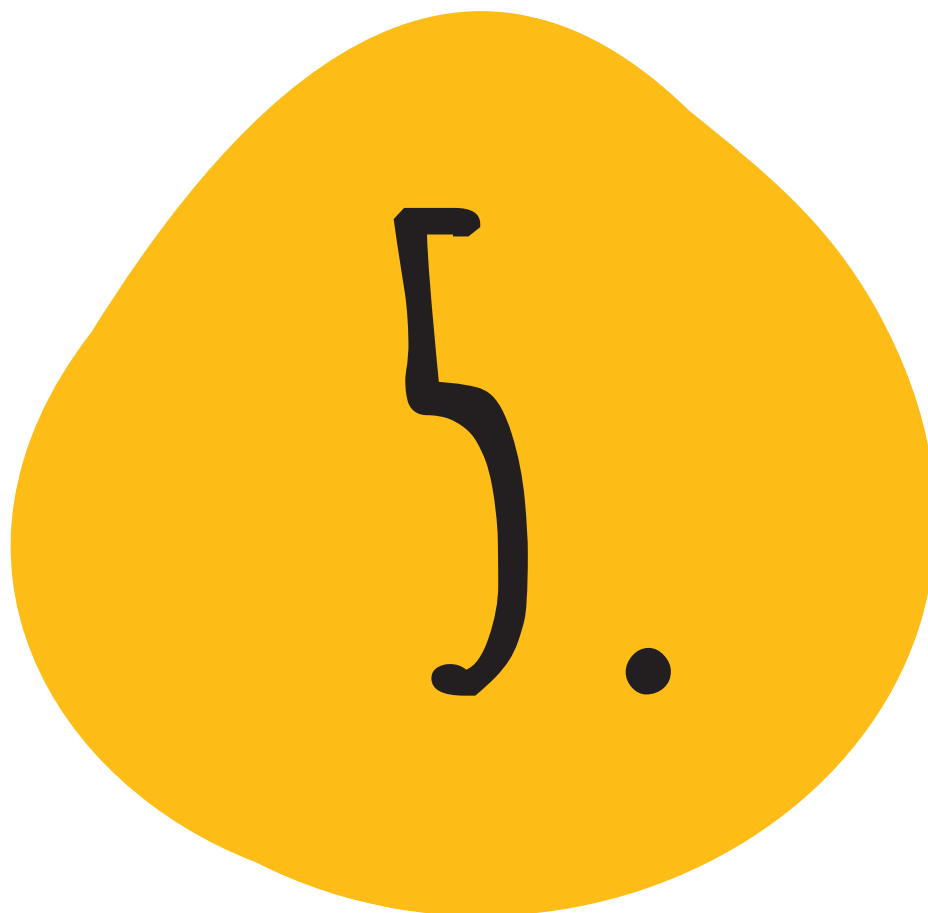
The design should entice both politicians and students to be open and vulnerable. Only if they both show their 'human' side, the experienced prejudices and assumptions can be diminished. Openness from both sides will also make their contact more valuable, as it allows for deeper conversations which get closer to the core of the experienced problems. To achieve this, hierarchy should be avoided.

Leave with a smile

If the tool can enthuse people about participation, they are more likely to want to be involved in other activities and see the importance of it. After interaction with the participation tool, all participants should feel like they either achieved something or learned something. But most important of all: they should have had a fun time which leaves them wanting more.

Phase two: Ideate & Prototype

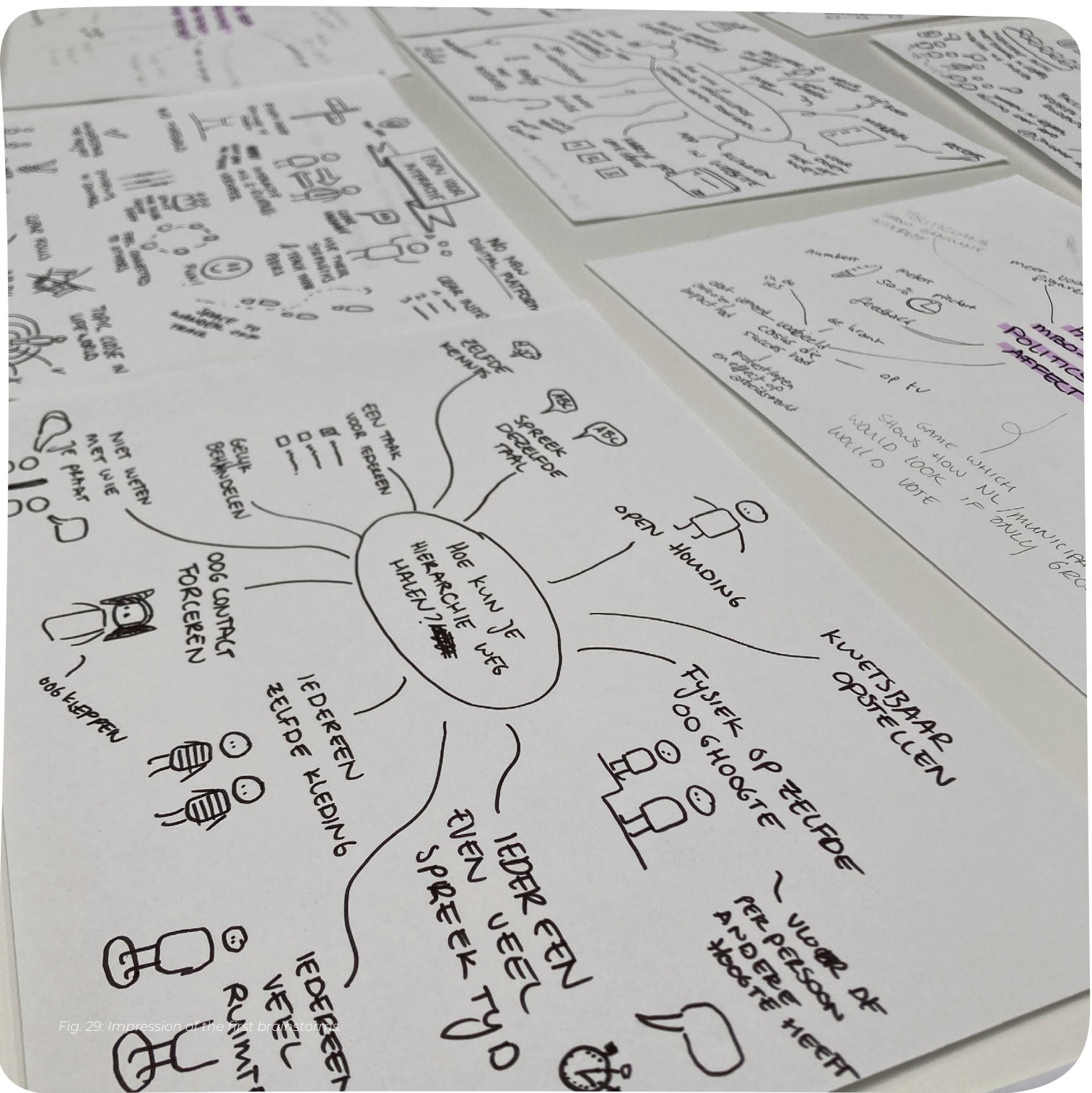




Ideate & Design

As a design goal has been formulated, it is time to come up with more concrete solutions. After an initial ideation, a co-creation session with peers is held. Brainstorming and prototyping methods are used simultaneously to develop the concept further. In the different iterations the different scale levels and elements of the design are developed.

- 5.1 Initial ideation
- 5.2 Co-creation session
- 5.3 Ideation on contact
- 5.4 Iteration 1 - Shaping the contact
- 5.5 Iteration 2 - Merge existing processes
- 5.6 Iteration 3 - Focus on co-creation



5.1 Initial ideation

To kick off the design phase, I started with collecting all the ideas I had written down throughout the project and evaluated them to see which were still relevant with the current aim and scope.

Next, I held a brainstorm session based on the requirements for successful participation as defined during the research together with fellow design students. Per requirement, How-Tos were created, as these are most useful at the start of idea generation (Van Boeijen et al., 2014). This allows the rather complex problem to be viewed from different perspectives and makes it more tangible. How to mitigate hierarchy? How to start a conversation? How to encourage mbo-students to express their opinions? How to increase self-efficacy? How to show someone you care about them? These are just a few examples of the questions that emerged and were answered during the brainstorm. An impression of the brainstorms can be viewed in figure 29.

Then I started thinking on how I could bring some of these ideas together, which led to a preliminary version of a potential journey (see figure 30). In this journey, students would be prepared for contact with politicians by being nudged to think about political topics in short interactions in different contexts in their daily lives. In these short moments of interaction, they would, for example, be confronted with statements they could react to. Their reaction can be very intuitive, only focusing on what they think about a certain topic. During the contact with the municipality, the focus could be more on why they think certain things, as they had some more time to think about the topic and were confronted with it in multiple places. The politicians can then support them in expressing their opinions more meticulously. This preliminary journey formed the basis for the co-creation session that is described in the next paragraph.

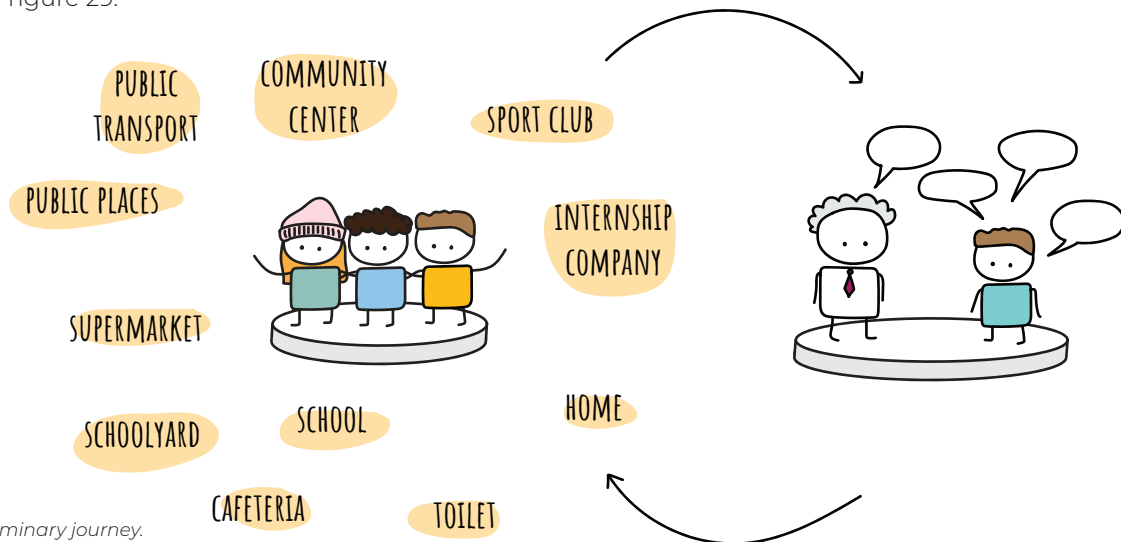


Fig. 30: Preliminary journey.

5.2 Co-creation session

After the initial brainstorm, a co-creation session was held for two reasons. First and foremost, the session is organised to get inspired on how to fill in the different 'trigger-moments'. The second goal is to test whether the empathise cards that were made to communicate the insights gained about the mbo-students are an effective way to empathise outsiders.

5.2.1 Approach

A full creative diamond was executed in the session, making use of diverging, reverging and converging methods. In this session, I had both the role of the facilitator and of the problem-owner. I prepared a session plan based on the Road Map for Creative Problem Solving Techniques (Heijne and Van der Meer, 2019). The guidelines for the session, as well as all results can be found in appendix N. In addition to standardised creative methods, I developed a game with the empathise card (see chapter 3.8) to empathise the participants with the target audience.

An impression of the session and the generated ideas can be found in figures 31 and 33.

5.2.2 Resource Group

Diversity in a team has a positive effect on the team's creativity (Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). A wider range of perspectives, knowledge, skills and opinions gives the group a larger pool of resources. This is especially helpful when dealing with complex

issues as *'the need to integrate diverse information and reconcile diverse perspectives may stimulate thinking that is more creative and prevent groups from moving to premature consensus on issues that need careful consideration'* (Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Therefore, participants with different academic backgrounds were selected (with a focus on fellow designers).

- Design for Interaction (MSc)
- Strategic product Design (MSc)
- Integrated Product Design (MSc)
- Industrial Design bachelor (BSc)
- Architecture (MSc)
- Aerospace Engineering (BSc)
- Security Studies (BSc)

The ideal group size for co-creation is five to eight participants per facilitator (Heijne & van der Meer, 2019) thus with the seven final participants, this requirement was met.

Session agenda

1. Introduction & icebreaker
2. Design brief
3. Purge
4. Empathise game
5. Idea generation through H2s
6. Idea gallery
7. Idea selection with dots
8. Break
9. Brainstorm in duos to develop one idea
10. Elevator pitches
11. Blindspot check
12. Wrap-up & small gift for participants



Fig. 32: Impression of the co-creation session.

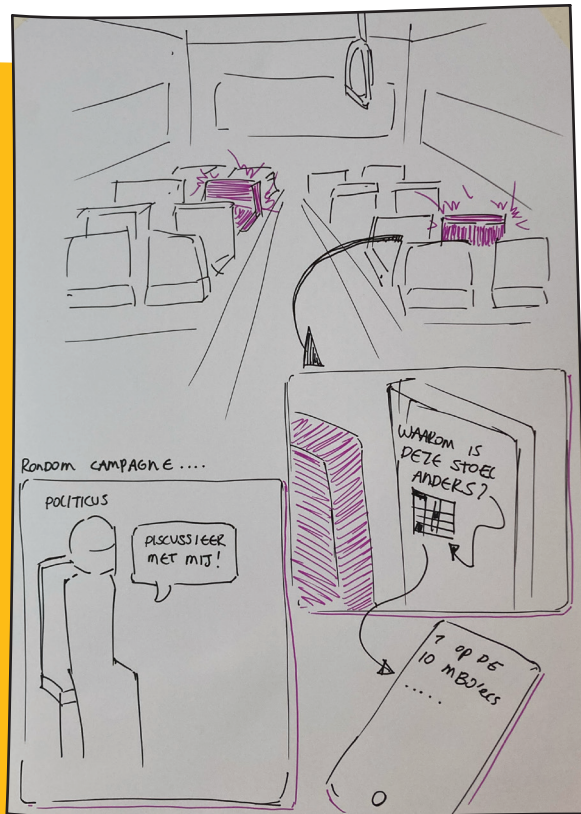


Fig. 33: Posters from the elevator pitches of the co-creation session.

5.3 Ideation on contact

The co-creation gave more insight about how smaller elements of the design could be translated to the perceived world of mbo-students. However, concrete ideas on how to shape the contact between mbo-students and politicians did not emerge as much as hoped. Therefore, extra brainstorms were done. These ideations focused on topics such as different conversation settings, elements that influence a conversation and its quality, and what 'conversational building blocks' are necessary to create a safe and creative environment. Next to these more open brainstorms, some How-Tos were used as well. Among others: How to choose a topic for conversations? How to make someone follow steps? How to communicate rules?

An impression of these brainstorms is shown in figure 34.

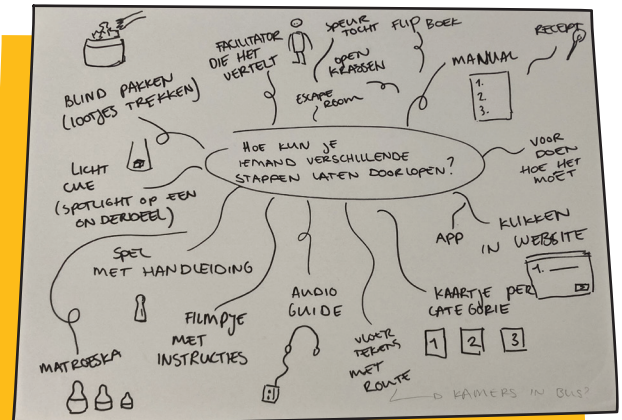
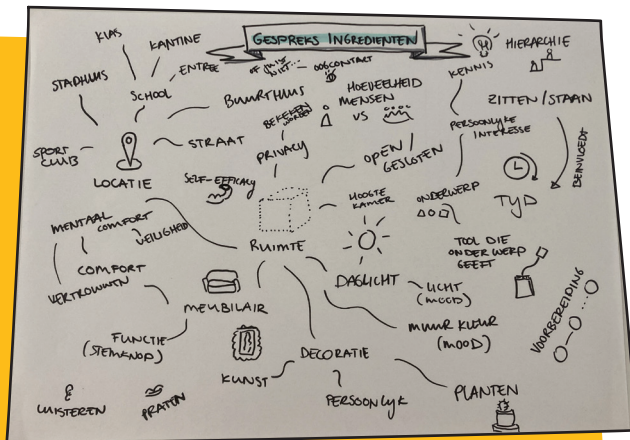
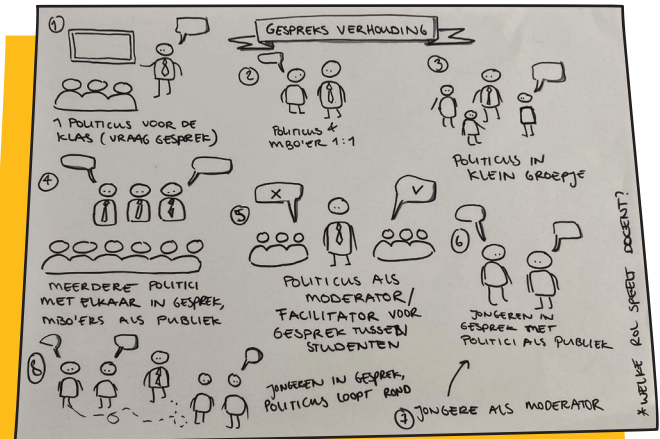


Fig. 34: An impression of the brainstorms on shaping contact.

5.4 Iteration 1 - Shaping contact

To determine what is needed to facilitate this contact properly, the meeting between local politicians and mbo-students is separated into different elements. Initially, 6 phases are distinguished, of which phase 1-4 form the actual encounters. These phases are based on the requirements for participation that emerged from the research. This iteration aims to provide an overview of these requirements in sequence of phases, but did not include with which activities these steps are achieved yet. The process can be seen in figure 35.

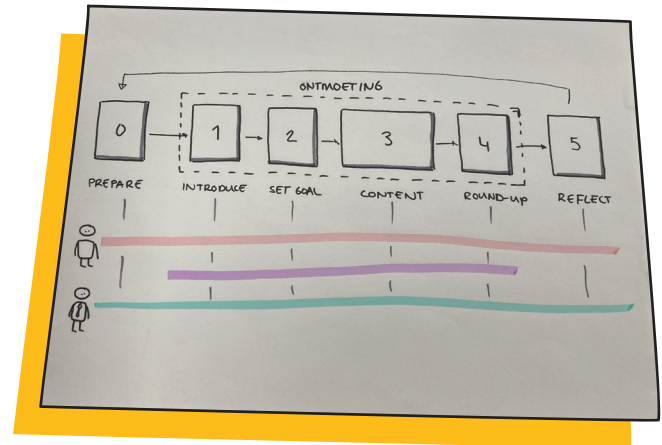


Fig. 35: The six phases of the encounter.

5.4.1 Meeting stages

Stage 0: Prepare

The preparation stage looks different for students and politicians. The students get prepared for the content, with the short moments of interaction in their daily lives. Students who want to have a more active role during the session, could already be appointed and prepared (e.g., if they want to be the facilitator, they need some instructions for this). The politicians on the other hand need to be empathised with the students, and prepared for leading the session if necessary.

Stage 1: Introduce

This is the first stage of the encounter. To mitigate hierarchy and prejudice, it is important that the students and politicians get to know each other. This will contribute to building mutual trust and equality between the participants.

The commonality of the problem should be established. An icebreaker ensures everyone has spoken up in

the group, and the basic agenda for the meeting is explained. This is also the stage where students are offered to quit the process if they want to. It has to be established that there are no wrong and right answers for the mbo-students in this process, and that they are the experts of their own experiences. The participants agree that they do not have to agree with each others' opinions.

Stage 2: Goal setting

In this stage, the course of the rest of the encounter is discussed. The session is scoped down: what are we going to do? (but also what not?). Process agreements should be made, as well as agreements on the results of the process, what do they want to get out of this conversation? A goal for the session is formulated. These goals could be about gathering input (what is going on with the students?), brainstorming for solutions, updating on the progress or getting

feedback on the proposed solution. One of the biggest design challenges of this project is to make this step fit the lifeworld of mbo-students, and not make it a boring meeting element.

Stage 3: Content

During this stage, the actual conversations are facilitated. A mix between different conversational settings is desirable, as group conversations allow for more input to be gathered, but one-on-one conversations between a politician and student allow for more depth and personal connection. The approach for this phase is dependent on the type of goal as well. A session in which the municipality wants feedback on ideas, should be set up differently than a session that is all about exposing the problems of mbo-students.

Stage 4: Wrap-up

After the content has been discussed, the session should be wrapped-up properly. This means the politicians should communicate what they are going to do with the input of the students. A short recap of the session is given and everyone gets a chance to share their experiences. The next steps are discussed

and prioritised and, if necessary, a new meeting is planned. Lastly, it is very important that the politicians express their appreciation for the effort and input of the students (and maybe even have a small gift for them).

Stage 5: Reflect

The last stage is less explicit than the others, but at least as important. After the session, the politicians are able to apply their gained insights and develop the outcomes further if necessary. Students can hopefully reflect a bit on their needs and opinions, and start thinking about these more autonomously.

5.4.2 Cyclic process

Due to the short nature of a session it is unlikely that the necessary trust between students and politicians is built in just one session. Therefore, a cyclic process is necessary and the phases are placed in a meeting cycle (see figure 36).

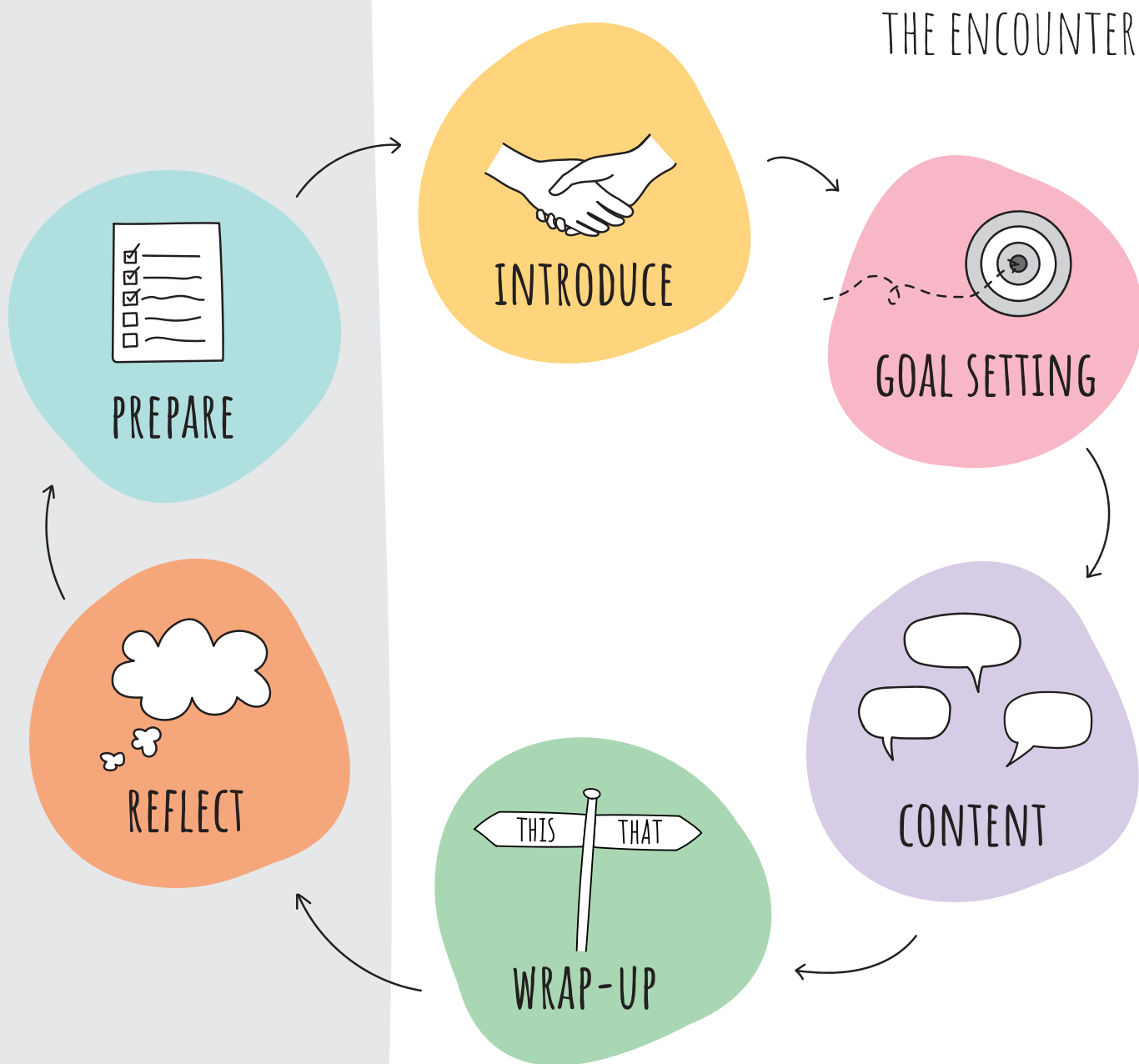


Fig. 36: The cyclic process.



Fig. 37: The designer is brainstorming.

5.5 Iteration 2 - Merging existing processes

In the first encounter, the needs of the stakeholders are very different from a wrap-up session. For example, during the first meeting a bigger focus on the introduction phase is desirable, as it supports mitigating prejudices, while this is less important in later meetings. A process consisting of several distinct interaction moments allows to tweak the interactions better to the needs specific to certain phases of the process. Secondly, building trust takes time, and spreading out the process might be beneficial for this development. Therefore, existing processes are analysed. Politicians and policymakers might be familiar with these, making implementation easier. Two processes will be discussed in the next section: Participatory Budgeting and integrated Creative Problem Solving. In section 5.6.3, a new process is proposed, which combines elements of these existing processes.

5.5.1 Participatory Budgeting

In Participatory Budgeting, governments set aside a section of their annual budget, allowing community members to decide how to spend it (Organizing Engagement, 2020). The process typically takes a year and, after the process is designed, consists of four main steps (see figure 38). After the winning projects have

been funded, the process is evaluated and tweaked for the next budget cycle if necessary.

As this strategy for civic engagements stems from 1989 and has been implemented all over the world (Organizing Engagement, 2020), policymakers are likely to be familiar with the process. This would make implementation and acceptance of the design easier.

However, Participatory Budgeting has a few flaws with respect to the specific context of the design. This process assumes problems have been identified by either facilitators of the process or by citizens, allowing them to jump into the brainstorm phase immediately. As the mbo-student is hardly on the radar of politicians and policymakers, this is not the case for the design context.

Furthermore, developing detailed, feasible proposals requires a lot of expertise and understanding of the complex processes a municipality has to deal with. Placing this responsibility onto mbo-students probably does not fit their interest, and thus would not be favourable in regard to exciting them about politics and participation.

DESIGN

the process

A steering committee, representative of the community, creates the rules in partnership with government officials to ensure the process is inclusive and meets local needs.

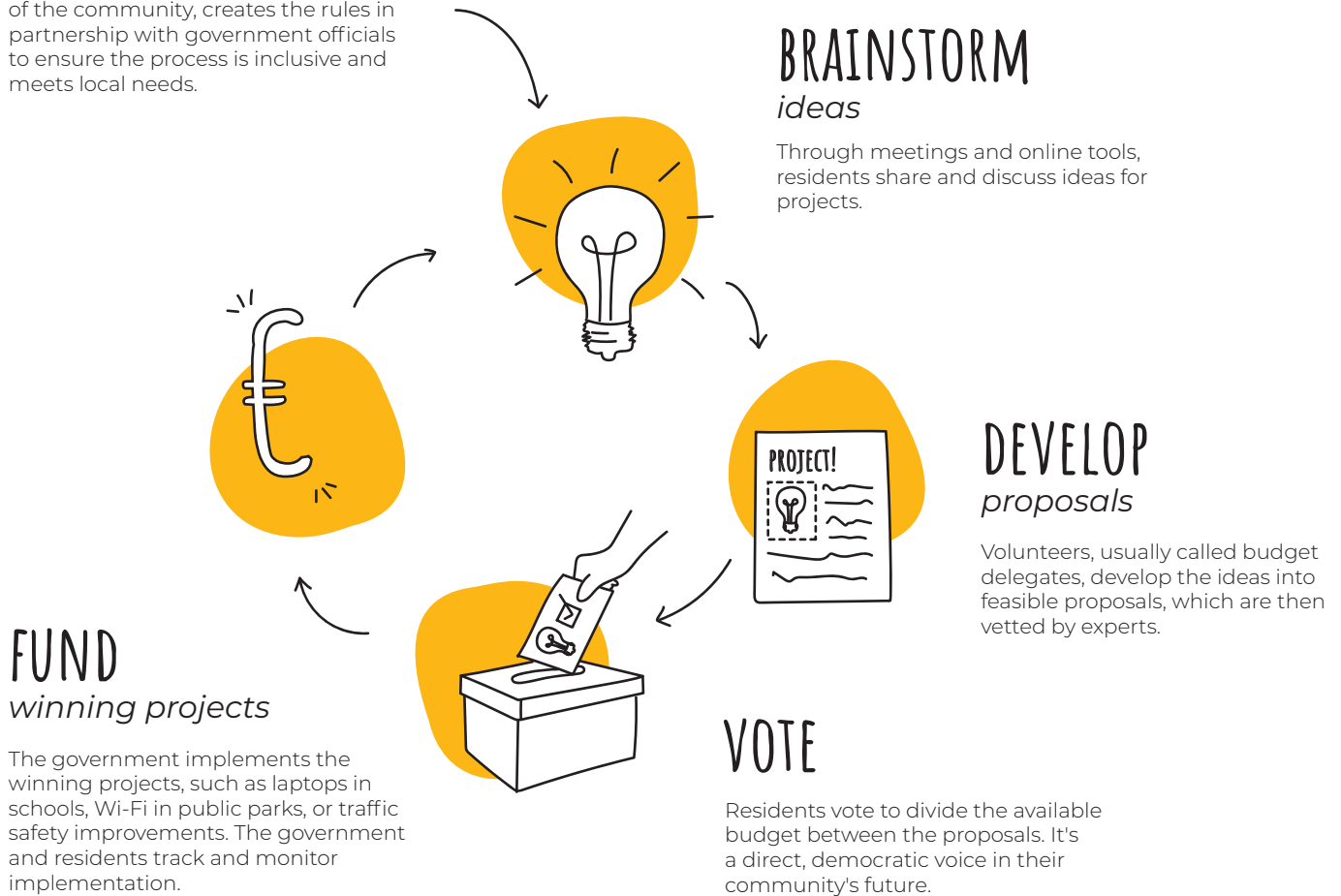


Fig. 38: The process of Participatory Budgeting, adapted from Organizing Engagement (2020).

5.5.2 Integrated Creative Problem Solving

In integrated Creative Problem Solving processes, a distinction between problem finding, idea finding and solution finding can be made (Heijne & Van der Meer, 2019). The stages can be seen as separate creative diamonds, in which one diverges, reverts and converges (see figure 39). As these stages have unique goals, they require the use of different methods. Although they can be combined into one session, it is not uncommon to separate these steps in the design process.

By applying this distinction to the participatory budgeting process, the different needs per meeting cycle can be more easily facilitated. It creates an opportunity to place the mbo-students and their needs and wishes in a more prominent role in the process as well. The brainstorm phase of Participatory Budgeting is the moment where the residents can share their story. Having multiple moments which are only about the students (rather than just one), could positively affect how much they feel heard or affected by politics.

Furthermore, separating the brainstorming phase of the participatory budgeting process into different encounters spread out over time, allows the students and politicians to build a relationship and rebuild mutual trust.

5.5.3 New process: Participatory Project Development

When combining these two processes, a new eight-step process is the result: Participatory Project Development (see figure 40). The entire process spans a school year, but the encounters between mbo-students and local politicians take place in the first few months. In four sessions, the students and politicians engage in a conversation with the help of creative exercises. Every session has its own focus, building from finding relevant themes to solution proposals. The results of each session form the basis for the next one. After a project is selected in the last encounter, the municipality works on developing a project proposal for it.

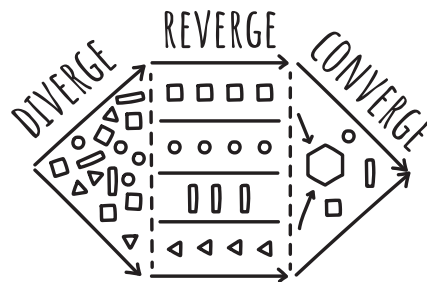


Fig. 39: A creative diamond (based on Heijne & Van der Meer, 2019)

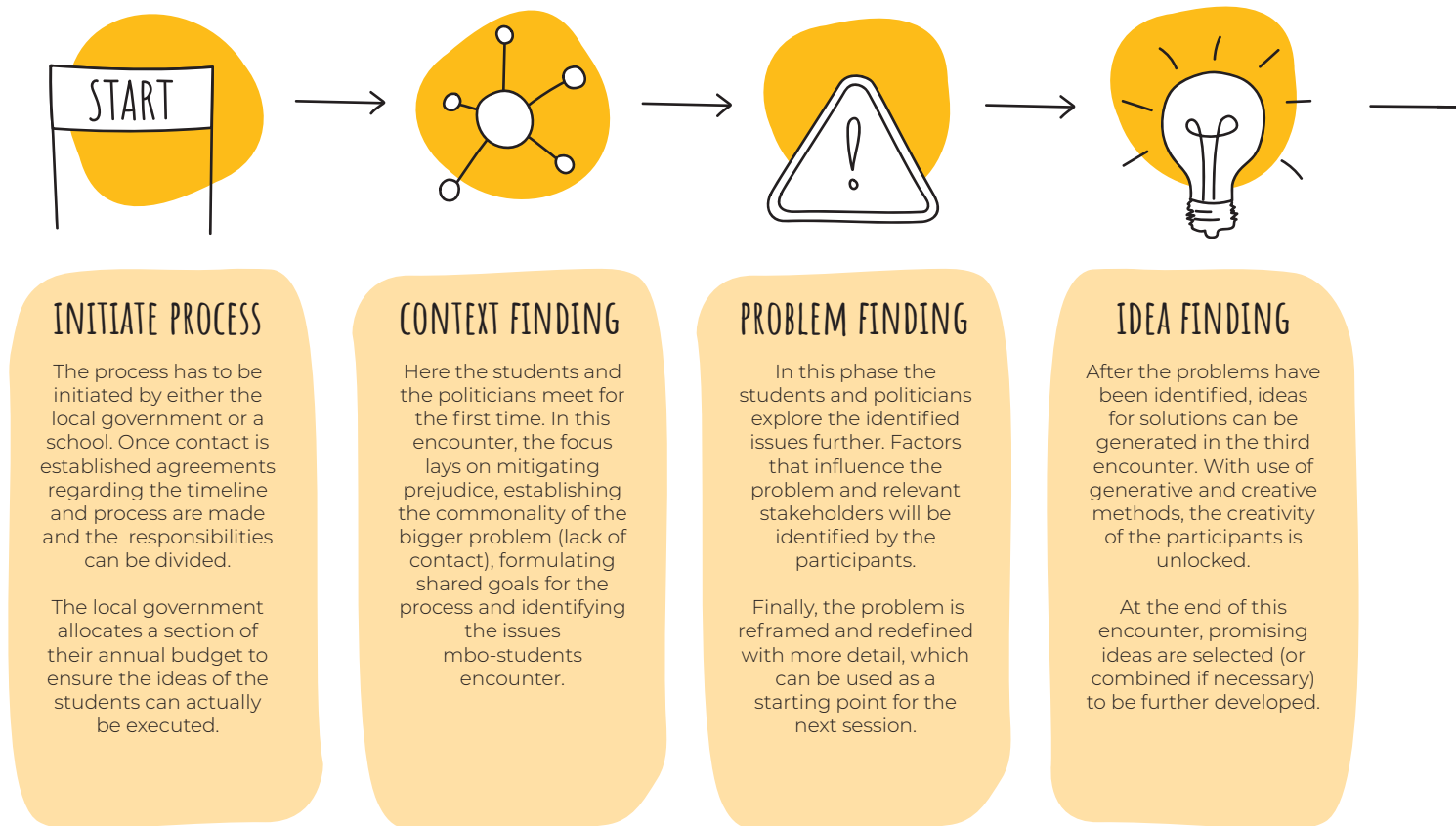
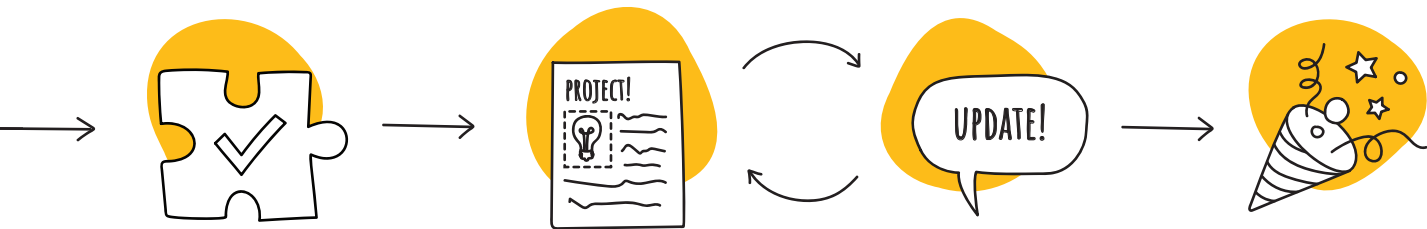


Fig. 40: The eight phases of Participatory Project Development.



SOLUTION FINDING

In the last encounter focused on content, the promising ideas that were selected are developed into more concrete proposals and improved by the mbo-students.

To wrap up this encounter, the students present their final solutions, and the best concept(s) get selected to be executed by the municipality. This selection is made by the students and happens democratically.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT & EXECUTION

Next, the municipality starts working on the proposal. Policymakers develop it into more detail, making sure it is feasible and viable.

A representative of the students can be involved in this stage to provide quick feedback for the policymakers and politicians.

COMMUNICATE

To make sure the students know their input is actually used and they don't feel left in the dark, progress on the development has to be shared by the government.

The frequency of these updates depends on the scale of the project, but in general, once every few months is acceptable and no overkill. An e-mail, update on social media or text message suffices.

WRAP-UP

Once the elected projects are executed, the final result can be presented. This happens during a festive event at the location of the executed project. This way, the students (and other stakeholders) can finally see the result of their hard work and input!

5.6 Iteration 3 - Focus on co-creation

5.6.1 Choosing a focus

Detailing this entire new process would not be feasible within the time frame of the project. It would require a lot more in depth research on Participatory Budgeting and the current workflow of the government. This would also shift the project's focus away from the students and their needs. It would not make much sense to develop, for example, the proposal development stage, as this is something policymakers already do regularly.

It is most interesting and relevant to look into the stages of the process where the students play a big role, as that is completely new for the government and, as established in the problem statement (see chapter 2.1), concrete tools for this are lacking. Focusing on the contact between mbo-students and the government fits well with the design goal 'to facilitate contact' as well (see chapter 4.2).

The context finding, problem finding, idea finding and solution finding session have been combined into one phase with four sessions (see figure 41). This makes the distinction between the phases of the process clearer and easier to communicate. This phase, co-creation, will be the focus of the design.

5.6.2 Finalising session elements

Now that the brainstorming phase of the Participatory Budgeting process has been transformed into a co-creation phase, this gives new insights into what elements the sessions need. Based on Heijne and

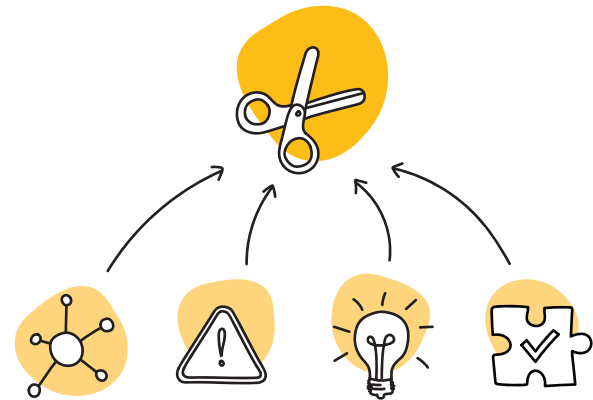


Fig. 41: The four content finding sessions have been merged into one phase: Co-creation.

Van der Meer's Roadmap for Creative Problem Solving Techniques, six relevant session duties can be distinguished:

- Opening
- Icebreaker
- Purge
- Breaks
- Energizers
- Wrap-up

Together with the content, these elements provide the structure for the four sessions.

5.6.3 Developing a toolkit

To provide the municipality with very concrete tools to facilitate the necessary contact, proposals for the defined session elements need to be made and

translated into a toolkit. This should be as complete and clear as possible, so the creative facilitation becomes something they can take on themselves. Therefore, activities suitable for novice facilitators have to be selected.

Selecting the right creative activities for the session is rather difficult, as the target group is so diverse. To make sure the session fits their needs and wishes, having options available for different types of activities is desirable. This allows the teachers, municipality and students to pick something that works for them.

Per type of session element, a few options which are expected to be suitable are conceived and translated

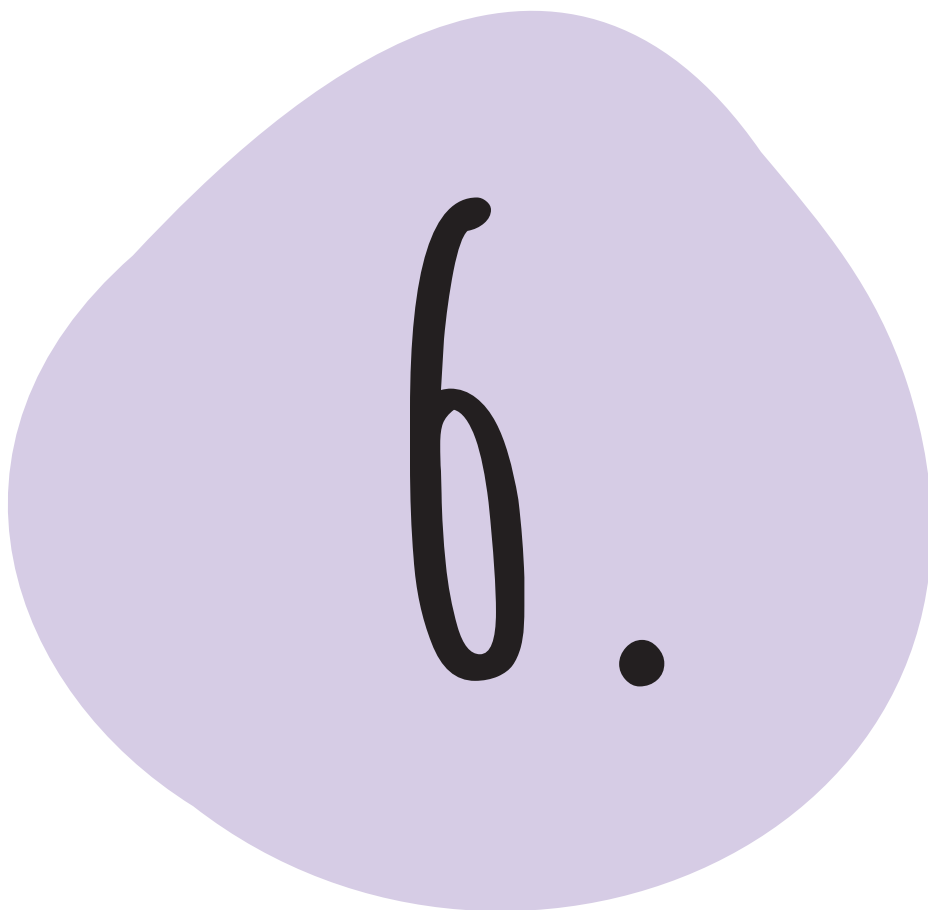
into 'Activity Cards'. These briefly describe the purpose, needed materials and a step by step overview of the activity.

The activities are inspired by the Roadmap for Creative Problem Solving Techniques (Heijne & Van der Meer, 2019) and by activities from the Verkiezingsfestival (see appendix K).

An impression of the Activity Cards is shown in figure 42.



Fig. 42: The first version of the Activity Cards.



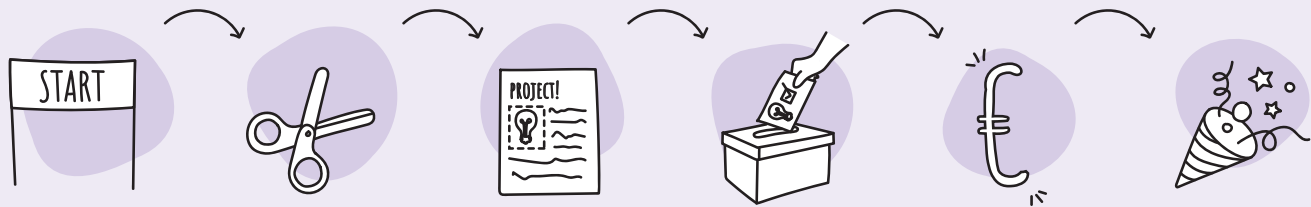
Concept: Rake Praat

The ideations from the previous chapter have resulted in the final design: Rake Praat. This chapter describes the design as it will be tested in the next phase in more detail. First, an overview of the proposed solution is presented, after which the different design elements are highlighted.

- 6.1 Concept overview
- 6.2 Rake Praat process
- 6.3 Co-creation toolkit
- 6.4 Empathise cards

RAKE PRAAT

THE MAIN PROCESS



EMPATHISE CARD DECK



TOOLKIT FOR CO-CREATION



Fig. 43: Overview of the design.

6.1 Rake Praat - concept overview

The final design comprises three design elements: The overall process and two interventions to facilitate the different steps of the process (see figure 4.3).

Rake Praat - the main process

The process of participatory budgeting (where a municipality allocates a section of the annual budget to be spent by citizens) has been altered to more accurately represent the needs and wishes of mbo-students. With the use of integrated creative problem-solving techniques, students and politicians define potential projects together. The process assumes an open form of contact, in which the municipality does not have concrete plans yet, but wants to define these together with mbo-students. This way, the needs and wishes of the students can truly play a central role in the process.

Empathise cards

To prepare the politicians and policymakers for contact with the students, a set with characteristics of mbo-students have been translated into a card deck. These

can be used to empathise with the students and give concrete tips for dealing with those characteristics in a sensitive and effective way. The design of these cards is explained in chapter 6.2.

Co-creation toolkit

Co-creation stage of the design is split into four sessions, each with its own focus. In this way, mbo-students and politicians navigate together from problem to solution. A toolkit to shape these sessions was created. A session plan can be designed by the municipality and schools with the use of the Activity Cards in the toolkit. These describe different types of (creative) activities, allowing the participants to go through the different stages of the creative process: diverging, reverging, and converging. The activities are shaped so that the creative facilitation does not require experts, allowing students and politicians to go through the process autonomously. The toolkit is showcased in chapter 6.3.

6.2 Rake Praat process

6.2.1 The six stages

In figure 44, the different stages of the process are described. As mentioned in the overview, the foundation of the process is the Participatory Budgeting process. A small section of the municipal budget is set aside (1) of which students can decide how the municipality should spend it. Proposals for how to spend this budget are created by the students with the support of local politicians and policymakers (2). These proposals are then worked out into more detail by the policymakers, (3) who consult the students regularly. All proposals are presented and the students get to vote on the one they would like to see executed (4). The winning proposal gets funded and executed by the municipality (5). Once the project is realised, this is celebrated with a festive presentation event, to celebrate the success and showcase the appreciation for the students (6).

Timeline

The process is aligned with the annual budget cycle of the municipality. The initiation therefore should take place in the year before the rest of the process is executed, as the budget has to be allocated timely. The next steps of the initiation, such as finding a school that wants to participate, can happen as soon as the budget is finalised. In the new calendar year, the co-creation sessions take place. These should be spread over approximately eight weeks. Having some time between the different sessions allows the students and councillors to process and reflect on the results. Ideally the sessions happen before March. This leaves

enough time to develop and finalise the proposals and have the students vote on their favourite before the summer recess of the city council. Depending on the type of project that gets selected, the execution can take a few months up to a few years.

6.2.2 Co-creation session

As the focus of the design has been to facilitate the contact between the students and local politicians, the co-creation sessions have been worked out in more detail than the other stages. This stage will therefore be elaborated in this section.

In four co-creation sessions, the proposals for next stages are developed. Every session has a different focus (see figure 44). In this way, mbo-students and politicians navigate together from problem to solution.

To support the students to formulate their opinions, and to access their latent feelings, a diverse set of creative problem-solving techniques will be used in these sessions. This structures the contact between the students and politicians in a meaningful way, and creates an opening for conversations.

In every session, a creative diamond (diverging, reverging and converging) is worked through, delivering a clear result onto which can be built in the next sessions. To ensure a smooth process which respects the rules of creative facilitation, every session consists of nine different types of activities:

- Opening (opening)
- IJsbreker (icebreaker)
- Purge (purge)
- Maken (diverge)
- Pauze (break)
- Energizer (energizer)
- Ordenen (revert)
- Selecteren (converge)
- Afronding (wrap-up)

To give these sessions shape, a toolkit was designed (see chapter 6.3).

6.2.3 Roles in the process

There are four important types of stakeholders involved, each with their own role in the process. These will be briefly described below.

Mbo-students

The students are the real stars of the process, as it revolves around their experience world. They play a dominant role during the co-creation sessions (2), the voting (4) and presentation of the results (6). However, during the other stages of the process, they can be involved as well if they want to. For example, they can help with organising the sessions or be made responsible for the final event. During the proposal development (3) and project execution (5), the students have a more passive role, as they get to provide feedback every now and then, and should be kept up-to-date on significant progress.

Policymakers

The process coordination is the responsibility of a municipal policymaker. They plan and coordinate the process and facilitate during the co-creation sessions. They are also responsible for developing the chosen proposals and asking for feedback at appropriate times.

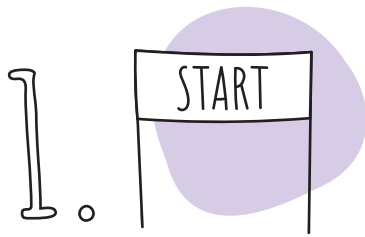
Teacher

The teacher is the first point of contact for the municipality. They mostly play a supportive role and can form a bridge between the municipality and students. For example, they can help with planning and organising the co-creation session, prepare their students for the contact with the councillors and pass on feedback students might have on the process or results.

City council members

The city council members mainly play a role during the co-creation sessions (2). During these sessions, they are divided over groups of students and get the opportunity to talk to them. They can support the students during the process by asking questions or sharing their own experiences.

They should also be involved during the more official moments, like the voting (4) and presentation of the final results (6). However, they have more of a ceremonial role there, as the students should stay in the centre of attention.

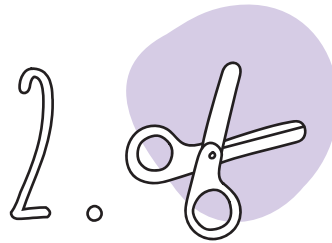


INITIATE

the process

The process has to be initiated by either the local government or a school. Once contact is established agreements regarding the timeline and process are made and the responsibilities can be divided.

The local government allocates a section of their annual budget to ensure the ideas of the students can actually be executed.

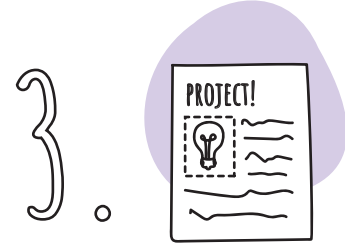


CO-CREATION

with students

Through four creative sessions, mbo-students and local politicians identify which problems the students encounter, and are supported in finding solutions. Simultaneously, they get to know each other better, mitigating prejudices and increasing understanding for each other.

At the end of this phase, all developed solutions are presented and a selection for projects is made.

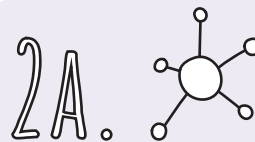


DEVELOP

the selected projects

Then the municipality starts developing the selected solutions into actual proposals. Policymakers elaborate on the details, making sure it is feasible and viable and fits their working structure.

To make sure the more detailed proposals still fit the needs and wishes of the students, the municipality needs to communicate about their progress, during which the students are given the opportunity to give feedback.



CONTEXT FINDING

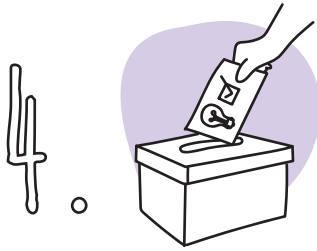
In this encounter, the focus is mitigating prejudice, establishing the commonality of the bigger problem and identifying the topics that the students find relevant.



PROBLEM FINDING

The problem is further explored. Factors that influence the problem and relevant stakeholders will be identified. The problem is reframed and redefined with more detail.

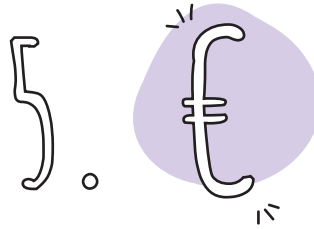
Fig. 44: The process overview of Rake Praat.



VOTE

on proposals

The final proposals are presented to all the involved students during a festive event. Students vote to divide the available budget between the proposals. This is a direct voice in their community's future.



EXECUTE

the winning projects

As budget has been allocated for the projects, the projects are now ready to be implemented. Depending on the selected projects, this could be quick fixes, or more long term projects. Again, it is important to keep the students in the loop about progress, and ask for their feedback regularly.



PRESENT

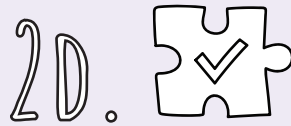
the final result

Once the selected projects are executed, the final result can be presented. This happens during a festive event at the location of the executed project. This way, the students (and other stakeholders) can finally see the result of their hard work and input!



IDEA FINDING

Options for the redefined problem are generated in this session and promising ideas are selected.



SOLUTION FINDING

The ideas are developed into more concrete proposals by the students. The solutions are presented and the best ones are selected democratically.



6.3 Co-creation toolkit

The co-creation sessions can be shaped with the use of the Rake Praat co-creation toolkit. The toolkit consists of four elements: a manual with instructions, blanco session plans, Activity Cards and attached supplies for specific activities. The complete toolkit can be found in appendix O.

An explanation of the process and the different roles and responsibilities, instructions on how to plan a session, and a list of all necessary materials can be found in the manual (see figure 46 for an impression).

To make sure all types of activities are done and a full creative diamond is completed, the Activity Cards can be used to plan a session. Each colour represents one type of activity. Per type of activity, one card is selected

and placed on the ring. Once a session is compiled, the booklet created also serves as a session manual, explaining all the activities step by step. A session plan card can be filled in (see figure 47) to provide an overview of the chosen activities and plan the duration of the session. In principle, the civil servant who is the coordinator of the process plans these sessions in coordination with the teacher, but if students are up for it, they can be involved as well.

The activities are shaped and communicated so that the creative facilitation does not require experts, allowing students and politicians to go through the process autonomously. Figure 48 describes the different elements that can be found on the cards.

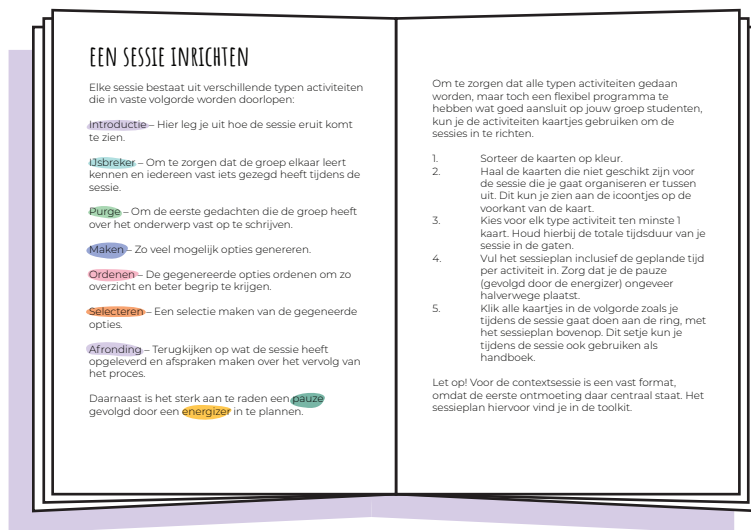


Fig. 46: An impression of the manual.

Activiteit	Duur
1. OPENING	10 MIN
2. TIJSBREKER - OVER DE STREEP	20 MIN
3. PURGE - KLAAGMUUR	10 MIN
4. DIVERGEREN - COLLAGE: POLITIEKE PARTIJ	20 MIN
5. PAUZE	10 MIN
6. ENVERGELER - MENSELIJKE CLUSTERS	5 MIN
7. REVERGEREN - IDEEËN GALLERY	20 MIN
8. CONVERGEREN - STICKER STEMMEN	10 MIN
9. AFSLUITING	15 MIN
Totale tijd	120 MIN

Fig. 47: A filled-in session plan.

Some activities require additional information or materials. For example, for *Over de Streep*, statements are necessary and for *Plus, Min & Interessant*, a template has been created. These are included in the toolkit as well, and the corresponding Activity Card shows which supplies are necessary.

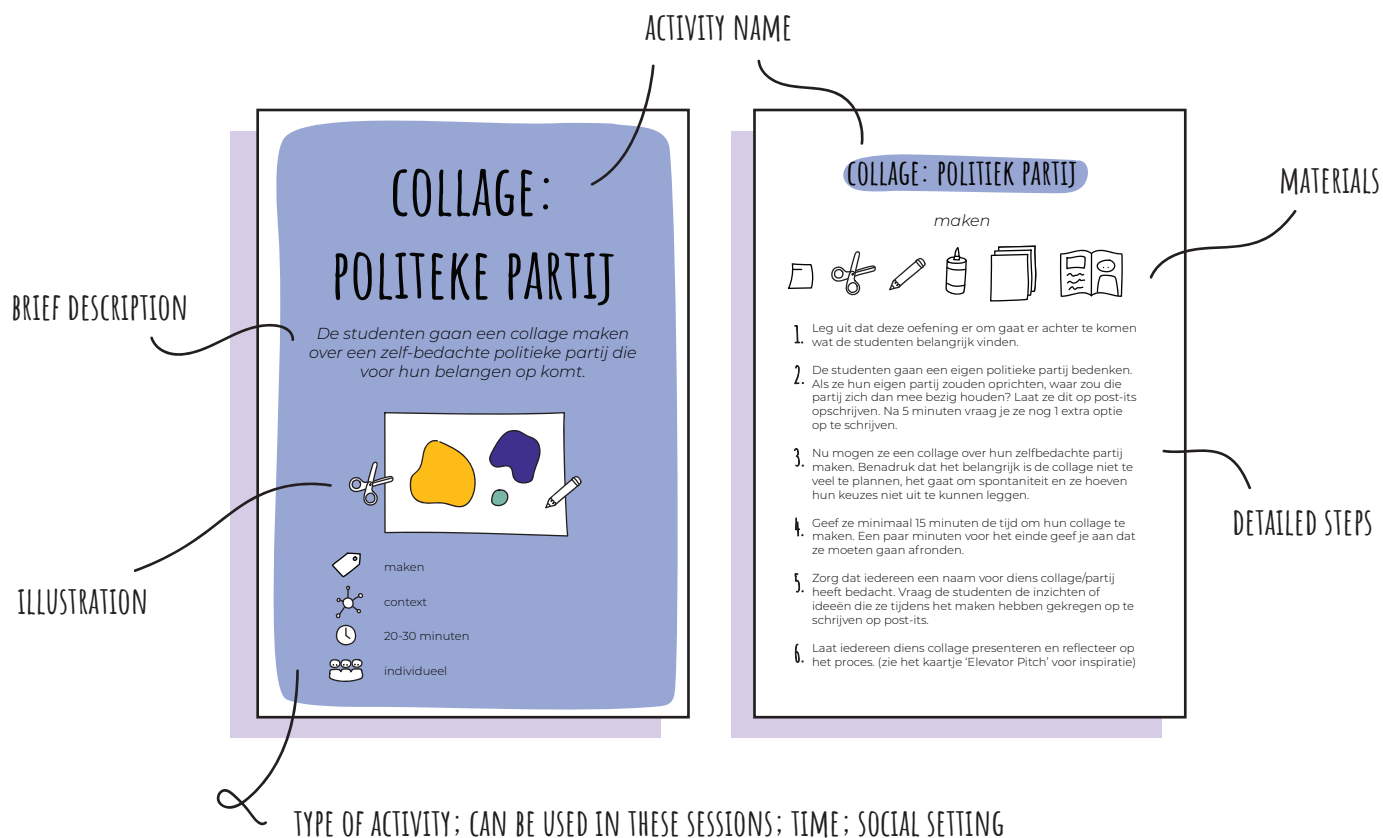


Fig. 48: The anatomy of the Activity cards.

6.4 Empathise cards

To sensitise the governmental stakeholders for their contact with mbo-students, the empathise cards have been created (see figure 50). The research insights concerning characteristics of the target group as described in chapter 3 have been translated into a card deck (see appendix L). Initially, this was done to communicate the research findings. However, throughout the design process, the cards have been used to empathise outsiders with mbo-students (see chapter 5.2). As this seemed effective during the co-creation workshop, the cards have been translated into Dutch to make them more usable for municipalities.

The cards describe characteristics of the target group, supported with an illustration and quote or observation. On the back of the cards, dos and don'ts are listed, providing the user of the deck with some hands on tools. The characteristics have been clustered into themes. Every cluster has its own colour and a cluster card providing overview of the cards in the cluster and some background information (see figure 51). This gives insight into why this theme is relevant for mbo-students.

The cards can be used in a variety of ways, but it is recommended to use them as a group. This allows you to share perspectives and have discussions about it. A few suggestions for uses are described below.

Empathy dump

Place all the cards on the table and discuss the cluster cards. Everyone in the team takes a look at the empathise cards and picks one that speaks to them. Afterwards, discuss why everyone picked their card.

Blindspot game

Discuss the cluster cards in your team. Next, divide all the empathise cards among the team members. Everyone ranks their cards from most relatable to least relatable. Once everyone is done, take all the cards the team members related to the least and place them in the blindspot (see figure 49). Throughout the process, the blindspot can be checked to make sure the projects fit the needs and wishes of mbo-students.

Forced fit

Place all the empathise cards in a stack and draw the top card. Read it out loud and brainstorm with your team how your product/service/... could be optimised for this characteristic. This exercise is more suited for closed problems.



Fig. 49: A filled in blindspot.



OMGAAN MET DISCRIMINATIE EN ONDERDRUKKING

- Sterke behoefte voor respect
- Vertrouwen politici niet echt
- Zijn openminded en oordelen niet snel
- Ervaren statusverschil met politici
- Lage tot midden SES
- Moeten andere prioriteiten stellen dan participatie



OVERGANG VAN KIND NAAR VOLWASSENE

- Voelen ons nog een beetje kind
- Ontdekken wie we willen zijn
- Leren onze eigen keuzes te maken
- Wonen nog thuis
- Reizen met het openbaar vervoer van en naar school



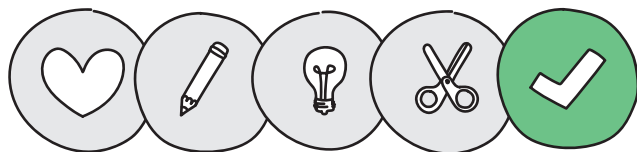
HEBBEN HET GEVOEL DAT POLITIEK NIET OVER HUN GAAT

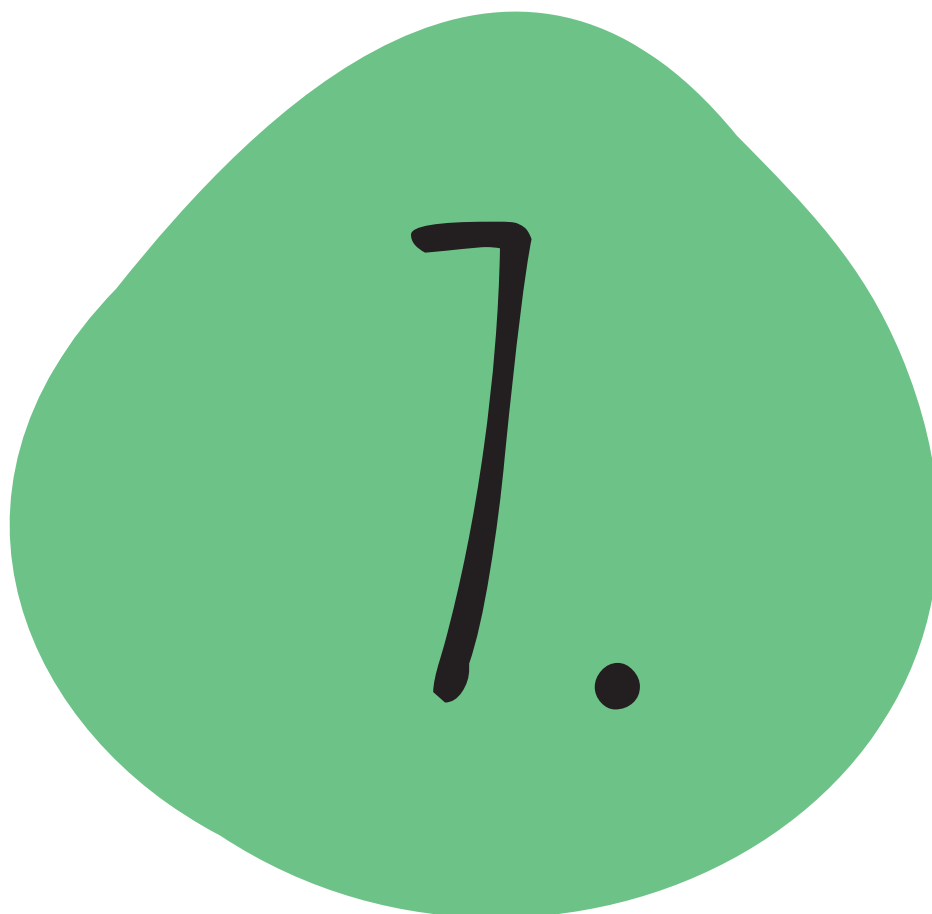
- Willen betrokken zijn in relevante discussies
- Volgen het (lokale) nieuws niet echt
- Hebben geen (politieke) rolmodellen



Fig. 51: An impression of the cluster cards.

Phase three:
Evaluate





Evaluate

In this chapter, the evaluations of the different design elements are discussed. The first section describes the approach for the different evaluations. In the rest of the chapter, the findings are presented. The chapter concludes with an overview of recommendations.

7.1 Evaluation approach

7.2 Evaluation empathise cards

7.3 Feedback on toolkit

7.4 Results test context session

7.5 Recommendations

7.1 Evaluation approach

This section provides an overview of the evaluation activities and the approaches used in the evaluations. The different elements of the design have been evaluated separately before testing them combined (see figure 52). An iteration on the toolkit and empathise cards has been made before the combined test, based on the feedback. During the evaluations, a distinction between usability, experience and effect has been made. For all evaluations, a paper prototype of the toolkit has been used.

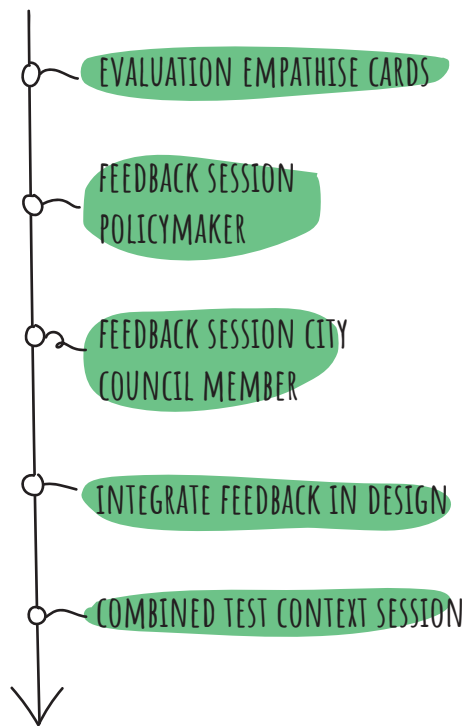


Fig. 52: Overview of evaluation activities.

7.1.1 Evaluation empathise cards

To determine if the empathise cards can be used to empathise outsiders, the cards were first tested in the co-creation session. The cluster cards were placed in the middle of the table and briefly explained by the facilitator. Then all participants got a section of the empathise cards, all from different clusters. They were asked to look at the cards carefully and rank them based on how much they identify with the cards. All the cards that were ranked lowest (so least identified with) were placed in the so-called 'blind spot'.

A brief evaluation interview with two of the participants was held after the session. During the session the participants were also asked to write ideas or contributions on the cards. This input has been processed as well. The card deck can be found in appendix L

Research questions

Usability

- Is it clear to the participants what they have to do?
- Is the used language of the cards clear to the participants?
- Is the size of the cards workable for the participants?
- Is all needed information present on the cards?
- Is a game format of added value?

Experience

- What do participants feel while using the cards?
- Are the cards pleasant to use?

- Is the design of the cards aesthetically pleasing to the participants

Effect

- Do the empathise cards contribute to a greater understanding of mbo-students?
- Do the participants feel a stronger connection with mbo-students?
- Does the usage of the empathise cards lead to results that are a better match with the needs of mbo-students?
- To what extent do the different design elements of the cards (title, quote, illustration, dos & don'ts) contribute to the desired positive effect?

7.1.2 Feedback on toolkit

As the government is responsible for the project initiation and coordination, the design is evaluated with several representatives from the government. Three evaluations were held: two with city council members, and one with a policymaker. For all three evaluations, the set-up was the same and the focus was on qualitative input (interview & observations).

First, the new process was explained with the help of the process overview visual. Then the participant was told they had to shape a session and was given the entire toolkit. The participants were asked to think out loud. Afterwards, they were asked questions about their experience with the toolkit and potential thresholds for implementation. The guidelines for the procedure and used materials can be found in appendix P.

Research questions

Usability

- Is the complete process clear to the participant?
- Is the manual clear and concise?
- Do the participants understand all information on the activity cards?
- Is the link between the manual and the Activity Cards clear?
- Is the link between activities and the worksheets and content cards (e.g., the statements for 'Over de Streep') clear?

Experience

- Do the participants feel like they could facilitate the sessions?
- Do the participants feel like it would be fun and interesting to go through the process?
- Is the design of the toolkit aesthetically pleasing?

Effect

- Is the participant able to compose and execute a session?
- What are potential obstacles for implementation?
- Does the toolkit lower the threshold to organise a session with mbo-students for governmental stakeholders?
- Does the toolkit make the governmental stakeholders enthusiastic about the process and working with mbo-students?

7.1.3 Test context session

Since testing all sessions and exercises from the toolkit would be too time intensive, only the context session is tested. Based on these results, the concept can be proven to be effective on an interaction level (in other words: does the concept facilitate a conversation between students and politicians?). The long term results fall outside of the scope. The context session will be executed as designed in a setting as close to reality as possible.

First, the city council members are prepared for the session in a short meeting. The participation process is explained to them and the toolkit is introduced. They are asked to read the session plan for the context session and given the opportunity to ask questions about it.

Then, the context session is executed as intended. One class of twenty students and two council members participated. I have the role of coordinator, allowing me to switch between the groups and observe everything that was going on. If there were questions by the students, I would refer them to the council member who was part of their group, trying to let them handle everything as autonomously as possible.

After the session, the students were asked to fill in a digital survey (appendix Q). The experiences of the council members are evaluated with a group interview (see appendix Q for the documentation of the results).

Research questions

Usability

- Are the participants able to execute the activities properly?
- Does the session plan provide enough information for the facilitators?
- Are the inexperienced facilitators able to perform their duties properly?

Experience

- Did the participants enjoy the session?
- What are points for improvement?
- Do the students feel like the session was centred around them and their lives?

Effect

- Do meaningful conversations take place?
- Do the students feel heard?
- Do the council members have a better understanding of mbo-students?
- Are the participants interested in continuing the process?

Results

In the remaining part of this chapter, the results of the described evaluations will be discussed. At the end, the results are translated into recommendations.

7.2 Evaluation empathise cards

7.2.1 Usability

In general, the participants understood the cards and exercises given. The explanation of the clusters was clear, but the link of the individual cards to the clusters with the colour coding had to be explained to the non-designers.

The formulation of some of the cards could be sharper. For example 'don't take yourself too seriously', as it is not obvious to whom it is referring.

A participant mentioned that during the beginning of the brainwriting with How-Tos, the blindspot was prominently in the back of her mind, while later it slipped away. During the elevator pitch preparation, they were reminded of it again by the facilitator, which helped to prioritise it. It would have been helpful for her to have a few extra reminders of the blindspot, or place it on a more visible spot, rather than on the wall.

In the current set-up, it was useful that the cards were divided among the participants, as the amount of cards would otherwise have been overwhelming. The ranking was an effective way to empathise with the mbo-students and to realise what characteristics are in their blindspot. However, more discussion on why someone ranked their cards the way they did would have been useful, as sometimes the participants were doubting between cards. Discussion would also have strengthened the empathization, as the participants now only saw a very small portion of the cards.

7.2.2 Experience

Overall, the participants liked the cards a lot. The participants thought the cards were aesthetically pleasing and made the session look very well-prepared. The quotes and insights on the front made it more personal. This could have been strengthened by phrasing the dos and don'ts from the perspective of the mbo-students, according to one of the participants.

The set-up with the rankings and blindspot forced the participants to actively read the cards, increasing their engagement with it. This would probably not have happened as effectively when the cards were just placed on the table.

Some of the dos and don'ts were very surprising to the participants, which evoked questions and made them more curious about the mbo-students and where the insights came from. Other dos and don'ts were more obvious, but the participants did not mind this, as it still is a good reminder on how to approach the students.

7.2.3 Effect

“It really did give me more insight, it sparked empathy.”

- Participant of co-creation session

During the session, the participants felt like the front side of the cards was enough to initially empathise with the mbo-students.

Some of the ideas that were generated during the session can be retraced to the cards in the blind spot. For example, one of the pitches was about creating an environment in which mbo-students could be more confident to give their opinion. This could be linked to the card '*Struggle with insecurities*' or '*Have a hard time formulating their opinions autonomously*'. The cards also helped to set the tone in the beginning of the session.

The cards could also be used to create profiles of different mbo-students, for example by picking a card from every theme. These profiles could be used to create a wide variety of personas. This allows for everyone to see a larger portion of the cards, which could increase the effect of the cards. Alternative usages like these should be explored further.

7.3 Feedback on toolkit

7.3.1 General

The overall process is clear and expected to be effective:

"I find it very concrete and nicely set up. That helps to actually do these things."

- City council member 1

"The basis is very good. I really like the fact that you used participatory budgeting. There is already a lot of experience with that worldwide, which makes me think that it should be possible to do something with it. And you have now developed something like that, which is really cool. So I think it's really great and hope it finds a place somewhere."

- Policy advisor culture participation

Municipalities would use the toolkit:

"I think it sounds really nice, especially since it's a group we don't get in touch with much. And that's really something we're looking for. So if we were offered something like that, we would say yes."

- City council member 2

"I think there are enough employees within the municipality who would be interested in doing this. This is an interesting process for us."

- City council member 1

The toolkit does lower thresholds for the municipality:

"I am inclined to use this because it is interesting. It stimulates ideas and I like to do something like this within a frame. [...] So then I know that it's really going to be something, that we're not just going to talk and then you end up doing nothing. So it certainly lowers the threshold."

- City council member 1

"I think you can get a foot in the door with this and they will be interested and quite willing to try that out because it is also a big challenge for them."

- Policy advisor culture participation

"Such a toolkit is very much needed, because otherwise you just don't know how to shape that, because they don't have contact now. So I think practical tools help enormously."

- Policy advisor culture participation

The form fits in well with the needs of the municipality:

"Going to schools, that is what you want."

- City council member 1

"A class is not that big, so it is low-level enough."

- City council member 1

"I think the amount of people you need to organise this is very limited, so I think that is manageable."

- City council member 2

The proposed process is innovative:

"You don't see that kind of process yet, that it also targets that kind of audience. You don't often see that in the city council."

- City council member 2

"In our municipality, we are very much involved in participation, and this is a totally different way of shaping it."

- City council member 1

"There is little for this yet. So that's an advantage. So even though municipalities have to search a bit of how or what, I do think you are going to find those connections."

- Policy advisor culture participation

The potential usage for the toolkit is broader than just within participatory budgeting:

"For the environmental vision, we commissioned a very large study that collected a lot of input from the city, then something like this could also be very good."

- City council member 2

"I think this can be quite valuable for political parties to get new ideas in this way. When you are writing your election programme or looking for new ideas or things you want to take up in the municipal council or make proactive politics, the whole playing field is still very much open. So then

there is a lot of room I think to go through such a very open process."

- City council member 2

The graphic style is appealing and fits the purpose:

"I'm really curious about all these nice little things."

- City council member 1

"It does make you happy right away, and that should be part of such a session."

- City council member 2

7.3.2 Manual

It is clear what the intention is:

"It's clear then that you just have to make a booklet like this, only for the other sessions. This one has already been made, but that is also an example. You know straight away that it has to look like this, in this order, in these colours, so that's more or less how it's going to look."

- City council member 1

"I take this list, make sure I have one for each of the cards, read the card and then do it. I then know for each session where it will lead, to a set of ideas or a set of solutions or to a set of problems or that you understand each other. So in itself I find that very clear and structured."

- City council member 1



Fig. 53: A city council member during the evaluation.

The information density of the manual is good:

"It is not a lot, so that is a good thing. I certainly don't have the idea that it is too much."

- City council member 1

The names of the types of activities are unclear:

"I have to say that the names of the activities, I could imagine that people don't necessarily have an association with that. Especially ironically if you do it with mbo-students. Then I think the terms diverge and converge don't necessarily tell them very much."

- City council member 1

The link between the manual and the cards is a bit lacking but can be strengthened by changing the order in the manual:

"It was only when I turned the page that I realised 'oh, those cards are apparently used for that'."

- City council member 1

"When I saw it, I thought: 'OK, colours, I guess they are categories'. And when I turned it over, I saw 'sort the cards by colour', so I deduced that these cards belonged here. And had to do with the fact that I didn't realise that these cards are a way of doing this process. So if you explain that earlier, it's all right."

- City council member 1

The language should be more consistent and better suited to mbo-students:

"The tone is actually quite formal. Perhaps too formal. You also use the word distilled here, for example. I understand all those words, but the moment you get the idea that you are going to do a low-level thing together, it is written here in a very formal way. You could tone it down a bit."

- City council member 1

It is not clear that all sessions have to be done during the process:

"For example here at the top of 'The four sessions' it doesn't explicitly say that you have to do them all. [...] You could maybe put another number there so it's clear you have to go through them."

- City council member 2

7.3.3 Activity cards

The information on the activity cards is generally very clear and the participant knows what should be done:

"Yes certainly now that I look at it a second time, they are really perfect in terms of the amount of information. The title is pretty self-explanatory. And then a sentence of explanation of this is what we're actually going to do. I really wouldn't want any more information. All that information on the back is what I would read when I start, but the

front is already so self-explanatory that I wonder if you even need the back.”

- City council member 1

“ With ‘Over de Streep’ and this [image], you actually already know what you’re going to do. ”

- City council member 2

The design supports the information on the cards:

“ I also find the colours very useful because they immediately tell you, in association, ‘this is an icebreaker, this is a purge’, so that was very logical and I really liked it. ”

- City council member 1

The information on the cards could use a better hierarchy:

“ I have the idea that you see the materials you need too late. I’d like to be able to see at a glance what I can expect from this card. ”

- City council member 1

Not all iconography is clear:

“ The activity symbol doesn’t really mean anything to me. That’s why I overlooked that the category is already mentioned on the front, next to the colour. ”

- City council member 1

“ I just have no idea what kind of icon this is [checks manual] Worksheets? What are those logos after the paperclip? ”

- City council member 1

7.3.4 Role division

A policymaker (in cooperation with the school) should take charge of the organisational aspects of the process:

“ I’m not going to coordinate the process. That does feel like a civil servant thing. ”

- City council member 1

“ I would bring along a policymaker from the municipality as the coordinator. You have a teacher from the students’ perspective and a policymaker from the municipality. ”

- City council member 1

“ If you only let them talk to civil servants, it’s hard to really give it a stage. That combination of roles works, otherwise you won’t get there. ”

- Policy advisor culture participation

“ This was very clear, how you say you have the roles and so on. That also feels very natural. ”

- City council member 2

In sub-groups however, councillors can be the facilitators:

“ My intuition is that you should have a councillor in each group and several students. I don't know how pleasant it is for mbo-students to be given such a responsibility. I can very well imagine that you have a group where everyone is very much a 'wait and see' group and that no one likes to take the lead, which is not very relaxing for the group as a whole as far as the process is concerned. And local councillors have that characteristic by nature, that's what you're on the council for. But then it might become too coloured or authoritarian again. ”

- City council member 1

Take the diversity of the target group into account by making the role distribution flexible:

“ Let it depend on the context. Just leave it open for the session and when you divide up the groups decide who wants it and you can indicate that. ”

- City council member 1

Give aldermen a role too:

“ An alderman does want to shine with something like this. You shouldn't pass him by. They have made the budget available for such a process. So that is another important element I would add. ”

- Policy advisor culture participation

7.3.5 Implementation thresholds

Time remains the biggest barrier but the right tools can entice them to participate in the process:

“ Four moments is really a lot for municipal councillors. I'm in such a small municipality that the context is very different from that of Rotterdam, for example. There are so many councillors that you can just ask the ones who have education in their portfolio and they will go ahead and do it, they will make time for it. But in our council, I also have 10 other portfolios, so if I were to spend four half-days on this, I wouldn't be able to do that for every subject. So then the amount of moments does feel like a lot. But when I saw this, I immediately felt the urge to do something like that because it gives you another perspective. So I definitely think there is interest in doing something like this within city councils. ”

- City council member 1

The number of moments is a bigger factor than the total amount of time:

“ It is really about the moments. So usually if I were to have a working visit or work session like that, it would take at least half a day. And the moment you have to do it four times, and you have to do it every year, it weighs heavily on the agenda. Especially compared to others, every inhabitant wants to talk to the municipality, so it feels like a lot of time for a group where other groups will

always feel neglected.”

- City council member 1

Allocating budget for a specific target group is difficult, especially in smaller municipalities.

“It’s already difficult to give it to residents, but to give it to a specific group, that’s quite a big threshold.”

- City council member 1

However, in bigger municipalities, there seems to be more space to do so:

“Freeing up a few thousand euros for something like this should not be a problem, especially in larger municipalities.”

- Policy advisor culture participation

7.3.6 Design alterations

Based on this input, an iteration on the toolkit has been made. The following alterations have been made:

- The language of the manual was made less formal.
- Information on the different roles has been added to the manual.
- General tips & tricks for the process and for creative facilitation have been added to the manual to make the process more accessible to inexperienced facilitators.
- The iconography on the Activity Cards has been adjusted to be clearer to non-designers.
- The background colours of the Activity Cards have been altered to be more distinctive.

7.4 Test of context session

The evaluation of the test of the context session will be discussed per stakeholder and described in the next section.

7.4.1 Students' view

The survey that was used to gather the opinions of the students on the session was filled in by only three students. The results on the likert-scale questions can be found in figure 54.

Students' reactions to the session ranged from neutral to moderately positive. They seem to feel heard by the city council members and some of the students indicated that they would like to give their opinion more often in this type of session. Based on both the survey results and observations during the session, the students seemed to understand what they had to do during the different activities.

In the section with open questions, they mentioned they enjoyed the 'Over the Streep' part of the session and that 'giving your opinion together' was the most fun part. As a point for improvement they mentioned they wanted to talk about their opinions even more.

When I left, I ran into a student who participated in the session. He mentioned that he enjoyed it:

"It was a nice [gezellige] thingy by the way."
- Session participant

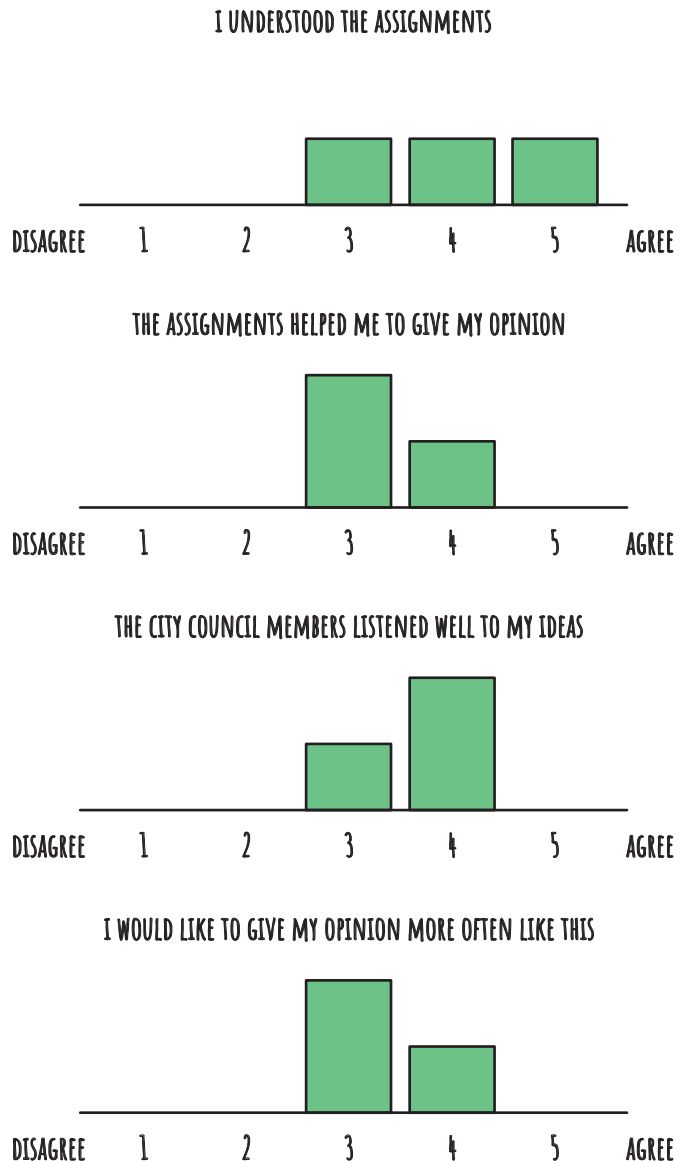


Fig. 54: Results of the survey that was used for the session evaluation.

7.4.2 Teacher's view

When the session was over, I had a brief informal chat with the teacher who supported me during the session. She gave the feedback that the communication towards the students should be more structured. For example, when explaining an exercise, mentioning how long it will take has a positive effect on the concentration of the students. The teacher also mentioned that having slides with the programme and explanation of the exercise in the background would be useful for the students.

"It is a very fun and active form of work that brings current affairs into the classroom."

- Teacher

"It is very valuable for us to see what you made, we can learn from that too."

- Teacher

7.4.3 City council members' view

In general, council members are positive

City council members see the added value of the session:

"Whatever the problem, it's an alternative way to connect more directly with the target group and pick up their concerns directly."

- City council member 3

"It did lead to very interesting conversations. You really have to keep asking questions. If you take them seriously, you do get closer to that deeper layer."

- City council member 4

"The format is super interesting, the conversation is good."

- City council member 3

The concept could be useful for a broader group of stakeholders:

"So I think that officials who deal with youth policy, police, etc., there are enough target groups who could come into contact with mbo-students in a positive way in this way. The fact that you invite politicians and officials to an ROC to engage in conversation I think is a nice concept."

- City council member 3

The session gave the councillors a glimpse into the lives of the students:

"Big age difference too. There was a boy of 19 in my group and one of 15. Yes they have completely different lives. I discovered that here."

- City council member 4

"I think it's very good that a lot more different kinds of people keep meeting. So this is very important. To be able to imagine what life can be like as



Fig. 55: The designer reading out a statement during the 'Over de Streep' activity.

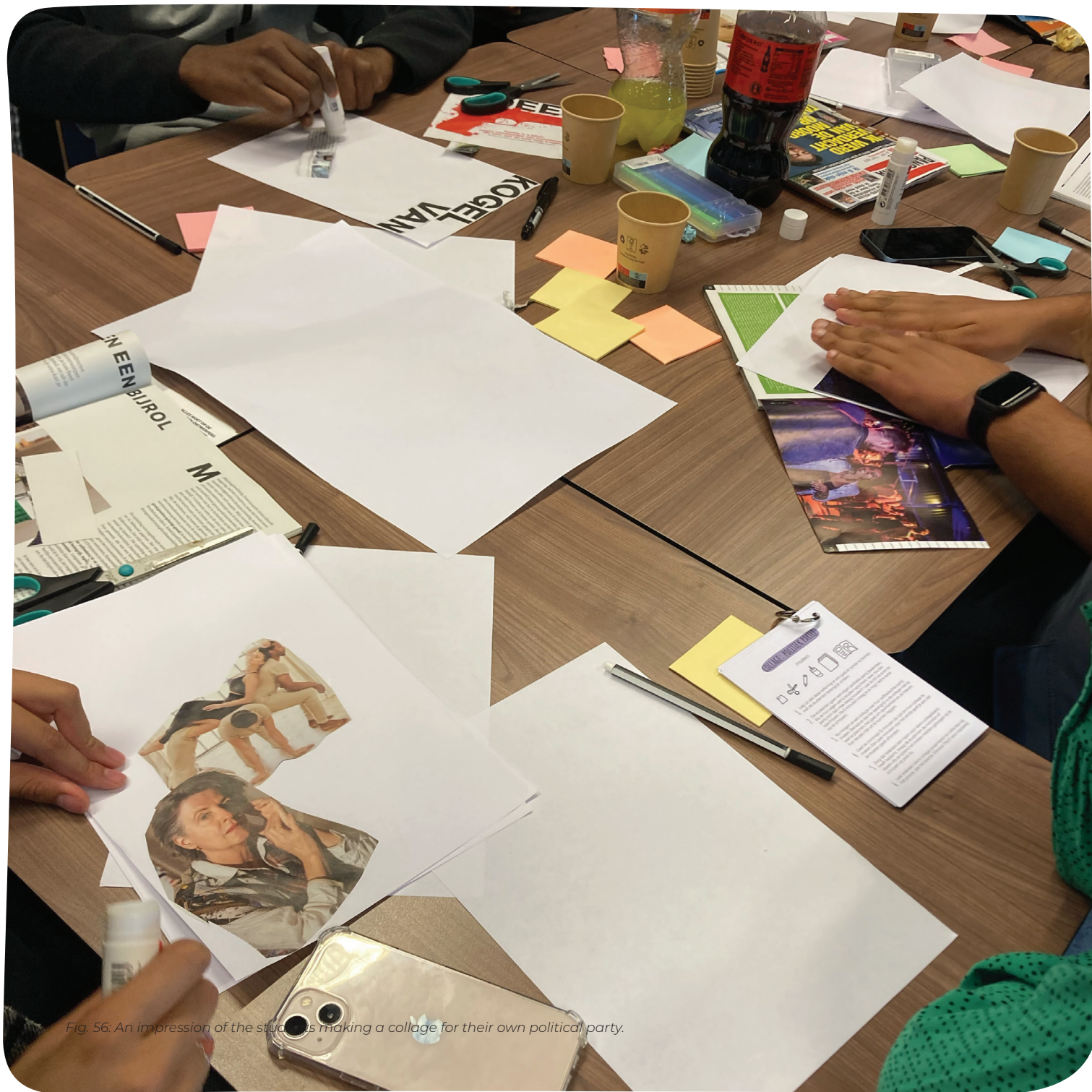


Fig. 56: An impression of the situation making a collage for their own political party.

well. I found it very interesting that the discount coupons that are in the magazines were pulled out and distributed. Those are those subtle things underneath, that also mean something.”

- City council member 3

“At this table there was a lot of anger towards Wilders. But also so nuanced about his discriminatory side, while on the other hand they were very supportive of his programme. I found that very fascinating. So they can see from a person ‘he discriminates, we don’t like that. But what else he stands for, we like,’ I think that’s quite a nuance I thought ‘Wow.’”

- City council member 3

The councillors noticed mixed reactions on the ‘Maken’ activity:

“About that collage for example: ‘Wollah I’m not a toddler’ you would hear them say.”

- City council member 4

The physical cards have added value:

“I like the fact that it is tangible. Every now and then I go crazy with everything that has to be digital.”

- City council member 3

The session lowered thresholds for contact with mbo-students:

“This does provide a reason why you even come to this place. You don’t just walk into a mbo and talk to people. So I think that’s very good.”

- City council member 3

Room for improvement

The session might be a bit too long:

“It seems very ambitious to me to do so many. I think two or three cards is really enough already.”

- City council member 4

“After five minutes they lost interest.”

- City council member 4

The used language was still somewhat too difficult:

“I think it might be formulated too complicated for your target audience.”

- City council member 4

Which side is which should be communicated more clearly during ‘Over de Streep’:

“To be honest, I was completely on the wrong side at the beginning. Because I hadn’t understood what was ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’. [...] If necessary with a red dot for ‘disagree’ and a green dot for ‘agree’. Then it would have been clearer for me.”

- City council member 4

Obstacles for implementation

The toolkit should be linked to a clearer question, especially because of its timeconsuming nature:

“ Does it connect to a question that is already there? Because when I look around me everyone is super busy. And I recognise a lot of things here, and it's very nice to have such an overview but it does ask: What problem are you solving? And where does it connect? And there is a piece in there, I don't see one, two, three, that this is going to sell like hotcakes.”

- City council member 3

“ I find myself thinking that if you really want this to land, then this also requires developing something between this product and reality. And what exactly that should be, I don't have a solution for that. ”

- City council member 3

The council members need more support throughout the process:

“ I think it is very good to have these kinds of conversations, but I don't see how this would be picked up in a programme from councillors themselves. ”

- City council member 3

“ I think this almost requires another training to do this conversation well too. ”

- City council member 3



Fig. 57: One of the groups combined their ideas into one political party and made a joined poster.



Fig. 58: The students all chose one side during 'Over de Streef' for the statement 'I think politics is complicated'.

7.5 Conclusion

7.5.1 General

In general, the different stakeholders involved in the evaluation are quite positive about the toolkit. The process is clear, and the city council members see the added value of the sessions. It would lower thresholds for them to get in contact with mbo-students and therefore they mentioned they would use the toolkit in the future. The main reason mentioned for this is that the sessions give them a clear purpose and activity for during the contact, rather than being subject to observational behaviour.

The session helped the councillors to learn more about the mbo-students and really gave them a glimpse into their lives. They really enjoyed visiting the school and using it as a location for the sessions.

Councillors mentioned they find the approach innovative, and they see a wide range of possible applications for the toolkit, both in other processes and with other stakeholders.

Students seem neutral to moderately positive. They enjoyed giving their opinions in a group setting and felt like the council members listened well. However, the session might be a bit long for the concentration span of the students.

7.5.2 Manual

The manual is clear and concise, with the right amount of information. The instructions are clear, but the used

language could be more accessible and consistent, as this allows the students to be involved in the planning.

7.5.3 Activity Cards

The information on the Activity cCards is generally very clear, and the councillors know what to do. The cards provide a nice overview of possibilities. Having the booklet for the context session ready made in the toolkit helps with understanding how to use it. The graphic style is perceived as aesthetically pleasing and works motivational for the process. The fact that the cards are physical is desirable.

After the last iteration, the iconography and hierarchy of the cards was clearer to the participants.

7.5.4 Roles

The proposed role division, in which a policymaker coordinates the process, and the city council members are part of the resource group, makes sense to the councillors. In the sub-groups, the councillors can support the students by asking a lot of questions. However, this is a skill which should not be underestimated, as one councillor mentioned she would like more training in advance.

It is very important to give an alderman a role in the process too, especially if they allocated the budget for the process. This can also serve as a good incentive for more council members to get on board.

7.5.5 Obstacles for implementation

Time remains the biggest obstacle for implementation. Four sessions during the daytime is too much for all the council members that were involved in the evaluation. Especially since they have regular jobs on top of being a city council member. However, the right tools can entice them to spend time on it anyway.

Because of this time-consuming nature of the designed process, linking the content to a more concrete question or existing processes seems desirable from a councillor's perspective. The open approach means additional workload, while making it an integral part of existing processes creates opportunities for contact.

Allocating budget for a specific target group is difficult, especially in smaller municipalities.

Privacy in ~~NL~~
NL



PARTij VRijheid.



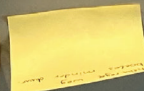
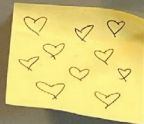
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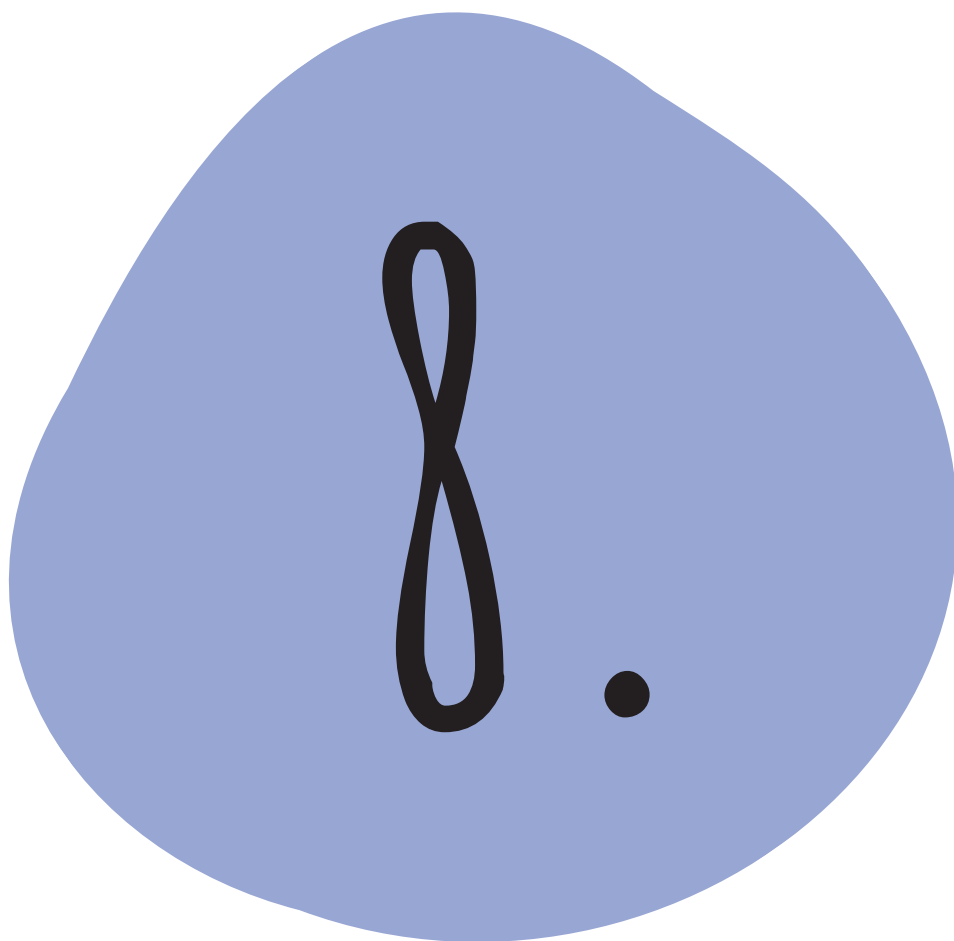
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(als zelfbescherming).



geen oorlog



Fig. 59: An impression of some of the posters for their own political parties the students made.



Limitations & Recommendations

This chapter reflects on the project and describes its limitations. Finally, recommendations for further research and design are made.

8.1 Limitations

8.2 Recommendations

8.1 Limitations

Lack of representation

As established, mbo-students are an extremely diverse group and thus, the research is not representative for the entire target audience. Both the research and evaluation have only been done with entry level classes. Students in mbo level 3 or 4 might have very different skills and needs. Furthermore, the diversity in *type* of education is also not well represented, as the participants were either in the healthcare or retail track, while secondary vocational education has much more to offer. Lastly, the design was only tested with students living in an urban area, where students in more rural municipalities might have very different views.

This lack of representation also holds up for the governmental participants. As the ones that were involved volunteered to help out with the project, they are more likely to be enthusiastic about participation, this might influence the results.

During the co-creation, only academically educated, Caucasian females participated. This could have limited the diversity of perspectives within the group, and therefore limited the creativity.

Focus on qualitative research

The research approach was predominantly qualitative. Although this helps with empathy for the target audience and inspiration in the project, there are several downsides. The results cannot be objectively

verified and are not statistically representative. Causality on the positive effects of the design is also difficult to establish.

Focus groups vs. individual interviews

The use of the focus group method during the research phase has also influenced the results. The group dynamics during the session are of major influence on the results.

Thinking out loud

During the focus groups and user tests, the participants were asked to think out loud to provide insights in their thoughts and opinions. However, this disrupts their normal behaviour and thinking patterns.

Conflict of interest

During the co-creation session and the final test of the context session, I was both facilitator and problem-owner. This might have influenced the results, as I could (unintentionally) steer the group in a certain direction. For the context session, this also meant that the participants could not autonomously go through the session.

Design only partly tested

Due to time constraints, only the context session has

been evaluated, and it was not possible to execute an actual and complete Participatory Budgeting process. The other designed activities and most of the created work sheets etc. have therefore not been tested yet in a real environment. Conclusions about the complete process and toolkit cannot be drawn.

Sample sizes

Especially during the design evaluation, the sample size of participants is not large enough to draw sound conclusions. Twenty students participated during the context session test, but as the test was only run once and only three students filled in the feedback survey, not enough data was collected and therefore the results are not representative. Conclusions on the connection of the prototype to their needs and wishes cannot be drawn.

Needs of the government

The perspective of government has not been researched extensively. Therefore, insights into their needs and a connection to these in the design are lacking.

Inductive research

When analysing the results from the research phase, an inductive approach was taken. However, the desk research was already done by the time the analysis

took place. The information that came out of the desk research might have subconsciously steered the results.

Familiarity with council members

Two of the council members that participated during the evaluation are personal connections of mine. This might have influenced their views on the design and resulted in a more positive reaction.

Explicit motivation to participate is missing

Even though the design could be considered '*more fun than what you would normally do with your time*', it does not answer the question of how to explicitly motivate mbo-students to participate.

Personal bias

Despite efforts to mitigate my personal (political) preferences and ideals, these have been of influence on the project.

8.2 Recommendations

1. Evaluate the complete concept with a bigger and more representative group.

To determine effectiveness of the complete concept, more tests are needed. At the bare minimum, all sessions and activities from the co-creation phase need to be tested. During these evaluations, it is highly recommended to use a more diverse and thus representative group of the different stakeholders. For the evaluation, it is vital to properly collect feedback from mbo-students. It is suggested to use a qualitative method, as the survey used in the test of the context session did not prove to be successful.

2. Develop a wider variety of Activity Cards.

Currently, the Activity Cards are mainly focused on creative exercises where students have to make something (e.g., a poster or collage). This is not a proper reflection of the diversity of the interests of the students. By creating a more diverse set of activities, the more likely the concept is to match the interests of the students.

3. Involve aldermen in the process.

By giving the aldermen a role in the process, all layers of government are involved. As the aldermen allocate the budget, it is important to not surpass them and give them the opportunity to have a prominent role in the process. This can also serve as a good incentive

for more council members to get on board with the process.

4. Look into possibilities to make the process less time-consuming for politicians.

The evaluation has indicated that the city councillors find the complete process very time-consuming and that this is the biggest implementation threshold. This must be addressed to make the concept sustainable. It is paramount to make sure that the concept still delivers the desired result in this new shape and that the output quality remains the priority.

5. Find a platform which can spread Rake Praat.

To put Rake Praat on the map and make it as accessible to municipalities as possible, it would be great if an organisation could take on the promotion and distribution. Organisations like ProDemos or the Association for Dutch Municipalities (VNG) are very suitable candidates for this.

6. Pilot Rake Praat at municipalities.

After more tests have been done with the toolkit, the next step is to pilot the full process at municipalities. To mitigate risk for a municipality, the budget for the pilot does not have to be as high as they would normally allocate for participatory budgeting. It is suggested

to approach the municipalities which signed the #MyVoiceCounts manifesto, as youth participation is a hot topic there.

7. Look into possibilities to integrate the toolkit in existing processes.

Even though participatory budgeting is a known process for many municipalities, their experiences with it seem rather mixed. To make sure the participation has a clear question to answer and clear goal, the toolkit could be embedded in existing processes such as gathering input for environmental visions, developing election programmes or in neighbourhood visits.

8. Verify the empathise cards with the mbo-students.

To give the empathise cards more gravitas, they should be verified with mbo-students. If the students do not recognise themselves in the content, the card was based on incorrect conclusions drawn from the research.

9. Consult a didactic expert to further develop the co-creation sessions.

To align the toolkit better with the needs of mbo-students and, it would be wise to consult a didactic expert (e.g., a teacher) for detailing the co-creation sessions.

10. Develop a tool for measuring participation.

To determine the long-term effects of Rake Praat (and of other initiatives) a tool for measuring participation rates must be developed.

11. Design a series of additional interventions.

Due to the complex nature of the problem, it is recommended that several other interventions are developed. This would tackle the problem from multiple angles. The design directions (chapter 4.1) could provide inspiration.

12. Investigate possibilities to create (or showcase) more political role models for mbo-students.

To break the chain of lack of representation, having role models the students can recognise themselves in is crucial. Therefore, it is recommended to look into possibilities of increasing role models in all layers of the political landscape.



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