master thesis Design for Interaction
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by Betsie Loeffen

TOWARDS RESPONSIVE POLICY MAKING

Enabling policy advisors to experience thinking and acting in response to the needs of youth

Master thesis Design for Interaction
Towards responsive policy making:
Enabling policy advisors to experience the value of
thinking and acting in response to the needs of youth

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Preface

During the past few months, I had the opportunity to engage in a project that intrigued me: the interactions within and between a policy system and youth. It was a period of learning and working with inspiring people, and felt like a valuable way to conclude my studies.

I want to acknowledge that this project would not have been possible without many wonderful people that I met and who supported me during this project. I would like to thank:

Irene - for the meaningful and, above all, enjoyable collaboration at the intersections of design, research and practice.

Yentl - for allowing me to collaborate and learn from your experiences and knowledge, and to keep inspiring me with your positive attitude.

Susanna - for the committed and fun collaboration and valuable brainstorming.

Milene & Ingrid - for challenging me to strengthen the reasoning of my design project and for trusting my independence, while becoming a designer.

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There are many other people I encountered during this project who made it possible and valuable. Many thanks to everyone involved in the Healthy Start community and to all the (young) people I met during my 'meeloopdagen' at gemeente Rotterdam, especially the policy advisors who allowed me to guide them through experiments and learn together about youth participation in policy making.

Enjoy reading!

Betsie

Summary

Background and aim

Dutch municipalities are striving for a better connection with their residents and increased mutual trust. Nevertheless, the voice of youth is often overlooked in this process, despite their right to be heard in policies and decisions that affect their lives. This is reinforced by bureaucratic institutions primarily focusing on executing tasks, processes, and protocols, sidelining youth and their needs and causing them to disengage from governments and other institutions. Therefore, a growing need for municipalities to involve youth in their policy making emerges. However, in practice, many policy advisors struggle to do so, despite the availability of various tools and strategies. This project aims to understand barriers to youth participation and develop an approach to enable policy advisors from the municipality of Rotterdam to meaningfully involve youth in policies that affect them.

Method

Through design research, a deep understanding is developed of the challenges and needs of policy advisors regarding youth participation. This included observation and participation within the municipal context, in-depth interviews (n=19), guerrilla interviews (n=50), iterative testing (n=7), and Service Ecosystem Design theory.

Results

The research revealed that various social structures underlie the normalized thinking and behavior of policy advisors: (1) ambiguous beliefs about the value of youth participation, (2) constraints imposed by the (partly unwritten) rules of the municipal system, and (3) entrenched norms and roles. These structures lead to assumptions about the needs of youth and barriers to their involvement in policy.

A learning approach is iteratively designed and tested. With this approach, policy advisors can experience the value of thinking and acting in response to the needs of youth, in an accessible way. These experiences contribute to increasing their motivation and knowledge about involving youth in policy. The approach includes multiple conversations and conducting small experiments that reflect on the current way of working. For example, by shadowing a youth worker for a day or engaging in a conversation with a young person from their own network about a policy question.

Conclusions

Challenging assumptions about youth and their needs through active and attentive experiences proves to be essential to enable policy advisors to reconsider and possibly reshape municipal structures and processes. A personally guided learning process can create space for this, allowing current attitudes and practices to change. These can promote the structural and meaningful use of participatory approaches and result in policies that meet the needs of youth. The project thus offers a new perspective and a small yet fundamental step by the municipality towards a better and mutual relationship with its (younger) residents.

Samenvatting

Achtergrond en doelstelling

Nederlandse gemeenten zoeken naar een betere verbinding met hun bewoners en meer wederzijds vertrouwen. Echter, de stem van jongeren wordt hierbij vaak over het hoofd gezien, terwijl het ook hun recht is om gehoord te worden in beleid en beslissingen die hun leven raken. Dit wordt bemoeilijkt doordat bureaucratische instituten zich voornamelijk richten op het uitvoeren van hun taken, processen en protocollen, waardoor jongeren en hun behoeften achtergesteld raken en zich afwenden van overheden en andere instituties. Daarom groeit de noodzaak van gemeenten om jongeren te betrekken bij hun beleidsvorming. Echter, in de praktijk blijkt het voor veel beleidsadviseurs lastig om hiermee aan de slag te gaan, ondanks de beschikbaarheid van diverse tools en strategieën. Dit project heeft als doel belemmeringen voor jongerenparticipatie te begrijpen en een aanpak te ontwikkelen om beleidsadviseurs van gemeente Rotterdam in staat te stellen jongeren betekenisvol te betrekken bij beleid dat hen aangaat.

Methode

Door middel van ontwerpend onderzoek is een diepgaand begrip ontwikkeld van de uitdagingen en behoeften van beleidsadviseurs met betrekking tot jongerenparticipatie. Hierbij werd gebruik gemaakt van observatie en deelname binnen de gemeentelijke context, diepte-interviews (n=19), guerrilla interviews (n=50), iteratieve testen (n=7), en Service Ecosystem Design theorie.

Resultaten

Uit het onderzoek bleek dat verschillende sociale structuren ten grondslag liggen aan de genormaliseerde denk- en handelwijze van beleidsadviseurs: (1) twijfelachtige overtuigingen over de waarde van jongerenparticipatie, (2) beperkingen opgelegd door de (deels ongeschreven) regels van het gemeentelijke systeem, en (3) vastgelopen normen en rollen. Deze structuren leiden tot aannames over de behoeften van jongeren en belemmeringen voor hun betrokkenheid bij beleid.

Een leeraanpak is iteratief ontworpen en getest. Met deze aanpak kunnen beleidsadviseurs op een laagdrempelige manier de waarde ervaren van het denken en handelen vanuit de behoeften van jongeren. Deze ervaringen dragen bij aan het vergroten van hun motivatie en kennis over het betrekken van jongeren bij beleid. De aanpak omvat meerdere gesprekken en het uitvoeren van kleine experimenten die reflecteren op de gangbare werkwijze. Bijvoorbeeld door een dag mee te lopen met een jongerenwerker of een gesprek aan te gaan met een jongere uit het eigen netwerk over een beleidsvraag.

Conclusies

Het uitdagen van aannames over jongeren en hun behoeften door middel van actieve en aandachtige ervaringen blijkt essentieel om beleidsadviseurs in staat te stellen om gemeentelijke structuren en processen te herzien en mogelijk opnieuw vorm te geven. Een persoonlijk begeleid leerproces kan hiervoor de ruimte creëren, waardoor gewerkt kan worden aan het veranderen van huidige houdingen en werkwijzen. Deze kunnen de structurele en betekenisvolle inzet van participatieve aanpakken bevorderen en beleid opleveren dat aansluit op de behoefte van jongeren. Het project biedt daarmee een nieuw perspectief en een kleine maar fundamentele stap van de gemeente op weg naar een betere en wederkerige relatie met haar (jongere) inwoners.

Reading Guide

Colour guide
Blue: “What Is?” phase
Red: “What If?” phase
Yellow: “But How?” phase
Green: “So What?” phase

Approach
The start of each chapter explains the approaches and activities used to inform the phase whose results are shared in that chapter.

To sum up
The end of every chapter provides the main takeaways for that chapter.

Terminology

- The project generally defines ‘youth’ as people between 15 and 27.
- While in the municipal context the term ‘participation’ is also used for participation in society, such as being able to find and perform a job, in this report it refers to participation in relation to policy making.
- Policy making refers to the whole policy cycle, including both policy development and policy execution.
- People working for gemeente Rotterdam are called civil servants. Civil servants who are responsible of making policies are called policy advisors.

Table of contents

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the context and aim of this project, and explains the approach, providing an overview of the project and its activities.

1.1 Context

It is in moments of crisis that we realize that the systems with which we have organized our society are not always effective or desirable (Frederik, 2021; Kraak, 2024). Here in the Netherlands, we got confronted with cases such as the childcare benefits scandal, misconduct in youth care, and the corona crisis. In response, desire for control has led our systems to become increasingly burdened with measurement processes, rules, and complexities, resulting in reduced trust between government and citizens (Van Ditmars, 2023; Steenvoorden, 2023). Bureaucratic institutions have increasingly focused on carrying out their tasks, processes, and protocols, sidelining people and their needs and resulting in citizens feeling unheard and disconnected from governments and other institutions (Bakker-Klein, 2021; Kruiter et al., 2023). Municipalities are increasingly aware of this and are seeking to establish better connections with their residents to foster mutual trust.

Aiming for citizen participation in policy making is one of the ways municipalities are attempting to improve their connection and mutual trust with citizens. The voices of youth, however, are often overlooked, despite their right to be heard in policies and decisions affecting their lives (United Nations, 1990). Policies developed through collaboration with youth are more likely to succeed because they can be better tailored to their needs and gain wider support (Head, 2011). Furthermore, it contributes to the personal, social, and organizational development of young people (Checkoway, 2011) and nurtures a society where people feel safe and willing to share their experiences and needs.

Youth participation in policy making is experiencing significant developments: organizations are specializing in facilitating participatory processes; step-by-step plans, guidelines, and tools are being developed and discussed in reports, podcasts, and events. This has led to a growing expertise and understanding of why youth participation is necessary and what participatory processes should entail. However, in practice, many policy advisors find it challenging to engage with youth participation, despite the availability of the various tools and strategies. How to translate intentions into actual behavior encompassing participatory processes remains underexplored (Migchelbrink & Van De Walle, 2021).

This project aims to design for the improvement of youth participation at gemeente Rotterdam. There too, a growing demand for youth participation and recognition of its importance emerges. In 2022, the city council adopted two motions calling for the development of policy frameworks for youth participation in municipal policies (Motie - De Jeugdige Participant Omarmd (Aangenomen), 2022). However, the perceived gap between the world of policy advisors and the lifeworld of youth makes it challenging to initiate engagement with youth participation or to make its processes meaningful (Zweegman et al., 2023).

1.2 Project collaboration

This project is part of Healthy Start, a program of the Convergence Alliance between Delft University of Technology, Erasmus University Rotterdam and Erasmus Medical Center. One of the six ambitions of the Healthy Start program is to improve youth participation. A two-year design project was launched in March 2023 to address issues around youth participation in policy making, led by postdoc researcher Irene Fierloos. The project uses design thinking to engage youth and stakeholders to generate insights into the barriers and factors that enable youth participation in policy making at gemeente Rotterdam. For this, Irene Fierloos has conducted 12 interviews with representatives of organisations working to improve youth participation in policy in Rotterdam and/or other parts of the Netherlands and 19 interviews with civil servants working on youth policy and/or citizen participation at gemeente Rotterdam (Fierloos et al., 2023; Fierloos et al., 2024). For my project, I collaborated with Irene Fierloos. My findings and results are part of her efforts to providing actionable directions for improving youth participation in local policy making.

Simultaneously with my project, another graduation project took place, led by Susanna Osinga, who pursued her master's degree in Strategic Product Design. She used the Frame Innovation approach with the aim of rethinking youth participation in local policy development from a broad perspective (Osinga, 2024).

Several activities of my project are carried out in collaboration with Irene Fierloos and Susanna Osinga and some results in this report are based on activities they carried out.

1.3 Focus

Within the larger scope of the project of Irene Fierloos, my project focuses on youth participation in policy development from the perspective of policy advisors at gemeente Rotterdam. How is it for them to involve youth in policy development, possibly for the first time? To transition from talking about using youth participation to properly doing it, requires much more than just reading a folder that has landed on the desk at the municipality office. Not everyone is willing and able to conform to a new way of working, due to several interrelated personal, organisational, cultural, process, and contextual factors (Migchelbrink & Van De Walle, 2021). Involving youth can be a scary, messy, time-consuming process and have a yet unclear determination of success. It creates a new form of responsibility and justification towards involved youth throughout the whole process, whether involved directly or indirectly, through consultation of an intermediary organisation. Furthermore, it can be difficult to translate input into policy.

Therefore, this project aims to **'design an approach that enables policy advisors of gemeente Rotterdam to involve youth in policy making'**.

The formal design brief can be found in Appendix A.

1.4 Approach

To effectively address the project's aim, I employed several methods, adapting and combining them as needed for the context. The following chapter shares the main methodology employed in the project: research through design. After, a project overview is given, concisely sharing the conducted activities of each phase. The start of each chapter also shares the approaches and activities used to inform the relevant phase of that chapter.

1.4.1 Research through design

The main methodology adopted in this project is 'research through design'. It involves practicing design activities throughout the duration of the project, informing both research and design (Stappers & Giaccardi, n.d.). Unlike strictly separating research and design phases, research through design focuses on creating opportunities for interactions that were not possible before, making them observable through design.

I find this methodology relevant and appropriate for the context of youth participation in municipal policy making because of

its pragmatic and practical nature. The municipal context this project seeks solutions for is broad and dynamic, thus a risk lies in staying very general or depicting a concept that only works under perfectly controlled conditions. Therefore, understanding the needs, developing, and evaluating a concept through probing and iterative testing throughout the project confronts myself and the concept in development with the real-world obstacles between a proposed concept and its meaningful and possible application. Moreover, it constantly drives the project towards generating actionable outcomes, which is needed as already many design and/or research projects surrounding youth participation in policy making have been conducted, yet not always succeeding in actual change (Osinga, 2024).

A research through design approach is employed in various ways, primarily to (1) explore the context and design space, and (2) develop a concept. While in the beginning of the project, probes and/or co-creation tools are used to spark conversations with civil servants, experts and youth, later on prototypes are used to iteratively test and improve a design concept.

1.4.2 Project and report overview

Adopting a research through design approach, the projects process does not follow a linear sequence of activities leading to a solution, but rather aims to constantly explore knowledge and possibilities. Figure 1 gives an impression of some of the conducted activities in this process. Nevertheless, four distinct phases can be identified that are iteratively informed. These are formulated as questions, inspired by Strategic Design courses taught at The Oslo School of Architecture and Design: "**What is?**", "**What if?**", "**But how?**", and "**So what?**". The undertaken activities contribute to exploring possible answers to these phases. However, not by going through them one by one, but by constantly exploring and reflecting. Figure 2 simplifies how this messy and intertwined process looks. It involves constantly moving back and forth between understanding what is happening ("What is?"), questioning how the situation could be viewed differently ("What if?"), and considering what is needed for that ("But how?"). All of this is accompanied by a constant but growing questioning of how the acquired knowledge and designed concepts will intervene, influence, and create effects ("So what?").

To ensure that this report is coherent and pleasant to read, I organized the acquired knowledge of this process not chronologically, but into the four phases, accompanied by seven sub-questions, each addressed in a separate chapter. Figure 3 gives an overview of the project's report following the four phases. At the beginning of each chapter, the activities carried out for that part of the phase are shared again. The remainder of this chapter briefly introduces each phase, its corresponding chapters of this report, the research questions, and the conducted activities informing the phase.

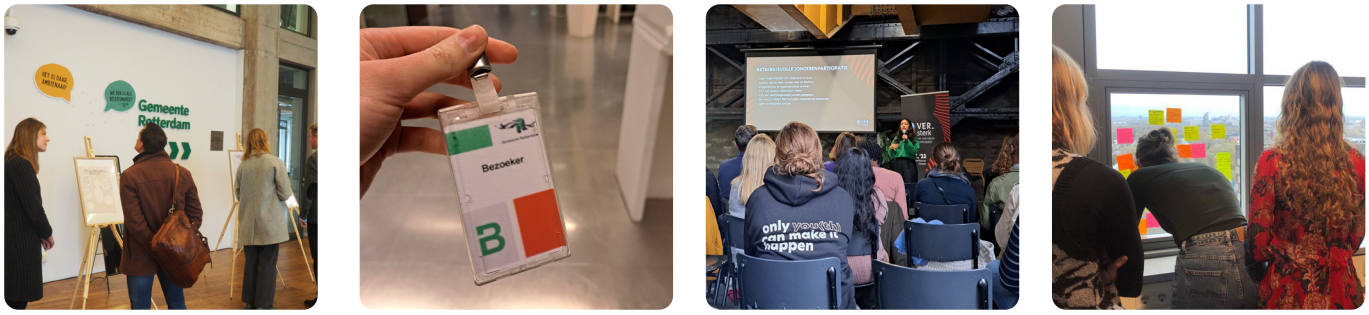


Figure 1 - a, b, c and d. Impressions of several activities conducted in this project.

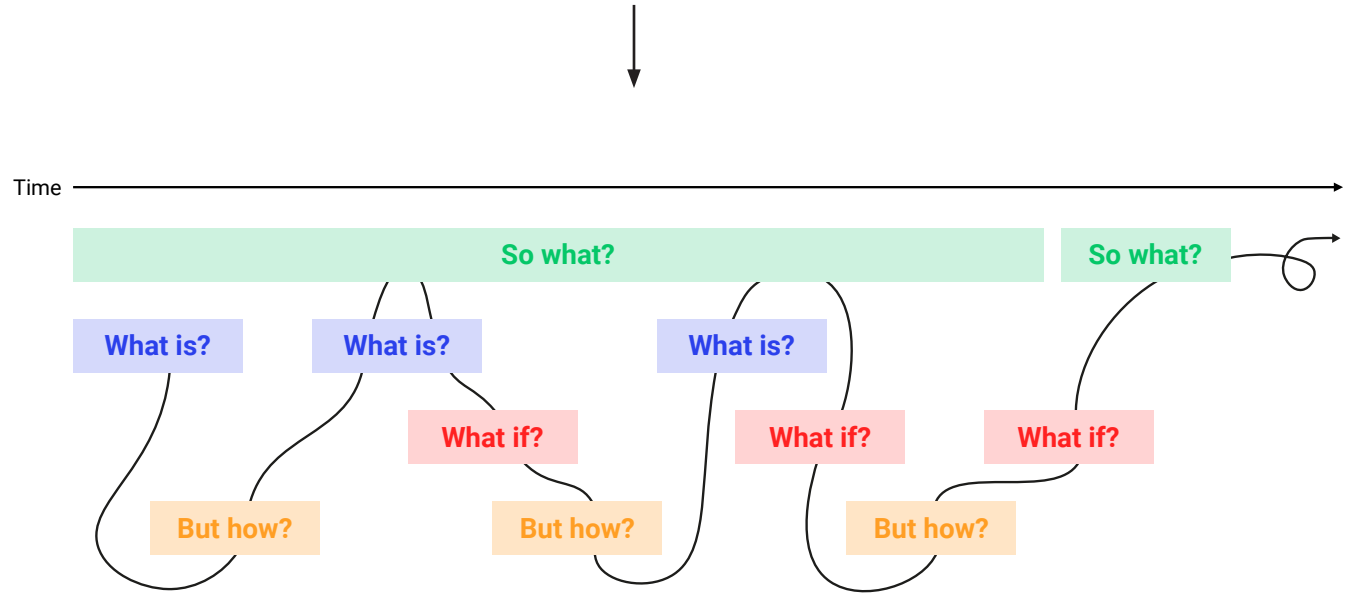


Figure 2. Overview of the project's approach, iteratively informing the four phases of the project.

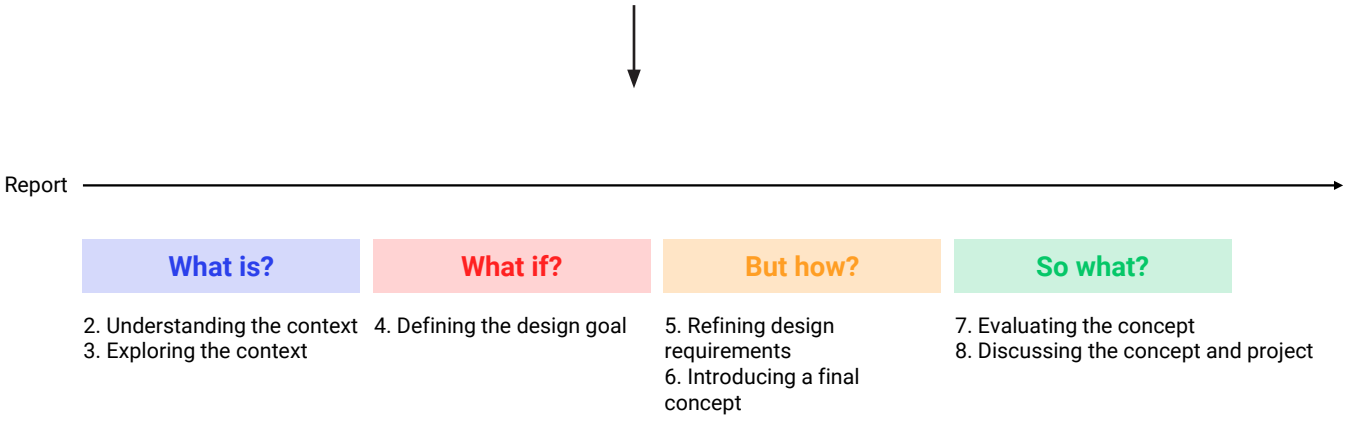


Figure 3. Overview of the report structure, guided by the four phases of the project.

What is?
The first phase aims to understand the current state of the subject. Therefore, Chapter 2 aims to understand the purpose of youth participation in policy making as well as its current state, approaches, and challenges at gemeente Rotterdam. It addresses the research question:

Chapter 2. Why and how does youth participation in policy making currently take place at gemeente Rotterdam and what are the challenges?

Following this, Chapter 3 delves deeper into the needs and challenges faced by policy advisors who are currently (not) involved in meaningful youth participation. It addresses the following research question:

Chapter 3. What obstacles and tensions hinder policy advisors from ensuring meaningful youth participation in policy making at gemeente Rotterdam?

The insights gathered during this phase are deeply informed by observations in the municipal context (Figure 1-b). By immersing myself in gemeente Rotterdam, observing youth participation processes, and engaging with stakeholders, I gained valuable knowledge about policy making and youth participation. This immersion took place throughout almost the entirety of my project, by spending approximately one day per week at the Timmerhuis, the main office location of gemeente Rotterdam where most policy advisors of social development policies are based.

I adopted the role of a colleague ('meelopen'), accompanying Yentl Lieuwma, youth participation coordinator of the 'Vastpakken en Niet Loslaten' program (Plan Van Aanpak Kwetsbare Jongeren 16-27 Jaar, 2022). This program aims to improve services for youth facing various challenges. In her role, Yentl coordinates a group of youth, who actively contribute to the development and execution of the program. I joined her in youth participation activities (seven in total) and numerous meetings with colleagues and external partners she collaborates with. Through these observations and informal conversations with participating youth, civil servants and external collaborators, I gained firsthand insights into the dynamics of the municipal environment. Additionally, it allowed me to establish connections with the intended 'users' of this project: policy advisors.

Furthermore, I took part in the internal municipal training 'Meedenken, Meedoen', which covered the importance, various forms, and implementation of participation in the work of civil servants. The training took three mornings and provided me with more understanding of municipal participation and insight into current municipal approaches to enable policy advisors to adopt participatory approaches. Moreover, the observations gave me insight into civil servants' views on and experience with participation.

Starting in an observing role, my involvement gradually evolved into a more active role, in which I shared ideas in meetings and conversations, gaining valuable experience as a temporary 'participation advisor'. This experience subsequently informed my findings and final concept. Throughout these interactions, I carefully documented my practical experiences and reflections, occasionally sharing these insights with 'colleagues' to enrich a collective understanding.

> *Appendix B provides a brief overview of my municipal observations and participation. Throughout the report, significant insights derived from the municipal observations are occasionally referenced within brackets, indicated as '(source: municipal observations)'.*

In addition to the **municipal observations** described above, the "What is?" phase was informed by the following activities:

- 19 **Interviews** with various policy advisors and other civil servants, who are committed to youth policy and/or participation.
  The interviews were primarily conducted by Irene Fierloos, occasionally with help from myself and Susanna Osinga. A total of 14 policy advisors/project leaders, one communication advisor, two youth counsellors/youth and family coaches, and two managers participated, who are part of different clusters (social development, work and income, and services). Respondents work within different teams and departments, including: poverty and debt; youth; sports; participation and elections; neighbourhoods, welfare and informal care. To ensure the anonymity of the respondents, their specific positions are not mentioned in this report. Throughout the report, significant insights from these interviews are occasionally referenced within brackets, indicated as '(source: interviews)'. When quotes are utilized to illustrate insights in the main text, they are accompanied by their function and a number indicating the civil servant who provided the quote (e.g., 'policy advisor (5)'). When quotes could potentially be perceived as sensitive, no number is shown to avoid traceability (e.g., 'policy advisor (-)').

- **Guerrilla interviews** with **probes**, involving conversations with approximately 50 civil servants to gather perspectives on youth participation in policy making (Figure 1-a).
  Appendix C offers further insights into the setup and outcomes of this activity, conducted in collaboration with Susanna Osinga and Irene Fierloos. Similar to the interviews, significant insights from the guerrilla interviews are occasionally referenced within brackets as '(source: guerrilla interviews)'.

- **Literature research** on youth participation in policy making and underlying structures informing the behaviour of policy advisors.

- **Desk research** on policy development and its opportunities for youth participation in policy making.

- Attendance at 10 **youth participation-related events** to discover what approaches, tools, language, and forms of participation are currently being used and developed (Figure 1-c).
  Appendix D provides information about these events and the main insights gained.

What if?
The deep understanding of the current situation lays the groundwork for envisioning a desired future state. What if a new perspective is adopted to enable policy advisors in fostering participatory approaches? By merging the insights gathered in the "What is?" phase with this new perspective, a design direction emerges that suggests an answer to the following research question:

Chapter 4. What approach is needed for policy advisors to enable meaningful youth participation in policy making at gemeente Rotterdam?

The activities informing this phase include:

- **Insights synthesis** of the research insights of the 'What is?' phase.

- A **creative session** with six (design) researchers specializing in the field of governance and design (Figure 1-d). The session focused on discussing and generating ideas on the requirements for enabling policy advisors to experiment with youth involvement in policy making.
  Appendix C provides further details on the setup and outcome of this session.

- The definition of a **design goal**.

Given the iterative nature of this project (Figure 2), the design goal is not established at a single point in time but is continually refined throughout the process. The final design goal, which serves as the foundation for the subsequent phase detailed in this report and is reflected in the research questions of the next chapters, is as follows: 'To design for a learning approach that challenges policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs and enables reshaped habitual thinking and acting in policy making.'

But how?
But how can the identified design direction be manifested? This is where the adopted research through design approach mostly comes into play. Through iterative testing, both design requirements and a concept are developed, with each iteration also providing valuable insights that inform and refine the other phases of the project.

The iterative tests are not performed in hypothetical settings but within the ongoing work of several policy advisors. The insights of these tests also inform the "So what?" phase, explained below. Conversely, evaluation interviews conducted as part of the "So What" phase also play a role in shaping the concept.

Hence to create a clear narrative in this report, the approach and insights gained from the iterative design and testing process are shared in the "So what?" phase of this report. The "But how?" phase primarily focuses on presenting the resulting design requirements and concept, addressing the following research questions:

Chapter 5. What is required for a learning process that challenges policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs and enables reshaped habitual thinking and acting in policy making?

Chapter 6. How can a learning process challenge policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs, enabling reshaped habitual thinking and acting in policy making?

In addition to the iterative design process and to support the reasoning and presentation of the concept, the following activities inform the "But how?" phase:

- Formulating **how to-questions** derived from the design goal that guide the refinement of design requirements.
- Using conceptualisations of **service ecosystem design** and other relevant fields to refine how the design goal can be manifested and to suggest the role the concept can play within gemeente Rotterdam.
- **Designing** a concept, including a several materials.
- Creating a **photo scenario** to illustrate the concept.

So what?
So what does the proposed perspective and concept deliver and what comes next? While this questions serves as a continuous thread throughout all phases, it is fully addressed in this last phase.

Chapter 7 explains how the concept is developed and tested iteratively, sharing its insights. Moreover, it describes how the concept can intervene and potentially generate impact, addressing the following question:

Chapter 7. To what extent does the application of a learning process challenge policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs and enable reshaped habitual thinking and acting in policy making?

Building upon the evaluations of the concept, Chapter 8 discusses the project and proposed concept, providing limitations, issuing a call to action, and offering a personal reflection. It therefore addresses the following research question:

Chapter 8. How can the proposed learning process be further developed and applied?

The "So what?" phase is informed by the following activities:

- Three **iterative tests** with low-fi prototypes of the concept.
- One **pilot test** with prototypes of the final concept.
- Four **(group) interviews** with relevant stakeholders and experts from municipal and research perspectives.

2. UNDERSTANDING YOUTH PARTICIPATION AT GEMEENTE ROTTERDAM

This chapter provides insight into the opportunities and necessity of youth participation in municipal policy making. It describes the different ways in which youth participation is currently integrated at gemeente Rotterdam. Furthermore, it discusses the persisting challenges despite ongoing efforts, prompting a deeper exploration of the obstacles and tensions experienced by policy advisors, detailed in the next chapter.

2.0 Approach

This phase of the project analyses youth participation in policy making and its current integration at gemeente Rotterdam. Most of the information shared in this chapter is derived from the following activities with the goal of getting a basic understanding of youth participation and/in policy making:

- **Literature research** .
- **Desk research**.

Yet by engaging in the activities mentioned below, I found out which aspects of the extensive information on policy making and youth participation are truly important for the other project phases and essential for initiating a deeper exploration in the second part of the "what is?" phase.

- **Municipal observations** during youth participation-related activities at gemeente Rotterdam.
  Appendix B provides a brief overview of my municipal observations and participation.
- 19 **Interviews** with policy advisors and other civil servants.
- **Guerrilla interviews** with **probes**, involving conversations with approximately 50 civil servants to gather perspectives on youth participation in policy making.
  Appendix C offers further insights into the setup and outcomes of this activity, conducted in collaboration with Susanna Osinga and Irene Fierloos.
- Attendance at 10 **youth participation-related events** to discover what approaches, tools, language, and forms of participation are currently being used and developed.
  Appendix D provides information about these events and the main insights gained.

The research question of this chapter is:

Why and how does youth participation in policy making currently take place at gemeente Rotterdam and what are the challenges?

Figure 4. This chapter expands on the topic introduced in the introduction, thereby touching the surface of the 'What is?' phase.

2.1 Youth participation in policy making

To understand the value and possible roles of youth participation in policy making, an overall understanding of the municipal system is needed. The following subchapters provide a brief explanation of the municipal system and policy making, both highlighting opportunities for youth participation. The last subchapter focuses on explaining the importance of youth participation in policy making.

2.1.1 From a municipal political system to youth

The functioning of a municipality can be simplified into three arena's: the political, civil and societal arena. Figure 5 shows an overview of the different arena's and their main actors. For this project, the most relevant actors in the municipal system are policy advisors working on youth-related policies and possibly their fellow civil servants. Second, the youth for whom the policy is made and who could therefore potentially participate in the policy process are most relevant.

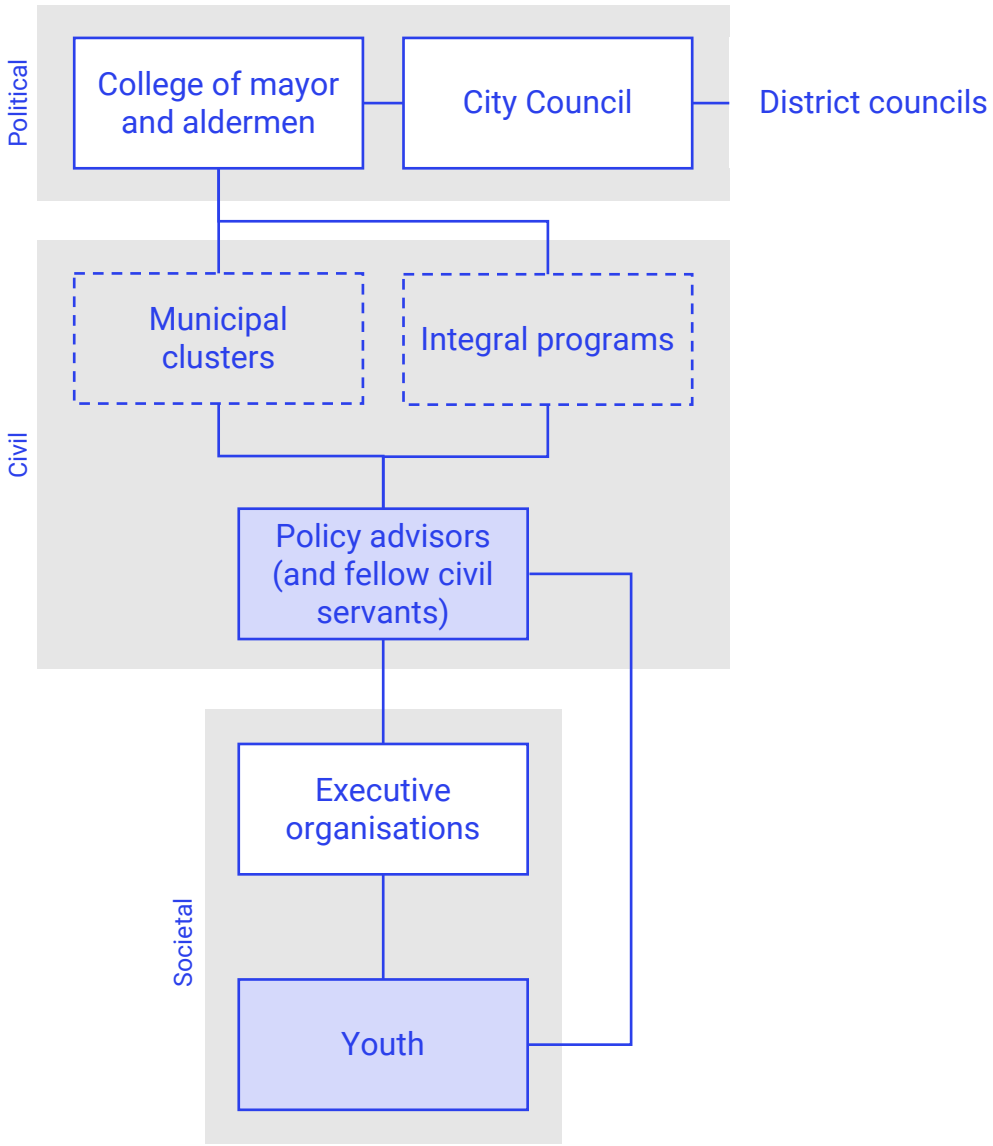


Figure 5. Simplified overview of Gemeente Rotterdam, with the main actors for this project in blue.

Political arena

Most decision power is held by the political arena, consisting of the **city council** together with the college of mayor and aldermen. The city council is the formal legislative department, consisting of 45 representatives from different political parties, elected by the residents of Rotterdam (ProDemos, n.d.-a). City council members are responsible of representing all people of the city, by deciding on the main policy outlines and controlling the college of mayor and alderman.

In 2022, another decentralized legislative department was implemented: the **district councils** (Wijkraden, n.d.). 39 neighbourhoods have their own council with each 7-9 elected residents. Through the district council, residents, organisations, and business owners can draw the municipality's attention to matters they consider important. It is possible to run for a district councillor from the age of 16.

The **college of mayor and aldermen** is the governing department of the city (ProDemos, n.d.-a). The mayor is proposed by the city council and the alderman are elected by the members of the city council. The college is responsible for the execution of council decision, national laws, and regulations. This is done mostly by overseeing the civil servants executing these.

Civil arena

In the civil arena, **policy advisors and fellow civil servants** are tasked with preparing and executing decisions from the college of mayor and aldermen (ProDemos, n.d.-b). Roles connected to policy making range from policy advisors to project coordinators and service providers.

Policy advisors are required to implement political decisions in society while also serving as advisors to the college of mayor and aldermen. This role brings a challenge (Pool, 2024). On one hand, they are expected to implement laws, rules, and political plans without allowing their own opinions to influence them. On the other hand, they must avoid becoming robotic in their approach, failing to prevent unintended consequences for people. These sometimes conflicting pressures are further discussed in Chapter 3.

The civil organization is structured in six clusters, encompassing administrative support, social citizen services, social development, city management, city development, and work and income. This project focuses mainly on policy belonging to the social development cluster.

Societal arena
Actual implementation of policy is done in society and can take the form of a social service, urban design, employment scheme, etcetera. For this purpose, operational civil servants are involved or, as often happens, the municipality collaborates with external **executive organisations**. Policy advisors are often involved to lead, monitor, and improve the implementation of the policy (ProDemos, n.d.-b).

The interaction of policy with youth may thus take place directly through operational civil servants, such as those working at the Jongerenloket (youth counter), or indirectly through external organisations the municipality engages with, such as a welfare foundation employing social workers who provide support to youth.

2.1.2 Policy development

Simply put, policy is merely a systematic way of achieving goals (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). In government organisations, policies are made to translate political visions into services for citizens (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, n.d.). In general, policy is divided into five key stages as shown in Figure 6: agenda setting, policy development, policy decision-making, policy implementation and policy evaluation (Beleid En Regelgeving Ontwikkelen, n.d.).

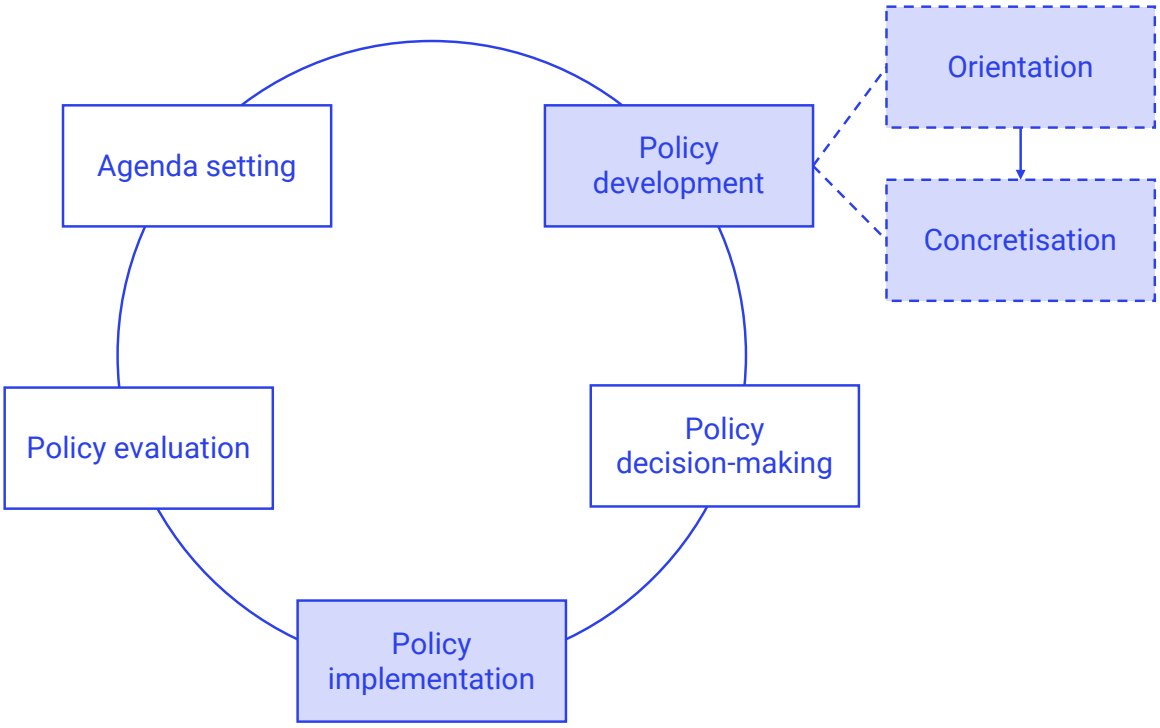


Figure 6. General overview of the municipal policy cycle, with the main phases for this project in blue.

1. **Agenda setting**. Societal issues that require political intervention find their way onto the political agenda. Which issues gain traction is influenced by public demands, political actors, crises, and research findings (ProDemos, n.d.-b). The voice of youth can also influence this, consciously or unconsciously. Moreover, you could also deliberately choose to seek out and address their concerns policy. The legislative city council ultimately decides on the agenda (ProDemos, n.d.-a).

2. **Policy development**. The development of policy can be simplified into two phases, which lead to different purposes for youth participation (source: municipal observations). If a policy is still in an early stage without clear solutions or project direction, an exploration phase is initiated. During this phase, discovering current concerns, dynamics and needs among youth through forms of youth participation could be valuable (Gemeente Leiden, 2023). Possibly, youth and policy advisors could collaboratively work on solutions. When the policy is already more advanced with defined solutions or project direction, it involves a concretization phase. In this stage, seeking feedback from youth on the formulated ideas could take place.

3. **Policy decision-making**. Once a policy proposal is developed, it is reviewed by the corresponding alderman through official and public communication channels (ProDemos, n.d.-a). The alderman makes a decision regarding the adoption or rejection of the proposal. This decision-making process can be influenced by several factors, including political considerations, budgetary constraints, stakeholder feedback, and confidence in the likelihood of success of the policy. This phase in itself may not allow youth participation, but taking youth participatory approaches in the preceding phase might influence and potentially even strengthen the decision.

4. **Policy implementation**. The approved policy is put into action through implementation measures. This involves allocating resources, assigning responsibilities, and executing the planned activities outlined in the policy (ProDemos, n.d.-b). Effective implementation requires coordination among various stakeholders, including operational civil service bodies, external implementing organizations and possibly the targeted youth population. Monitoring progress and addressing challenges are essential aspects of this phase to ensure that policies achieve their intended outcomes. Participation practices might lead to finding out what these challenges or needed areas for improvement are and generate ideas on how to solve them.

5. **Policy evaluation**. After a certain period, the implemented policy undergoes evaluation to assess its effectiveness, efficiency, and impact (ProDemos, n.d.-b). The evaluation aims to determine whether the policy has achieved its stated objectives, identify areas for improvement, and inform future policy agendas, policy development and policy decision-making processes. This may result in policy adjustments. Evaluation methods can include participatory practices to gather feedback and ideas for improvement from the intended youth target group (Gemeente Leiden, 2023).

2.1.3 The importance of youth participation in policy making

Youth participation in policy making entails involving young people in decisions that affect their lives (Checkoway, 2011). This broad definition can be interpreted and implemented in various ways, with differing levels of influence. Subchapter 2.2 shares different forms of youth participation in the Rotterdam municipality. The role and importance of involving young people can have diverse meanings. The international Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1990) states it as a fundamental right. However, this legal and moral obligation is often not the primary motivation for incorporating youth voices (Head, 2010). Two main values of youth participation stand out as prominent arguments: a democratic value and a pragmatic value (Migchelbrink & Van De Walle, 2021; Liao & Schachter, 2017; Head, 2011). Moreover, the value of youth participation is often perceived differently compared to adult participation. These different perspectives on these values influence the reception and implementation of participation. This is further explored in the next chapter.

Democratic value

Research indicates that youth participation enhances young people's personal, social, and organizational development, including social skills, self-confidence, and civic competence (Checkoway, 2011). Sharing experiences can provide emotional and mental energy, fostering a sense of hope and recognition within groups (Van Hoorn & Keuzenkamp, 2022). These individual benefits can indirectly lead to societal benefits, as civic engagement increases and citizenship improves (Head, 2011).

Pragmatic value

Additionally, youth participation can enhance the outcomes of policy by making it more efficient, effective and accepted (Head, 2011). Participation involves understanding people's concerns, challenges, and needs and giving them a role in determining what they need. This ensures that services better align with the needs of young people, thus contributing to a municipality's objectives (Migchelbrink & Van De Walle, 2021).

Participation involves incorporating specific experiences and knowledge about what works in an individual's perception. It relies on the agency individuals possess to survive, especially in challenging circumstances. Civil servants have only a limited perspective on this knowledge. A policy advisor may work on policies to reduce poverty, but may have never experienced what it is like to have limited money and thus not really know what could help you to get out of such a challenging situation.

In addition to experiential knowledge, there are two other forms of knowledge utilized in policy development and decision-making: scientific and professional knowledge.

- **Scientific knowledge** is based on evidence gathered through systematic research and analysis, and often subject to peer review. It is grounded in theories and aims to be objective and generalizable (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.).

- **Professional knowledge** is gained through practical experience and expertise in a particular field or profession and is informed by standards, ethics, and best practices formed within a specialized profession (Van Hoorn & Keuzenkamp, 2022).

- **Experiential knowledge** is acquired through direct personal experiences, observations, and reflections (Keuzenkamp & Van Den Hoorn, 2022). It is shaped by individuals' unique perspectives, emotions, and interactions with their environment. Subchapter 2.2.2 further explains different definitions of experiential knowledge applied within the municipal context.

These forms of knowledge may overlap, and a combination of all is often necessary to achieve widely accepted, efficient and effective policies. The next chapter revisits these different forms of knowledge, as the importance attached to them influences the belief in the value of youth participation.

> **"It is often not possible for me to empathize well with the lived experience of my target group, so I need to hear from them. What do you need? What do you want? How do you want it? etc., to ultimately offer them something they say, yes, indeed, this is what I needed. Otherwise, the risk of missing the mark is high."**

Civil servant (7)

2.2 Youth participation at gemeente Rotterdam

At Gemeente Rotterdam, a variety of youth participation is integrated, each tailored to attract or engage different segments of the youth population. The following subchapters share about this integration, by differentiating between participation driven by youth themselves and participation driven by specific policy themes, projects, and programs. Both provide valuable opportunities or examples for policy advisors to engage with youth. This project primarily focuses on participation driven by policy objectives.

2.2.1 Participation driven by youth

In these forms of youth participation, the incentive arises from young people themselves. The ideas, concerns or initiatives of young people form the basis of these projects, after which the connection to policy can possibly be made. Conversely, these projects can also be approached by policy advisors as an entry point to engage youth.

Gemeente Rotterdam collaborates with, facilitates, and funds various of such projects and organisations for young people to participate (Figure 7).

Several internal opportunities are:

- The youth contribution scheme, allowing young people in Rotterdam aged 12-27 to apply for a financial contribution for their own project or for organizing events.
- The district council, allowing youth aged 16 and above to represent residents, organisations and entrepreneurs of a neighbourhood and draw the municipality's attention to things they consider important in the neighbourhood.
- A youth panel, a platform polling the opinions of youth aged 16-26.

Several external opportunities are:

- Young010, part of LOKAAL foundation, which is the official youth advisory body of the college.
- Subsidized projects, such as Chick and the City: a podcast for and by girls in Rotterdam.

2.2.2 Participation driven by policy

Policy-specific forms of youth participation are initiated within gemeente Rotterdam from different teams, departments, and clusters. The policy concern provides the occasion to start engaging in some form of youth participation (Figure 8). There is currently no complete overview of the ongoing participation processes within policy themes. However, several characteristics can be identified, illustrated by a few examples.

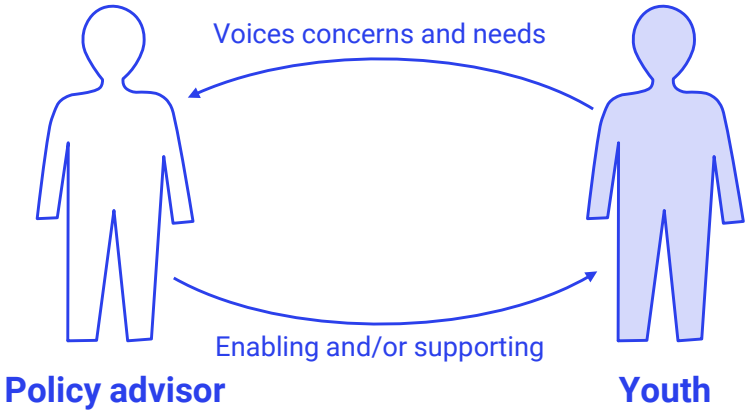


Figure 7. Participation driven by youth, highlighting the driving actor in blue.

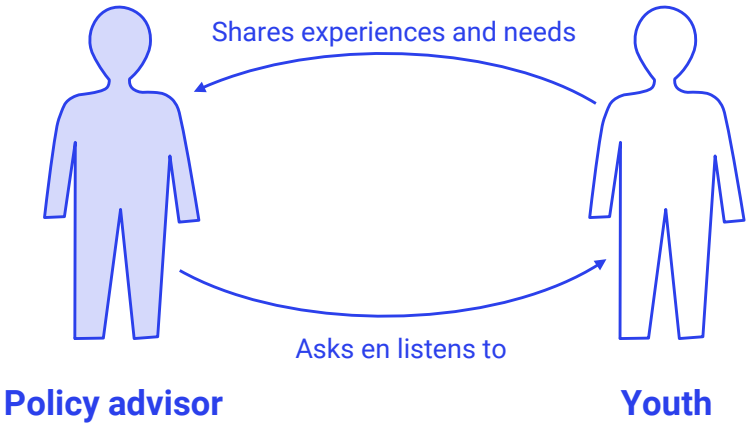


Figure 8. Participation driven by policy, highlighting the driving actor in blue.

Type of experience
Within the social development cluster, policy themes often do not relate directly to all young people in Rotterdam, but often to those facing certain challenges. Therefore, when starting a participation project, it is relevant to involve young people who have experience with those challenges. For instance, the 'Vastpakken en niet Loslaten' program works with youth who have experience in youth care, in order to improve the path other young people in youth care have to take (Plan Van Aanpak Kwetsbare Jongeren 16-27 Jaar, 2022). The youth advice on various topics such as the MijnRotterdam website, outflow profiles in youth care and dealing with debts.

Thinking along with topics that are close to you is not self-evident. That is why a distinction is made between experience, experiential knowledge, and experts by experience (Keuzenkamp & Van Den Hoorn, 2022), as visualized in Figure 9. Personal experience is obtained by experiencing something yourself: learning through experience. Someone knows what it means to face certain challenges and what does or does not work in this respect. Personal experience can become experiential knowledge through reflection, dialogue and other sources. Someone then knows how others experience the same thing. Skills can be learned, for instance in a course, to use knowledge of personal and collective experiences competently and functionally. Someone has transcended his or her own experiences and has used learning moments to support others or employ it in projects or research.

Length of participation
Depending on the nature of the policy topic and the type of input sought, youth are involved for varying durations. While the "Vastpakken en niet Loslaten" program consistently engages the same participants over an extended period, other programs also incorporate one-time participation activities. For instance, the "Urban Sports" policy is partly developed through initiatives involving discussions with 'random' youth on the streets throughout Rotterdam.

Location specific
Another element that influences participation is whether it is linked to specific residential locations or not. When developing youth hubs, the intended target group is mainly the local youth from that neighbourhood. When young people are involved in the creation of the new space, the outcome of participation (if all goes well) becomes highly visible: a physical place where they can go and make use of. The reason someone might join such a project could simply be because it's in their own street. In contrast, many social service themes are not directly tied to residential locations, but rather to organizations, regulations, or places where young people can go for assistance. The results are usually less visible or may no longer be relevant for the participating youth.

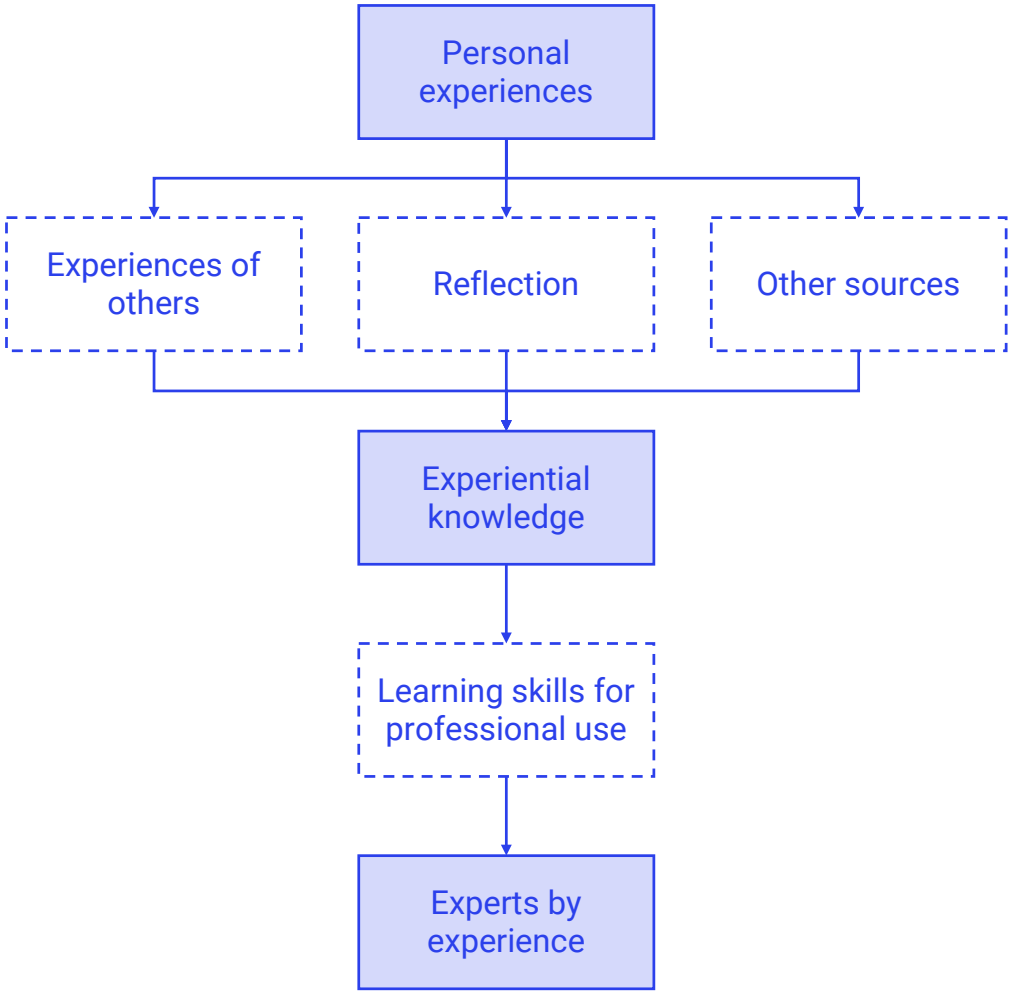


Figure 9. Different forms of experience (adapted version of visual developed by Timmer (2009)).

2.3 A call for meaningful youth participation in policy making

The desire to involve youth in policy making is acknowledged within gemeente Rotterdam and beyond. Some municipal departments are already mandated to integrate participation into their work and the city council has tasked the college with developing policy frameworks for youth participation in municipal policy making (Motie - De Jeugdige Participant Omarmd (Aangenomen), 2022). Additionally, a participation department offers training, advice, and guidance to civil servants involved in participation projects, although not specifically focused on youth participation (source: municipal observations).

Efforts are therefore underway to promote youth participation in policy making in a meaningful way. By “meaningful” it means that participation takes place on a structural basis and creates value for all actors involved. It is about aligning with the motivation of youth to participate, and contributing to policies that better meet the needs of youth. Appendix E lists several principles suggested to be part of meaningful participation practices, as indicated by Fierloos et al. (2023). However, achieving meaningful participation proves to be challenging. Translating participation into policy is difficult, and participating youth are not always heard or recognized, such as when their input is not taken seriously, expectations are unclear, or (visible) results are lacking or not shared (source: municipal observations).

Compared to adult participation, achieving the desired value for all participating actors in youth participation can be more difficult due to differences in life experiences and a lack of trust in the knowledge and experience that young people have (Checkoway, 2011; Zweegman et al., 2023). Furthermore, youth participation requires a certain sensitivity as young people are still developing themselves, searching for their ambitions, interests, and opinions. These can change rapidly and are influenced by trends (source: interviews). As a result, youth may not always know why they are participating, or their participation may be misused or have negative outcomes for them (source: municipal observations). For example, youth participation may lead to media attention, which is important for certain purposes but may not result in changes to their own situation or that of fellow young people.

Meanwhile, knowledge and expertise on youth participation is growing, supported by youth-focused (research) organizations in the Netherlands such as Up to Us, NJR, and ExpEx. Design agencies, research projects and government organisations develop and share numerous step-by-step plans, tools, and podcasts, and many related events are organized (Osinga, 2024). Internally, gemeente Rotterdam has introduced a participation guide for policy advisors to initiate and navigate participation processes (Figure 10). However, these developed approaches are still rarely used and there seems to be more talk about (adopting) youth participatory approaches rather than putting these intentions into practice (source: interviews and

municipal observations). Additionally, many policy advisors seem to be in an exploratory phase, seeking ways to initiate youth participation for the first time, which deviates from their conventional way of working and considering the role of youth in policy (source: municipal observations).

To discover what can contribute to a change in the way policy advisors work, their current way of working and perceived obstacles and tensions must first be understood more deeply.

Figure 10. 'Het Participatie Kompas', a supporting tool in participation processes, developed by gemeente Rotterdam in 2024.

“We [policy makers] can come up with what someone needs, but if someone is not ready for it [municipal interventions and services] themselves, well then it won’t work.”

Civil servant (3)

“It [participation] does align with Rotterdam’s vision to work more neighbourhood-oriented, but I haven’t noticed yet that it found its way into policy.”

Civil servant (5)

To sum up

Answering the research question: Why and how does youth participation in policy making currently take place at gemeente Rotterdam and what are the challenges?

- Policy advisors move in between developing and implementing policies, having varied amounts of space to involve youth.
- Youth participation in policy making is not only a right but can also contribute to the development of youth, and lead to policies that better meet the needs of youth.
- Youth participation in policy making is in development at gemeente Rotterdam and beyond. Youth are increasingly being listened to and developed with and so more knowledge and approaches are emerging. Nevertheless, the need of gemeente Rotterdam to involve youth more in policy is still growing, in which:
  - There is still insufficient action upon taking youth participatory approaches.
  - Many policy advisors are in a phase of exploration, seeking ways to initiate youth participation.
  - There is room to increase the meaningfulness of youth participation: on a structural basis and with value delivery for all actors.
- Meaningful youth participation requires another way of working and reconsidering the role of youth in policy. To discover what might enable policy advisors to involve youth in policy making, their current ways of working and perceived obstacles and tensions need to be better understood.

3. EXPLORING OBSTACLES AND TENSIONS

This chapter explores the current perceived obstacles and tensions faced by policy advisors concerning youth participation. This exploration serves as a basis for defining the design goal, as shared in the next chapter.

3.0 Approach

While the first part of the “What is?” phase touched the surface of the context, revealing the main challenges, this second part delves deeper into the context: exploring the obstacles and tensions in the current way of working of policy advisors in relation to youth participation.

The following activities contributed to gathering insights on the obstacles and tensions faced by policy advisors:

- **Municipal observations** during youth participation-related activities at gemeente Rotterdam.
  A brief overview of my municipal observations and participation is provided in Appendix B.
- 19 **Interviews** with policy advisors and other civil servants.
- **Guerrilla interviews** with **probes**, involving conversations with approximately 50 civil servants to gather perspectives on youth participation in policy making.
- **Literature research** on youth participation in policy making.

Furthermore, literature on **theory of social structures** is used to analyse and structure the insights. Regular discussions on this with involved research and municipal stakeholders, enabled me to refine and capture them into the various subchapters of this chapter.

The research question of this chapter is:

What obstacles and tensions hinder policy advisors from ensuring meaningful youth participation in policy making at gemeente Rotterdam?

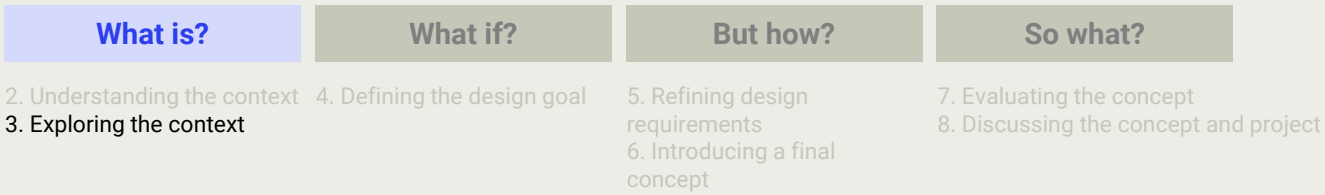


Figure 11. This chapter delves deeper into the ‘What is?’ phase.

3.1 Social structures that influence ways of working

Before delving into the behaviour of policy advisors, it is important to acknowledge that in general all civil servants hold good intentions: their aim is to contribute to a pleasant and just society (source: municipal observations and interviews). The policy advisors encountered during this project desire the best for the residents of Rotterdam.

Figure 12. A civil servant's response to the question 'How would you like Rotterdam youths to perceive you?': That I have a heart for the city and its people'.

However, adopting meaningful youth participatory practices requires changing conventional ways of working, which now mainly rely on invovlving youth indirectly, via contact with professionals working for executive organisations. To discover what might enable policy advisors to involve youth in policy making, their current ways of thinking and acting, and the perceived obstacles and tensions therein need to be deeply understood.

To explore this, it is important to regard the policy advisors as actors working in a municipal system, with its own intertwined interests and arrangements. To structurally and meaningfully apply a new way of working, adopting youth participatory practices, not only physical enactments but also the inseparable and invisible underlying structures. Vink and Koskela-Huotari (2021b) refer to these as social structures: the shared and endured beliefs, norms and roles, and "the rules of the game" informing the way people behave in complex social systems. They regard social structures as design materials enabling and constraining desired ways of working. Thus, these become central to both understanding the current way of working of policy advisors, as well as become potential drivers of influencing those ways of working (Chapter 5.2).

The conceptual framework of social structures as design materials, developed by Vink and Koskela-Huotari (2021b) are applied in this chapter to explain the manifestation, causes, and nuances of social structures in the municipal context related to youth participation (Figure 13). Above the line of visibility we see activities and relations, and symbols and artifacts, which form the physical enactments of (combinations of) the social structures. Under the line of visibility, it contains three pillars of the underlying social structures. For clarity, these determine the structure of the main texts in the subchatpers that follow, corresponding to (1) beliefs about the value of youth participation, (2) rules of the municipal system, and (3) norms and roles. However, in reality these social structures are highly intertwined and influence each other. Physical enactments of social structures are shared separate to the substantive texts, in the form of quotes, anecdotes (in blue boxes), and memes. These allow the insights to come alive and reveal the felt sentiments.

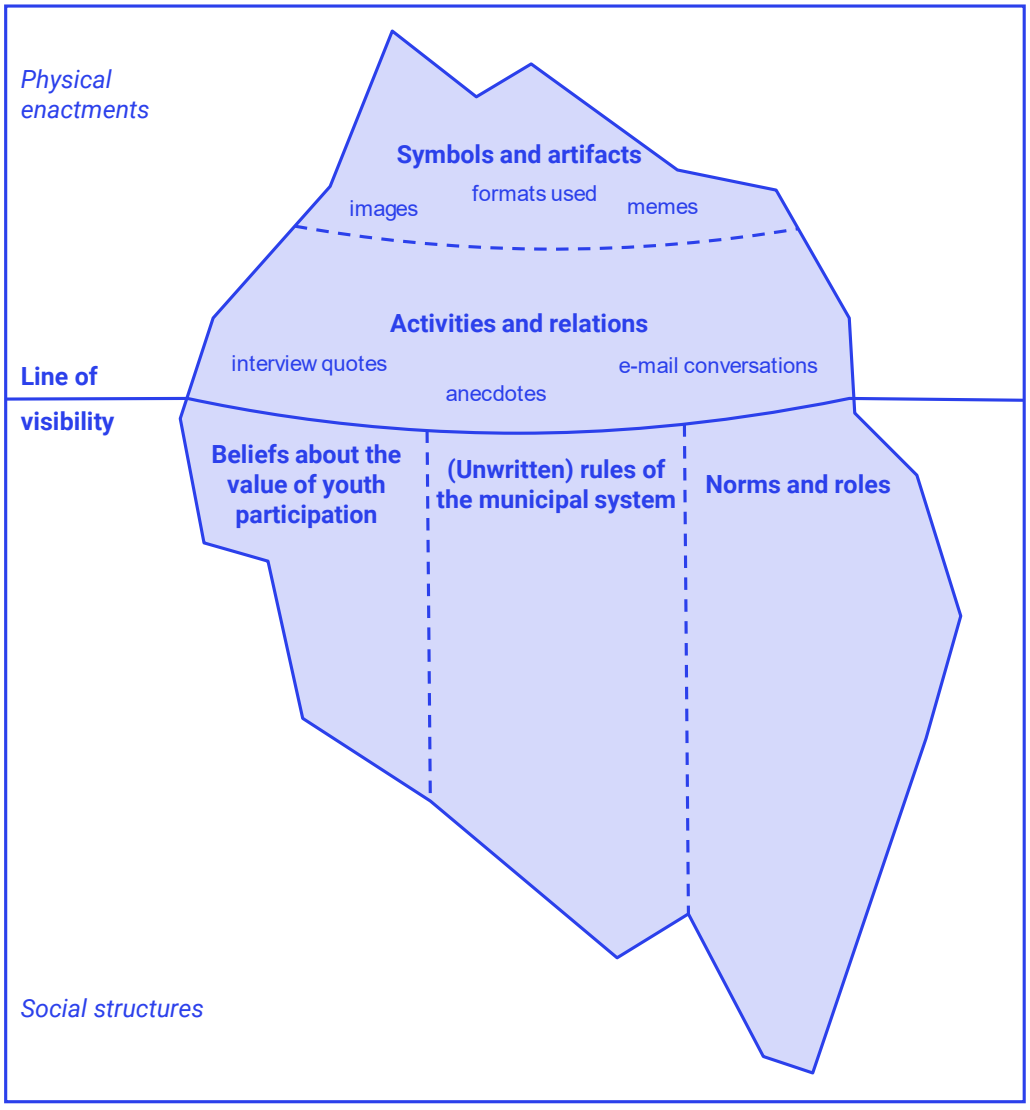


Figure 13. Modified conceptual framework of social structures as design materials, developed by Vink and Koskela-Huotari (2021b).

3.2 Beliefs about the value of youth participation

Beliefs about the value of youth participation seem to be neither universal nor coherent, influencing collectively accepted perspectives of thinking and acting. Chapter 3.2.1 explains the concerns about the value of youth participation and Chapter 3.2.2 argues why the belief in its value may not always be intrinsically grounded. Both arguments constitute barriers to more and/or better youth participation in policy.

3.2.1 Uncertain beliefs about the value of youth participation

There seems to be individual and collective ambiguity among policy advisors about the value that may be attributed to experiential knowledge and how experiential knowledge relates to other sources of knowledge for policy, such as scientific research and expertise. The next two subchapters explain this discrepancy of beliefs about different sources of knowledge and the final subchapter explains how these beliefs may change over time.

Strong belief in scientific and professional knowledge

Within municipal organizations, there seems to be a preference for the use of scientific and professional knowledge, indicating that more value is placed on these forms of knowledge than on experiential knowledge (source: municipal observations and interviews). Municipal actions, funded with public money, require careful consideration, leading municipal services and projects to strive for well-considered choices and tangible results. In this context, science provides a reliable source of knowledge, delivering information that can be repeatedly tested and is widely accepted as factual. Harnessing this scientific foundation contributes to the responsible allocation of resources and the achievement of measurable successes for the greater good. Scientific facts may therefore feel like a more attractive source of knowledge than experiential knowledge (source: guerrilla interviews). Yet, as explained in Chapter 2, certain challenges would benefit from including experiential knowledge.

Furthermore, the utilization of professional knowledge can overshadow the importance of experiential knowledge the differences between which are explained in Chapter 2.1.3. When policy advisors believe they already know what is needed, the target audience may be less likely to be engaged (source: interviews). Remarkably, there is limited recognition even for the experiential knowledge of policy advisors themselves (source: municipal observations and interviews). From a professional point of view, this is seen as highly susceptible to bias and choices based on personal preferences (source: guerrilla interviews).

“If you make policy or carry out projects for gemeente Rotterdam with public money, you have to get inside the target group or at least find an organisation that can do that well in order to understand the target group’s world. (...) However, you notice that some people still think very hierarchically in that respect: ‘We know what’s good based on science’.”

Civil servant (10)

Figure 14. A civil servant’s response to the question ‘What do you find important in the actions of citizen representatives?’: ‘That they [youth] rely on facts’.

“I think what limits us in engaging citizens, in terms of assumptions, is that we think we know, thinking ‘yes but it’s logical, isn’t it?’ ”

Civil servant (7)

Disbelief in the value of youth experiential knowledge
In addition to prioritizing scientific and professional knowledge, the use of participation seems to depend on the perceived value of experiential knowledge. Three main causes were identified for this.

First, individual experiences might be seen as highlighting sensational problems rather than addressing structural, large-scale issues (source: guerrilla interviews). Concerns arise about individual 'sad tear-jerking' narratives overshadowing the need for comprehensive societal changes. The assumption that people cannot think beyond their own experiences perpetuates this resistance. Tackling this by letting a truly representative group of people would be (almost) impossible according to policy advisors (source: interviews). Questions arise about individual influence, the risk of favouring specific groups, and difficulties in determining true representation.

Second, the assumption that individuals are not able to determine what is best for themselves or their peers devalues experiential knowledge (source: interview; Checkoway, 2011). There is a belief that experts always have a better understanding of what is beneficial for individuals. This conviction is even more pronounced concerning young people (Zweegman et al., 2023). Given their ongoing development and exploration of how to shape their lives and what is or is not permissible, it is argued that they might not be able to discern what works and what does not. Yet, as detailed in Chapter 2, this view does not consider the ability of individuals to navigate through survival, especially in difficult situations.

Third, policy advisors mention that they think many young people are unwilling to participate in policy processes, which would make involving experiential experts not worthwhile (source: interviews).

"Who represents the person who participates? How do you know whether someone contributing as an individual or speaking on behalf of a broader group? How much influence should an individual's input have? When a small group of youth are given the opportunity to participate, while other youth are not, do you not favour a certain group? And isn't the group that participates often the very group that is already better off?"

Paraphrased questions raised in conversations with civil servants (source: guerrilla interviews)

“What comes into play is the mindset we have about [youth]: there is not enough life experience or seniority there yet. We still have to parent them. There are some generalistic thinking patterns in there, basic attitudes that indeed prevent us from saying, no, but you are already good enough the way you are and with the way you are you can enrich or complement us.”

Civil servant (7)

“[I think some] young people then just say ‘well, I don’t care’. And [I think there are] young people who are also unable to think that far because they are not comfortable in their own feelings. If you are surviving, then the last thing you think about is to think along with the community. Right? Yeah, you don’t need that.”

Civil servant (9)

Change of beliefs over time

Migchelbrink and Van de Walle's research (2021) shows that civil servants' attitudes toward participation are not only influenced by rational cost-benefit considerations, but also by non-rational factors, including cognitive and cultural elements, such as the personal and profession-related backgrounds of policy advisors.

Many of the policy advisors that were involved in this research have pursued university-level education, often in governance or diverse fields like social sciences, pedagogy, and health studies (source: municipal observations and interviews). They enter municipal roles either directly after their education or following transitions from high-level jobs. On the other end, some policy advisors progress internally, starting in operational-focused roles with many direct resident interactions, such as at the youth counter (Jongerenloket), before transitioning to policy development. While these diverse pathways contribute varied experiences, knowledge, and skills, offering valuable perspectives, it seems that having a background of operational roles often leads to a mindset that strongly believes in human involvement in policy making, which is reflected in one's actions (source: municipal observations and interviews).

Moreover, the duration of employment at the municipality influences the belief in the value of youth participation. This can work in two ways. As time passes and you face bureaucratic setbacks, the tendency to align your individual beliefs with those of the organisation grows. (Kruiter et al., 2023). When you no longer make contact with the target group, you may lose awareness of what you don't know (source: interviews). On the other hand, a longer period of employment can also result in a better understanding of the municipal system, enabling one to navigate through it effectively to put one's belief in the value of participation in practice (source: guerrilla interviews).

"There is, of course, a very nice enrichment if you have practical experience or have had an operational role and can now anticipate on that. But there are also plenty of them [policy advisors] where I think, yes, you have never had a conversation with a young person. Yes, I find that twisted."'

Civil servant (6)

3.2.2 Incoherent beliefs about the value of youth participation

The belief in the value of youth participation may not always be intrinsically grounded. Participation is on the rise: it is widely discussed, shared, and plans are made. A participation hype is emerging. While this trend can be beneficial for its growing application and increasing knowledge, it also brings risks. The term is used so frequently that various interpretations and opinions emerge. Is there genuine belief in the value of involving youth in policy, or in the narrative being told or imposed?

Merely to check the participation box, participation may be initiated without profound reflection on why it should be done, with what (shared) objectives and under whose conditions: those of the municipality or those of the youth (source: municipal observations). This can lead to a superficial approach and attitude, resulting in participation processes that get stuck in participation fatigue or offer no added value (Zweegman et al., 2023). Chapter 3.4.2 delves deeper into this.

This hollow belief in the value of participation can be present at all levels of the municipality. A director might feel societal pressure ‘to do something with youth participation’, while a policy advisor might have been inspired by a colleague’s participation experience and now also wishes to speak with a few young people next week (source: municipal observations). These factors create obstacles that hinder meaningful participation.

“So, if it’s really just a fake show that you’re putting on to check a box, they see right through it. But if they see that you genuinely want to create something beautiful for them from your heart, I think it really doesn’t matter how old or hip you are, as long as they see that you’re doing it from intrinsic motivation and from your heart, so to speak. And that it’s not fake.”

Civil servant (10)

“Then you see, for example, that participation moments are often photographed or used by politicians on LinkedIn, and that should show something good, so something like a result, but personally, I find it very difficult to display that as a positive outcome, so to speak, because how is our work measurable? How can I say that in my neighbourhood people have progressed or that ‘good’ participation has happened?”

Civil servant (12)

3.3 Rules of the municipal system

Much municipal thinking and acting is guided by the, partly unwritten, rules of the municipal system. In this subchapter, these rules are explained by highlighting three factors faced by the municipality of Rotterdam that stand in the way of taking participatory approaches.

3.3.1 System dominance over lifeworld dominance

Much municipal action is bound by laws and regulations, involving public funds that require careful management. To achieve this, various municipal structures, policy mechanisms, and bureaucratic and administrative protocols are employed, aimed at standardization and automation. While this has worked well for a considerable time, the system becomes increasingly complex, reaching a point where it is unclear whether the policies serve the lived experience or merely the system itself (Kruiter et al., 2023). When complex problems are treated as simple issues, the already complicated municipal system becomes even more complicated.

As explained in Chapter 2, current issues demand a different approach, one focused on responsiveness, simplification, and justice. This becomes challenging when the dominant thinking and acting is still mostly system-oriented. Additionally, it can be difficult to identify the type of problem at hand and the required approach. Uncertainty about when the use of participation in policy is right seems to result in reluctance to engage with participation (source: interviews). Meanwhile, the habitual working method becomes less questioned over time, given the daily pressures and expectations to maintain the system.

“You get a kind of blind spot. In the sense that we’re used to doing things in a certain way, and I’ll call that the system. So there’s a council meeting, there are motions, they need to be responded to, it comes back. And I also notice myself, you occasionally have to go back to the intention. Why are we here? What is our role as a municipality? What is my role in that? Do I still have that clear? And how do I do that, am I able to...? You have to talk about it with each other occasionally.”

Civil servant (3)

To illustrate why this system dominance hinders participatory approaches, I use the following example, loosely based on a conversation with a civil servant (source: guerrilla interviews).

A group of civil servants is working on the renewal of the Stadswinkel, the first point of access to the gemeente Rotterdam for many residents seeking information and assistance. An involved policy advisor visits the service in person and talks to its staff and users. It provides her with new insights, such as the difficulty many users face in understanding the digital systems, preventing them from using the services. However, in the many municipal team meetings that subsequently take place, user needs are overshadowed by the need to meet privacy requirements. This results in digital system made even more complicated. The final delivered service performs excellently in theory and for the system, but appears to be of little use to its intended users.

This example illustrates how participatory approaches face difficulties in achieving the desired human-centred effects due to system dominance (source: interviews). It might even discourage participatory approaches in the first place.

3.3.2 Strong dependence on political needs and pressure

Strong dependence on political will and societal pressure makes it challenging to initiate participation. The following subchapters explain how the obligations and collaboration that policy advisors have with the political leaders impose a certain time and performance pressure on policy advisors, hindering the space for participation.

Political needs

What needs to be worked on by policy advisors is heavily dependent on municipal politics. While enabling the democratic functioning of society, it also creates a lack of long-term possibilities and a need for acute solutions (source: interviews). The municipal council is re-elected every four years, exposing long-term youth participation projects to the risk of being cancelled when new municipal representatives have a different vision (source: municipal observations and interviews). The importance a politician attaches to involving young people in policy processes influences the allocation of funds and time (Migchelbrink & Van De Walle, 2021). Simultaneously, there is a high demand for short-term results, driven by politicians seeking achievements and crises necessitating immediate solutions, such as the toeslagenaffaire. This demands a fast work pace from policy advisors, making participatory approaches less likely to be adopted due to the time and dedication they require.

Achieving success

Like any other employees, most policy advisors seek appreciation and fulfilment in their work. Laws, regulation, and professional standards and societal expectations, provide policy advisors guidance on how to decide and act, yet can also lead to additional pressure if they contradict each other or are difficult to achieve in practice (Hupe & Buffat, 2013). There must be enough resources to work according to these guiding principles, such as training, time and money. If the guiding principles and resources are not balanced, there is a gap, which policy advisors have to deal with in practice. As if this were not difficult enough already, this balance is also influenced by political priorities. For instance, if a council member deems financial matters crucial, policy advisors might emphasize cost-saving aspects in their policy plans (source: municipal observations).

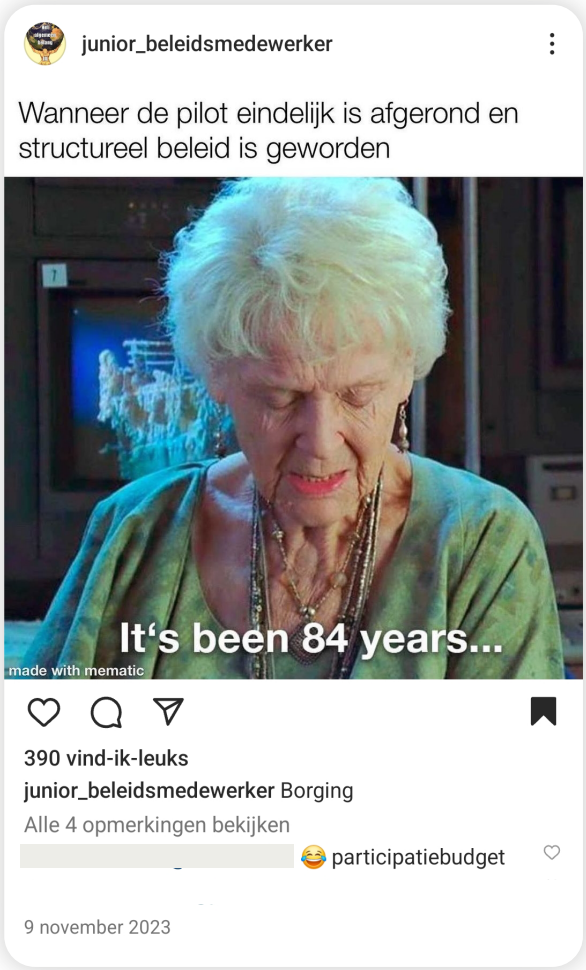


Figure 15. Instagram meme capturing the sentiments of policy advisors regarding the policy system in which policies are made (retrieved from @junior_beleidsmedewerker account with 17,3K followers).

"We hope it goes through the college and the council, and I do expect it, of course. I mean, if we indicate that we've developed it with so many Rotterdammers, well, then you have to be pretty strong to say: 'I don't see it happening'. But it can still happen, and that's makes it quite complicated."

Civil servant (2)

"(...) I do consider participation important in itself, don't get me wrong. But it also has to be feasible within your work. And if I look at how my job looks now with political pressure, yeah, sometimes it's just not feasible to realize it."

Civil servant (11)

Additionally, policy advisors face significant societal pressure in their actions (Hupe & Buffat, 2013). The responsibility they feel for society leads to a desire for control, resulting in various behaviors. For example, policy advisors prefer easily understandable quantitative results over qualitative effects, as these are easier to justify to the public and political stakeholders. This can hinder participation because there may be uncertainty of the outcome, or it can produce misplaced participation goals that focus on the measurable rather than the meaningful.

In situations where policy advisors feel unable to act adequately, decision-making is often outsourced to external parties (source: municipal observations). There can arise ambiguities about who is holding responsibility, and therefore also about who is organizing participation.

Moreover, intuitive decisions are sometimes hidden by searching for facts after a decision is made or hiring researchers to justify a decision, illustrating the tendency to retroactively create the appearance of rationality and staying in control. This behavior not only costs significant intellectual capacity, time, and money geld (research Gerd Gigerenzer in Volkskrant) but also undermines the potential of participatory approaches focused on direct engagement and understanding the needs of youth.

To illustrate this, I want to share an example based on observations during municipal conversations (source: municipal observations).

In a meeting, the results of research assessing the value of an ongoing program are discussed. During the conversation, it becomes clear that all civil servants involved are convinced of the program's value, but that the research results are needed to justify from which municipal department the program can be further funded. Therefore, a lengthy and costly study has been initiated to fit the program's implementation into the system, which still proves complex: the results lead to different possible interpretations instead of one clear department.

This example highlights that in the desired behaviour of policy advisors, much space is taken up by having to meet the justification conditions set by the municipal and political system, leaving less room for participatory approaches.

“That’s the moment they will say ‘We’re going to reach 500 young people [with a participation project]’. Because we want to achieve that performance, we’ll define it very precisely. Then we’ll work very hard to reach that 500.”

Civil servant (8)

3.3.3 Organisational scale impedes change

Because Rotterdam is a big city, many people work for the municipality. The municipality is compartmentalized into various departments, each focused on distinct tasks often governed by their unique procedures. Navigating this extensive and intricate system demands a significant investment of time and energy from policy advisors (source: interviews). The decision-making processes involve multiple stakeholders, leading civil servants to dedicate substantial time to internal meetings and managing procedural aspects rather than actively contributing to the policy discussions.

Additionally, the size of the organization, in combination with frequent staff substitutions, presents challenges in comprehending ongoing activities and identifying responsible colleagues (source: municipal observations). Consequently, policy advisors often find themselves starting participation projects from scratch instead of building upon existing efforts. There is currently no overview of who is working on youth participation within the municipality, so policy advisors who want to get involved in youth participation do not know where to go for support and advice (source: interviews). Although integrated projects aim to connect civil servants across departments, the effectiveness might be hindered by civil servants adhering to their department-specific processes and goals (source: municipal observations). This leads to a lack of clarity about the mutual contributions each department can offer to ‘working integrally’.

“Just the way we have everything organized in the municipality. That everything is always so complicated and difficult, and everything takes forever, and you have to go through 27 conversations with this and that person before you get anything arranged. Yes, then you’ve partly lost the youth. You’ve even lost me, you know? I think if everything has to be so difficult, or if you face so much resistance, then I think, well, forget it.”

Civil servant (9)

Working within a large organization also influences knowledge-seeking behaviours, as there is a high likelihood that someone internally oversees a particular area of interest, discouraging exploration beyond internal channels (source: municipal observations).

In conversations with policy advisors, instances were revealed where they had sought insights from an operational service, like the Jongerenloket. Upon further questioning, it became apparent that they were referring to a fellow policy advisor within the Jongerenloket rather than a youth counsellor actively engaging with youth.

This communication chain risks weakening the original value of youth needs, as they pass through numerous intermediaries before reaching policy advisors. Meanwhile, interviewed employees of the Jongerenloket indicated that there is hardly any interest in their work from policy advisors and that they rarely visit even though they could.

Figure 16. Instagram meme capturing the sentiments of policy advisors regarding the policy system in which policies are made (retrieved from @junior_beleidsmedewerker account with 17,3K followers).

3.4 Norms and roles

The third theme influencing the likelihood of policy advisors adopting (meaningful) participatory approaches depends on norms and expected or taken roles. Chapter 3.4.1 discusses the influences of policy advisors' capabilities and Chapter 3.4.2 explains how perceived and taken space has consequence on participation.

3.4.1 Being able to work in a participatory manner

As explained in Chapter 2.3, participation requires specific skills which is a challenge for many policy advisors. Some policy advisors may just not be very good at connecting quickly and smoothly with people you do not yet know; let alone people you do not interact with very often like youth. Whether due to a lack of these skills or doubt about their ability to establish contact and engage with children and youth, self-efficacy plays a crucial role. Self-efficacy entails the individual belief in their capacity to achieve specific goals, being one of the main preconditions of behavioural change (Bandura, 1977). If policy advisors feel they are not able to engage in participation, the chance that they actually do so is reduced. The level of self-efficacy is influenced by past experiences, exposure to others' experiences, external encouragement, and internal physiological feedback. A lack of prior experience, limited awareness of best practices by colleagues (as also argued in Chapter 3.2.3), weak external obligation or incentive and a low ability to process your own reflections are therefore obstacles for policy advisors to take participatory approaches.

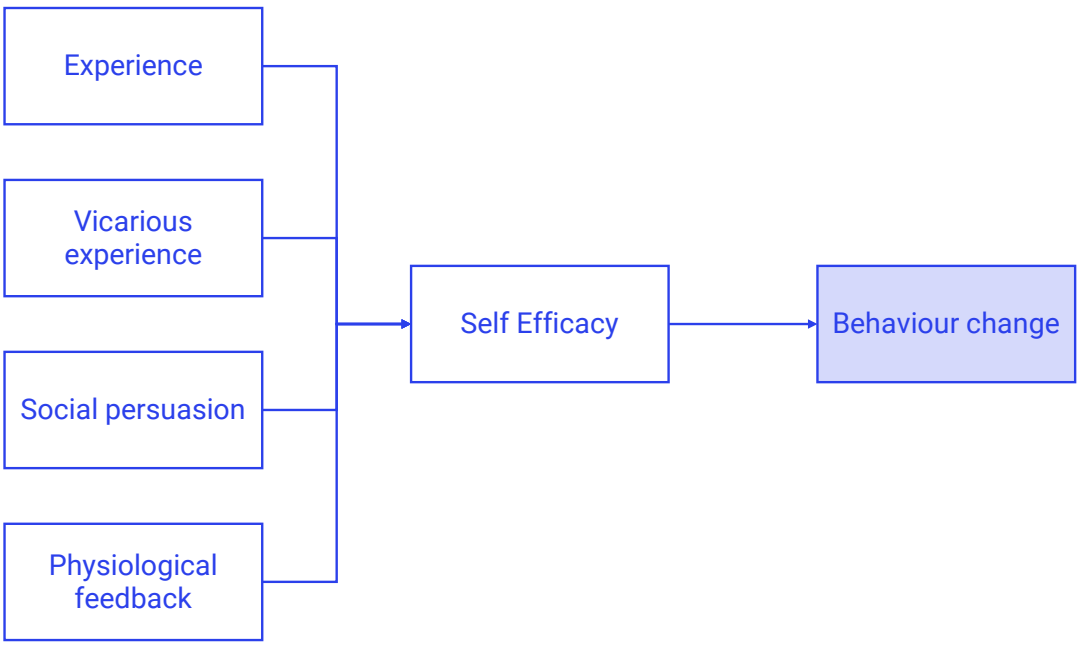


Figure 17. Determinants of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

Policy advisors express the difficulty some colleagues face in venturing into unknown situations, fearing unexpected questions for which they might not have answers (source: interviews). This uncertainty makes participatory approaches less appealing, as there is a desire to project confidence, considering the professional identity associated with working for the municipality. The fear of being unprepared can discourage advisors from adopting participation practices.

As a result, if an advisor lacks the necessary skills or confidence, there is often uncertainty about how to begin a participatory approach (source: municipal observations). Policy advisors are very eager for straightforward methods and tools to easily organize participation. This is understandable and indeed may enhance the implementation of youth participation, but it also risks turning participation into something to 'easily' check off. Dedicated reflection on why a policy advisor engages in participation may remain unclear and runs the risk of only serving the system instead of the lifeworld, as explained in Chapter 3.3.

This uncertainty and perceived difficulty may lead advisors to avoid taking the initiative or delegate youth and youth participation to more extroverted colleagues or external organizations. Consequently, policy advisors miss valuable learning experiences, hindering the development of confidence and competence in participatory approaches.

In conclusion, hesitation, and perceived challenges around acquiring participatory skills contribute to a reluctance among policy advisors to actively engage with young people.

"Some colleagues find it challenging to go somewhere without knowing what to expect. When questions are asked for which they have no answer, it becomes unattractive. Because you don't want to appear uncertain, especially when being from the municipality; you want to leave a certain impression of: I know it. And if you stand there and don't know, then you face much criticism."

Civil servant (1)

3.4.2 Feeling and taking the space for (meaningful) participation

In addition to having enough confidence in your personal ability to engage in participation, you must also take and feel the space to do so. Even if you believe in the value of participation, it does not immediately lead to action, especially when the activity involves something new. Governmental organizations tend to stick to traditional norms and roles due to societal demands for safety and stability (source: municipal observations and intervies). Conforming to the day-to-day routine and adhering to norms of 'doing good work' remain dominant, as explained in Chapter 3.3.2. Two crucial factors are elaborated in the following subchapters: the fear of the unknown and the shifting and bending of responsibilities.

"Internally, I think that the old familiar is much easier to calculate what it's going to do in the outside world (or perhaps not do anything at all because the reach and number of young people are almost negligible, but well, that aside) than trying something new, which is of course scarier. You don't know what the effect is going to be, and then we want to scientifically substantiate it all again."

Civil servant (10)

Fear of the unknown
According to policy advisors, reluctance in participation can result from fear of the unknown (source: interviews). Many policy advisors find involvement in participation stressful and unpredictable. You are not sure how to approach it and what will happen. It requires letting go and possibly handing over control and that can feel uncomfortable and complicated.

According to policy advisors, the expectation that youth can come up with complicated things, uncomfortable truths, or out-of-the-box solutions can also result in reluctance to engage in participation (source: interviews). Moreover, there is a risk of being the face of the municipality and receiving a lot of negativities or questions as a result.

Shifting and bending responsibilities
When space for participation is created, the shifting and bending of responsibilities can become an obstacle to making participation meaningful. Partly due to the desire to maintain control (see Chapter 3.2.2), policy advisors may adhere to their formal role during a participation process. For example, a common complaint is that policy advisors have their say at a participation session and then leave before the session is ended (source: municipal observations). This explicitly illustrates the relationship: the poorly prepared municipal stakeholders take the stage, the invited attendees take the stage, and people go home. It leaves both participants and policy advisors in passive roles; information is shared and gathered, without actually creating space for collaboration where experiential knowledge can converge with scientific and professional knowledge and lead to action (Zweegman et al., 2023).

When challenges arise, such as when a participant comes up with ideas that seem impractical or ask questions to which a policy advisor does not have an immediate answer, vague language is used, and issues are avoided (source: interviews). Responsibility for the impact of a participation process, that something is done with the input and insights gathered, is shifted to others or bent so that it still fits within the norms of the system (Zweegman et al., 2023).

“There’s also something risky it, it can go wrong, it’s all intangible, you don’t know exactly, and… These are all kind of reflexes that partly clash with why you think you started doing this job. So, they’re about avoiding risks, controlling, no scary things, no weird antics. And I think that ultimately, because that space is there, I think there’s much more possible than we often allow ourselves.”

Civil servant (8)

“It becomes very tricky when something unexpected comes out. Everyone feels like, oh, we didn’t mean this. I know very few examples who then remained successful, who said, no, but we’re just going to do it anyway.”

Civil servant (8)

“You can, from the municipality, I think, quite quickly sort of hide behind the municipality or your sort of very much service-oriented thinking. Very much not saying too much because you also don’t want to overwhelm people because you’re from the municipality, but that also creates a kind of invisibility and something very big that is totally incomprehensible.”

Civil servant (8)

The interviews with policy advisors showed that the fear of creating false expectations can prevent policy advisors from engaging in participation. This indicates that expectations are already not well established internally among policy advisors or in collaboration with participating youth.

The formal and system-dominant role makes it difficult to translate an understanding of the needs of young people into action in the policy process. To illustrate, I will share an example of a participation session, loosely based on an observation during such a session (source: municipal observations).

During the session, I noticed that municipal attendees pay close attention, adopt a humble attitude, and listen attentively. Afterwards, I ask some of them how they found it. They immediately nodded in agreement: they found it very valuable, had learned a lot and gained understanding of the situations in which the participating youth find themselves. Then I ask what they are going to do with this information now, and vague answers are given. One says she does not have authority over that, and another says it is up to the project leader. I react somewhat surprised; if the conversations were so instructive, you should get in action and do something with it, right? It appears that they did not enter this meeting with the expectation that it would have an impact on their own future actions.

This example shows that it can be unclear who acts upon the gathered input and what the role of the other involved municipal stakeholders is.

Finally, in collaboration with participants, there is a risk that they too become part of the system. As explained in Chapter 2.2, some policy projects collaborate with motivated youth who are regularly involved and can find their way to the municipality, possibly with guidance. Building a personal connection with participating youth is valuable to structurally ensure youth participation, especially when involving experts by experience (source: interviews). However, there is also the risk that they legitimize existing beliefs of civil servants about what is good for youth (Vromen & Collin, 2010). Over time, they may become accustomed to the language of policy and adapt to the frameworks set by the municipality. The way the municipality engages in collaboration can also influence this.

“[We don’t seek direct contact with young people ourselves.] Maybe also because we’re afraid that we’ll create expectations that we’ll immediately do a lot with that information.”

Civil servant (5)

Figure 18. Instagram meme capturing the sentiments of policy advisors regarding the policy system in which policies are made (retrieved from @junior_beleidsmedewerker account with 17,3K followers).

“I don’t doubt the value I bring to the organization, but when I go home, I can’t say that my work has had an impact on people. I find it challenging to translate that into situations in the city.”

Civil servant (-)

To sum up

Answering the research question: What obstacles and tensions hinder policy advisors from ensuring meaningful youth participation in policy making at gemeente Rotterdam?

- Various entangled social structures lead to assumptions about the needs of youth and barriers to their meaningful participation in policy making. Figure 19 below provides an overview of these social structures.

- Having revealed social structures allows for noticing structural conflicts and discovering structural malleability, towards fostering meaningful youth participation in policy making.

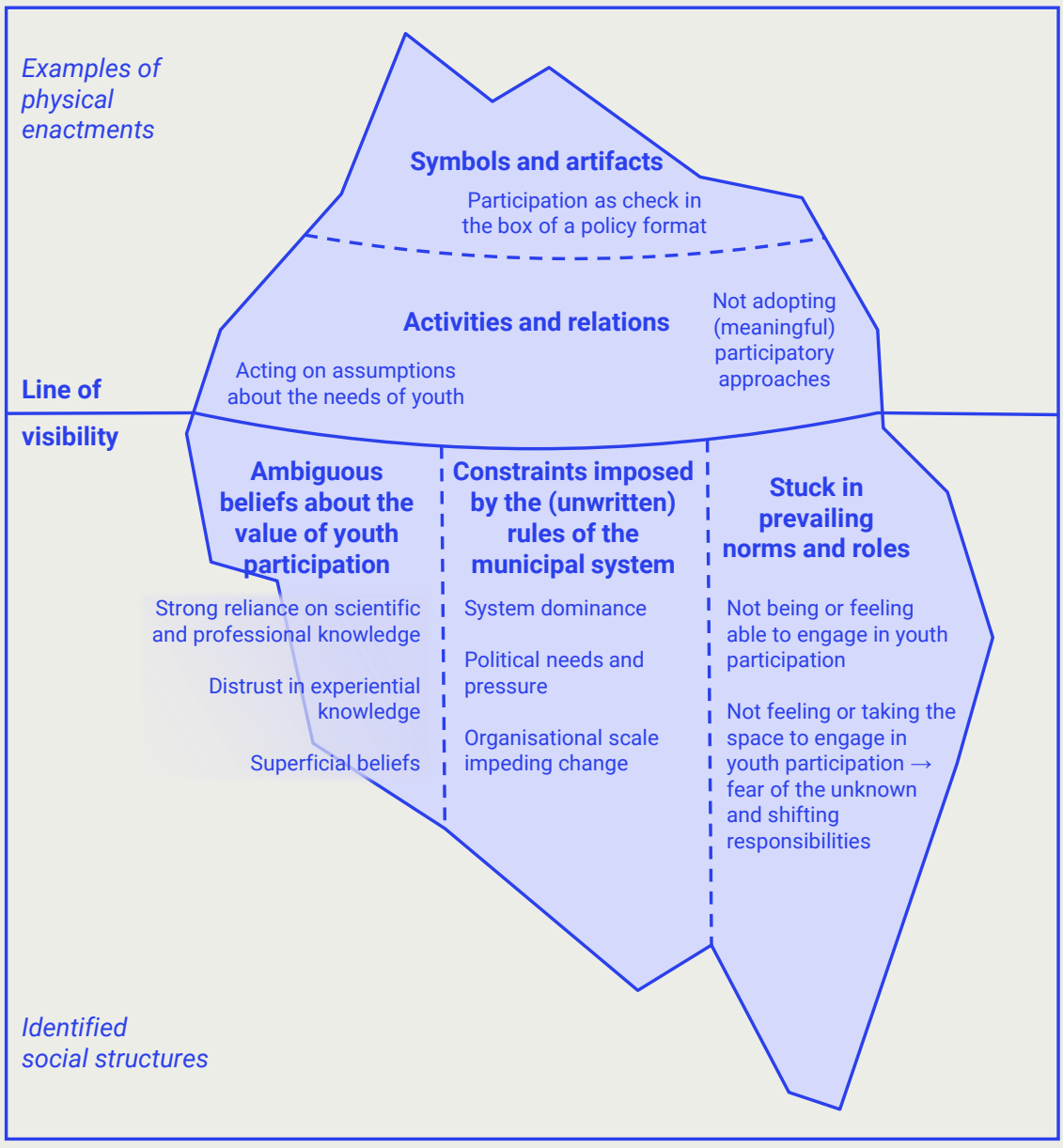


Figure 19. The identified constraining social structures and a few examples of the resulting phsyical enactments, put in a modified conceptual framework of Vink and Koskela-Huotari (2021b).

4. DEFINING THE DESIGN GOAL

This chapter focuses on defining the design goal, based on an analysis of the obstacles and tensions currently encountered by policy advisors regarding youth participation (Chapter 3), as well as the ongoing efforts to enhance youth participation in policy making (Chapter 2). The design goal shapes the space for the development a new approach, which is further refined with design requirements in the next chapter.

4.0 Approach

The “What if?” phase brings together the findings of the “What is?” phase to describe the current situation and propose to a desired one. This is done through:

- **Insights synthesis** of the research results of the ‘What is?’ phase, while regularly discussing this synthesis with involved research and municipal stakeholders.

Furthermore, a solution space is sought, with the aim of designing a concept that supports the transition from the current to the desired situation. It is based on insights gained during the “But how?” phase and is supported by:

- A **creative session** with six (design) researchers specializing in the field of governance and design. The session focused on discussing and generating ideas on the requirements for enabling policy advisors to experiment with youth involvement in policy making.
  Appendix C provides further details on the setup and outcome of this session.

- The definition of a **design goal**.

The research question of this chapter is:

What approach is needed for policy advisors to enable meaningful youth participation in policy making at gemeente Rotterdam?

What is?	What if?	But how?	So what?
2. Understanding the context 3. Exploring the context	4. Defining the design goal	5. Refining design requirements 6. Introducing a final concept	7. Evaluating the concept 8. Discussing the concept and project

Figure 20. This chapter shares how the current context (‘What is?’) could be viewed differently, corresponding to the ‘What if?’ phase.

4.1 Noticing structural conflicts of youth participation in policy making

The initial aim of this project is to 'design an approach that enables policy advisors to involve youth in policy making'. However, the research insights shared in the previous chapter revealed that various entangled social structures lead to assumptions about the needs of youth and barriers to their meaningful participation in policy making. Therefore, a fundamental shift of perspective is needed to shape the aim of the project. The following subchapters use Figure 21 to explain this shift. Figure 21 is a matrix depicting 4 situations: on the left (a) a current situation and on the right (b) a desired situation, and at the top (1) the ability of policy to respond (response-ability) to challenges concerning youth and at the bottom (2) the effect of youth participation, as one of the ways to respond to these challenges. It should be noted that this is a generalized and perhaps exaggerated representation of reality and does not apply for all policy advisors and all youth. However, identifying such different perspectives helps define a design goal in subchapter 4.2

Current situation: seeking for youth participation

Figure 21-1a (top left of the figure) depicts that currently policy is still often made in isolation, without being connected to youth nor involving youth. Various intertwined social structures (Chapter 3) lead to assumptions on the needs of youth and a distrust in the role youth might play in policy making: (1) ambiguous beliefs about the value of youth participation, (2) constraints imposed by the (partly unwritten) rules of the system, and (3) stuck norms and roles. Meanwhile, the need of municipalities to involve youth more in policy making is growing (Chapter 2) and gradually more youth participation is taking place. The youth participation aimed for, depicted in Figure 21-2b (bottom right of the figure), is about creating value for both policy advisors and youth. Many processes, plans and tools have been developed that explain how this desired form of youth participation can be approached and achieved (Chapter 2). This is beneficial, as it enables sharing knowledge and skills, and learning from each other. However, these approaches are all too often left collecting dust on a shelf or, when they are implemented, the original intention is slowly eroded over time (source: municipal observations).

It results in currently often rushed forms of youth participation, where I it is unsure if and for whom value is created, as depicted in Figure 21-2a (bottom left of the figure). A strict demarcation is drawn between participants and those who seek to deploy and enable participation. From this role division, a perfect-looking interaction may be organized according to recommended guidelines. A diverse group is approached, the interaction takes place in the lifeworld of the participants, there is room for their input, active listening occurs, and understanding is fostered. However, it becomes challenging to act upon this interaction because both actors maintain a certain degree of distance and formality. Youth have expressed their views, and the policy advisor returns to the normalized way of working, thereby mostly serving the municipal system and preventing youth from being heard or known (Figure 21-1a).

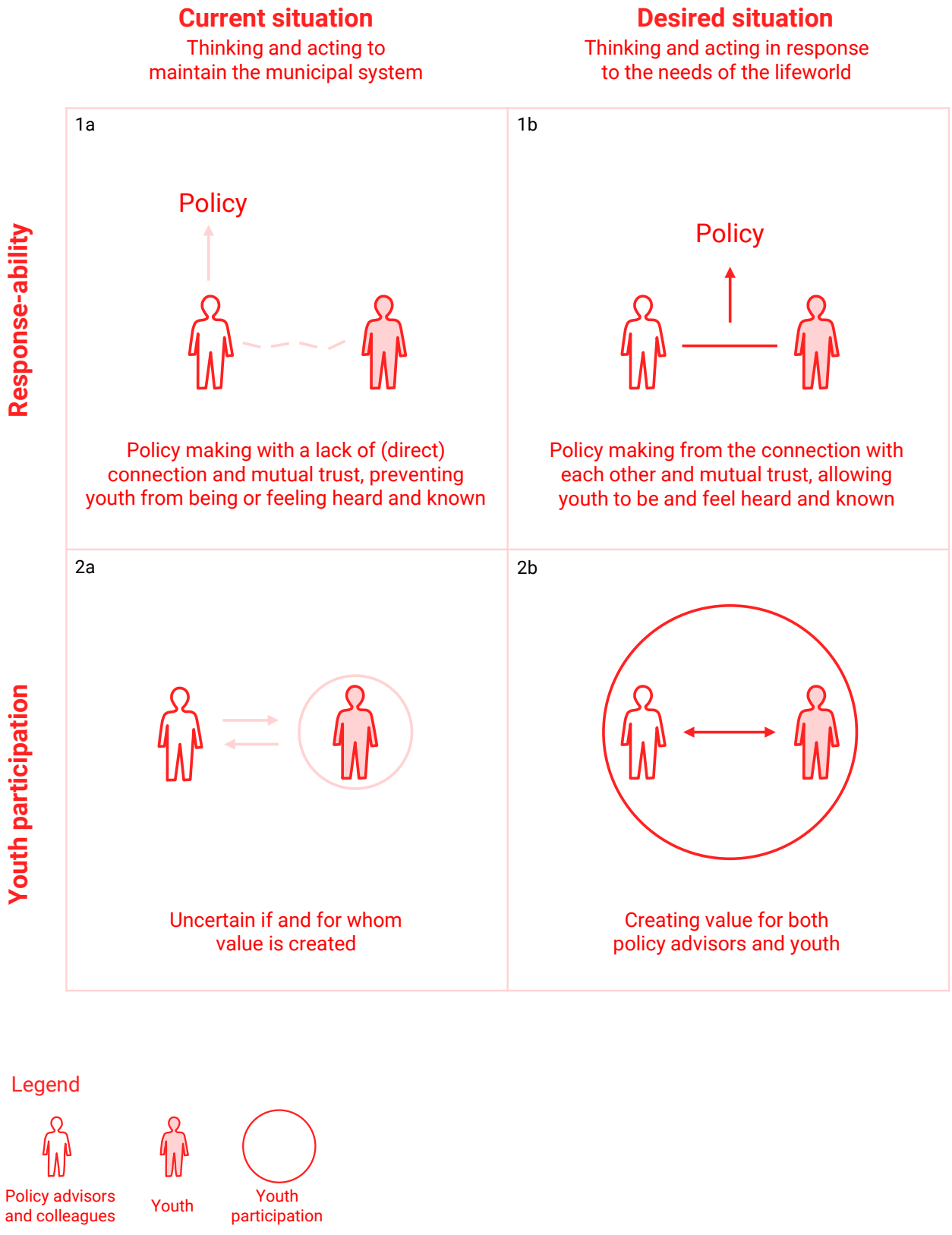


Figure 21. Current and desired situation of youth policy making and youth participation therein.

Furthermore, the interactions lead to the postponement and deflecting of responsibilities. Within the municipality, there is always someone else who must deal with it and involved youth may feel or become prey to the municipal organization. Trying harder to listen seems like a common way to counteract this challenge. This perpetuates the idea that a policy advisor can fix the problems of youth with a formal attitude dominated by economic, political, and scientific values. Yet, the call for youth participation is grounded in the belief that a policy advisor cannot conceive the needs of youth alone.

In short, youth participation (Figure 21-2b) is tried to be incorporated into the conventional way of working (Figure 21-1a), which is too dominant to do justice to the desired effects of youth participation, resulting in poor forms of value creation (Figure 21-2a). Striving for youth participation does therefore not directly lead to building on a connection and mutual trust between policy advisors and youth and instead may still mainly serve as a way to maintain the municipal system.

Desired situation: seeking for connection and mutual trust, enabling youth participation

Instead of trying harder to follow guidelines of 'good participation' within the confines of institutional dominance expressed by numbers, rules and protocols, policy advisors should actively engage, nurture, and acknowledge a connection with youth and learn to trust youth in a participating role, as depicted in Figure 21-1b (top right of the figure). Only then, the ability to respond (response-ability) to challenges concerning youth can be nurtured.

From the connection and mutual trust, meaningful youth participation is able to take place: creating value for both policy advisors and youth (Figure 21-2b). It means that in youth participation policy advisors and youth can jointly respond to challenges concerning youth, with a degree of informality: less adherence to highly structured formal processes and more recognition of and response to the everyday, the local and the culturally meaningful and to everyone's motivation to participate or allow for participation (Vromen & Collin, 2010). From the connection and mutual trust, policy advisors are able to respond to the created value, allowing youth to be and feel heard and known and aligning policies with the needs of the lifeworld (Figure 21-1b).

Establishing such connection and mutual trust does not mean that all policy advisors and youth should engage in participatory practices. There will always remain many processes where direct or indirect interaction is not desired, and several policy advisors may not have a character or skills suitable for direct interaction with youth. Nonetheless, all policy advisors have a connection with challenges concerning youth and are in some way responsible for the conception and direction of the relevant policies. They thus all play a part in enabling connection and mutual trust (Figure 21-1b), and the desired effects of youth participation (Figure 21-2b). Therefore, all policy advisors should allow, seek, and feel the connection with youth and trust on their possible role in policy making, throughout their work fitting to their character and skills. Moreover, fuelling the ability to respond to challenges concerning youth might not only contributing to their professional competence but also to their enjoyment and satisfaction in their work, igniting their motivation within their work as policy advisor.

In short, meaningful youth participation (Figure 21-2b) is only possible when policy advisors are connected and have trust in youth and their possible participating role (Figure 21-1b), which is challenging due to the various intertwined social structures (Chapter 3) of the dominant way of working (Figure 21-1a). Therefore, merely seeking for more or better forms of youth participation is not meaningful: a different approach is needed.

‘The people who make the substantive choices have to start experiencing the consequences of those choices. They have to live through that, not outsource it. [They have to] feel the responsibility by engaging in it, having those conversations, seeing participation as part of their work, talking to the city or however you want to describe it. The signals from the target groups, to actively engage with that.’

Civil servants (12)

4.2 Towards a defined design goal

The fundamental shift of perspective explained in subchapter 4.1 shapes the aim of the project, requiring an approach to enable policy advisor to build a connection and mutual trust with youth, thereby allowing for meaningful youth participation and contributing towards policy making in response to the needs of youth. It is about changing the way policy advisors behave, or put more specifically: how they think and act. The various intertwined social structures constraining the current way of working, might also become the main drivers of enabling desired ways of working (Vink & Koskela-Huotari, 2021b). So **challenging policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs**, might reveal dominant social structures constraining a connection and trust in the participating role of youth. Being aware of this allows policy advisors to react on it, **reshaping their habitual thinking and acting in policy making** gradually building more connection with youth and increasing trust in their potential participating role.

Such an approach requires policy advisors to get in action, active practicing, reflecting, and allowing for gradual iterative improvement. **A learning approach** is therefore suitable to design for.

Hence, the defined design goal is **to design for a learning approach that challenges policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs and enables reshaped habitual thinking and acting in policy making.**

Personal intermezzo

Around the initiation of me testing out a learning approach, the Dutch government issued a call for an 'innovative tool' aimed at encouraging civil servants to connect with citizens (Figure 22) (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2023). This challenge faced substantial criticism regarding the desired efficiency of the requested solution and the solutions itself being overly evident: you get in contact by getting in contact. This should not require the search for 'innovative tools' but should be intrinsic to civil service work. I shared this cynicism about the call while also being confronted with the observed reluctance of policy advisors to engage in seemingly ordinary activities. Consequently, I considered my attempt of designing for learning approach as a means to propel and guide policy advisors through these seemingly normal and straightforward activities, aiming to derive insights from this process. Furthermore, I wanted my design focus not to dwell solely on the exercises themselves but rather on the dynamics surrounding them for policy advisors: the reflections, the lessons learned, and the potential shifts in attitude and approach. I aimed to reflect this in the refined design requirements of Chapter 5.

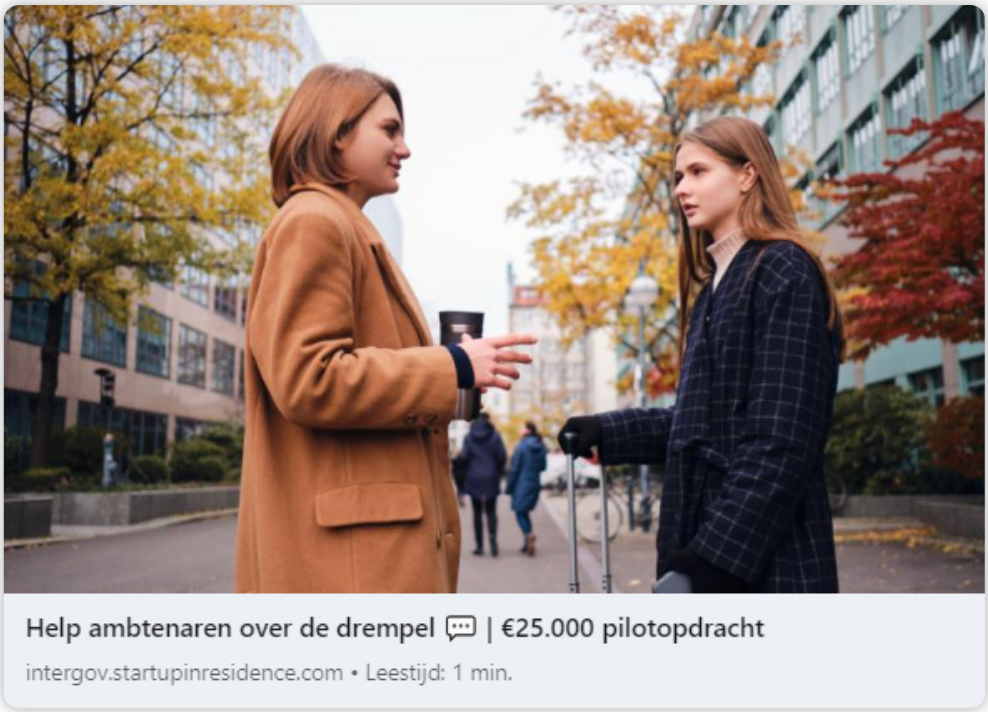


Figure 22. Advertention from the Dutch government calling for innovative tools to encourage civil servants to connect with citizens.

To sum up

Answering the research question of this chapter: What approach is needed for policy advisors to enable meaningful youth participation in policy making at gemeente Rotterdam?

- The various entangled social structures lead to assumptions about the needs of youth and barriers to their meaningful participation in policy making.

- Many current approaches to foster meaningful youth participation in policy making focus on how to achieve such forms. Yet thereby, youth participation is tried to be incorporated into the current way of working, which is too dominant to do justice to the desired effects of youth participation. As a result, policy making falls back into how it serves the municipal system and thus does not do justice to what it is actually about: policy making from the connection and mutual trust with youth, thereby responding to the needs of youth and allowing youth to be and feel heard.

- To design an approach that contributes to meaningful youth participation and policy making in response to the needs of youth, policy advisors need to allow, feel, and seek a connection and mutual trust with youth. For this, their current way of thinking and acting needs to be challenged, creating room for reshaping it, taking small steps towards a better and mutual relationship with youth. As this requires an active and iterative progress, a learning approach must be designed.

- Therefore, the design goal is to ‘design for a learning approach that challenges policy advisors’ assumptions about youth and their needs and enables changed habitual thinking and acting in policy making’.

5. REFINING THE DESIGN REQUIREMENTS FOR A LEARNING PROCESS

This chapter focuses on the refinement of design requirements for an approach that contributes to policy making in response to the needs of youth, arising from the connection with youth. The design requirements are determined according to components of the design goal, as defined in the previous chapter. These results contribute to development of a learning approach, introduced in the next chapter.

5.0 Approach

In this first part of the “But how?” phase, elements of the defined design goal are refined. These are mostly discovered during the development of a concept, the final result of which is presented in the following “But how?” phase (Chapter 6), and the iterative design and evaluation process of the concept in the “So what?” phase (Chapter 7). This intertwined way of gathering knowledge is characteristic of the research through design approach adopted in this project , as described in Chapter 1.4.1. Occasionally in this chapter, references are made to the results of the iterative testing, when this was considered an important contribution to the emergence of design requirements, indicated as “(source: iterative testing)”.

Additionally, the refinement of the design requirements is supported by the following activities:

- **How to-questions** derived from the design goal that guide the refinement of design requirements.
- Using **conceptualisations of service ecosystem design** and other relevant fields to refine how the design goal can be manifested

This chapter informs the research question:

What is required for a learning process that challenges policy advisors’ assumptions about youth and their needs and enables reshaped habitual thinking and acting in policy making?

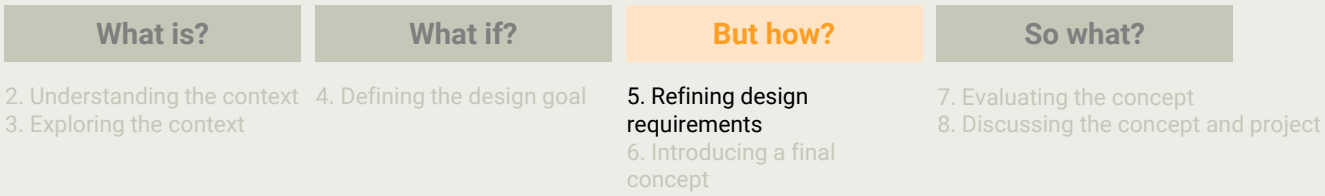


Figure 23. This chapter shares the conceptual components of how the defined design goal could be manifested.

5.1 How to challenge policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs?

To design an approach that contributes to policy making in response to the needs of youth, the underlying social structures as discussed in the Chapter 3 will have to be revealed in order to create space for reshaping their behaviour (source: iterative testing). In other words, policy advisors should confront themselves with their assumptions about youth and their needs, thereby making these discomforts and conflicts visible (Figure 24). Vink et al. (2020) describe this as a combination of three processes of awareness (Figure 25): revealing hidden social structures, noticing structural conflict, and appreciating structural malleability.

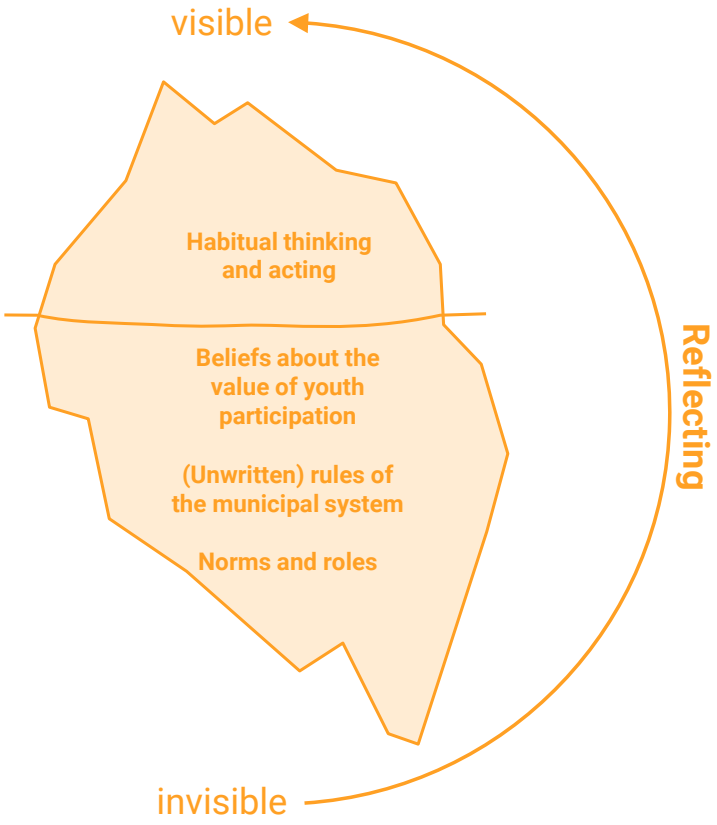


Figure 24. Making the invisible social structures visible through a process of reflection on current ways of thinking and acting.

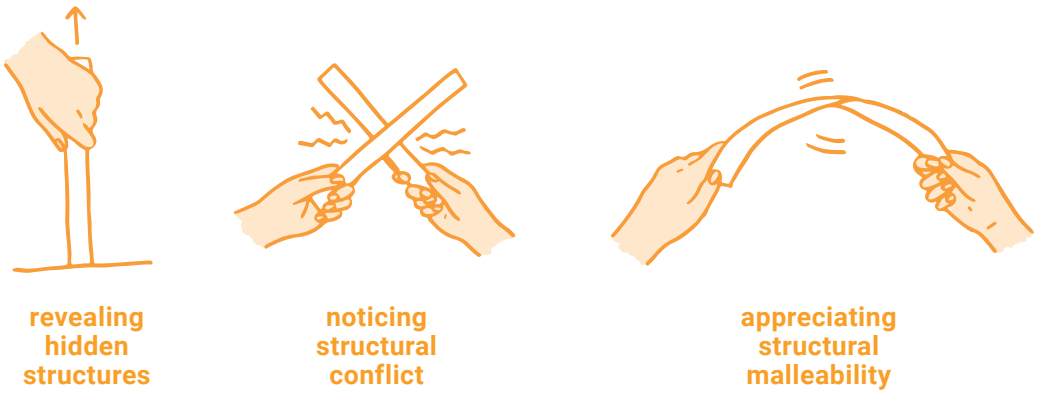


Figure 25. Awareness of assumptions about young people and their needs is developed through revealing, noticing and appreciating (visual created by Vink & Koskela-Huotari, 2021).

To make reflection a valuable trigger for reshaping habitual ways of working (as further explained in the next subchapter), policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs must be challenged through active experience (Vink & Koskela-Huotari, 2021b). This sensory questioning can be actively sought, possibly through staging experiences inspired by approaches used in service design. In service design methods, observations, experiences, and interactions play a central role in understanding the needs of a target group. As described by Wetter-Edman et al. (2018): "it is by staging situations, in effect proposing environments where actors may sense contradictions, that design methods catalyse a process of inquiry, shifting individual assumptions and destabilizing habits".

Personal intermezzo

In a way, the experiences I want to propose to policy advisors, reflect my own approach to this project. I actively engaged in the municipal context, attended events related to youth participation, and consistently held conversations with various individuals, both within and outside my project. This approach focused on exploration and connection with the subject (my scope thereof) and key actors, with continuous reflection on my experiences: what stands out to me and what do I think about it? Although this approach can be time-consuming and unpredictable, it has strengthened my understanding of the subject and the stakeholders involved, enabling me to respond to its challenges in my own way and with my own expertise. In short, I want my design concept to empower policy advisors to embark on a similar journey of exploration, tailored to their specific needs and challenges.

In the context of this project, the experiences sought for policy advisors should relate to their connection with youth they are making policies for. Learning from the effects of using service design methods, different staged experiences can lead to different types of reflections and awareness about the needs of youth. Following the work of Vink and Koskela-Huotari (2021a), 6 different modes of questioning assumptions can be distinguished (Figure 26): temporal, material, corporeal, relational, cultural, and cognitive. Below, the different modes and their expressions or experiences are briefly explained, identifying possible applications for challenging policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs. Appendix F specifically indicates which service design methods were adapted and applied to trigger (a combination of) modes of awareness, the final compiled activities of which are introduced in the next chapter.

- **Temporal** awareness of (the contextual evolvement of) social structures over the course of time. For example, by prompting policy advisors to look back at their own youth, revealing how their own needs back then may differ from the needs of youth in the present.

- **Material** awareness of social structures through engagement with physical objects. For example, when policy advisors create a photo series on a youth-related topic, which serves as an opportunity to reflect on tacit knowledge when discussing it with young people.

- **Corporeal** awareness takes place through individual bodily experiences and emotions, such as role playing by policy advisors as if they were experiencing a youth service themselves.

- **Relational** awareness is enabled through interactions between people, gaining insights in personal differences, for example when engaging in dialogue with youth.

- **Cultural** awareness is about interpretations of social structures within a particular group of people: their customs and behaviours. For example, it can be gained by immersing oneself in a youth-related place or activity.

- **Cognitive** awareness is raised through internal reflections on one's own thoughts. Inner thoughts may challenge or contradict each other, which could become clear when having to answer again and again why one acted as one did, digging deeper into the underlying reasons behind one's thoughts or actions.

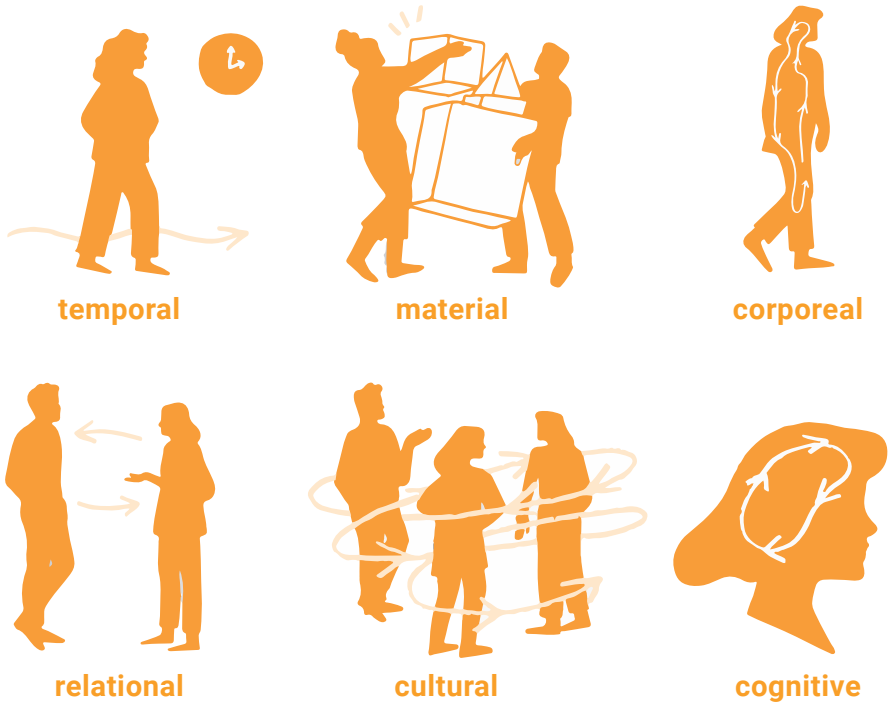


Figure 26. Six types of modes that enable reflection to challenge policy advisors' assumptions about young people and their needs (visual created by Vink & Koskela-Huotari, 2021).

To realize the potential value of involving policy advisors in such experiences, several aspects are crucial.

Firstly, the suitability of the experience for a policy advisor depends on their specific policy needs, the context of the policy, and their individual characteristics (source: iterative testing). Further elaboration on the fit with individual characteristics is provided in Chapter 5.3. Generally, the experiences should be simple and close to everyday life, as this is where connections with youth can be established and their needs understood (Vromen & Collin, 2010). This allows for the experiences to be easily performed on short notice, which is advantageous given the limited time typically available in municipal settings. Although the experiences themselves may seem mundane or trivial, the true value arises in the prompted reflections and recognised connections with youth. After all, the learning process should be more than simply ticking the box that there has been interaction with youth, thereby falling back into dominant ways of working.

Secondly, it is crucial to maintain the exploratory and flexible nature of the experiences, as they are intended to stimulate reflection and promote learning (source: iterative testing). Therefore, any materials used to support the learning process should not be overly polished in design and avoid imposing rigid structures that may discourage policy advisors from recognizing opportunities for action on their own. The key point here is that the activity should always serve the overarching purpose of the experience. In other words, the activity should not become the sole purpose in itself. When, for example, a policy advisor engages in conversation with a young person, attention may be lost when there is a perceived need to ask or feel obligated to ask a long set of questions. Instead, the focus should primarily be on establishing a connection and initiating reflection.

‘If you only get on paper, young people want this, this and this, well okay, but will that make you work harder? I doubt that. You have to feel it yourself to do this. Because then the policy might also change and you might just say to an alderman like ‘well, so we’re just not going to do it that way’.’

Civil servant (9)

5.2 How to enable policy advisors to reshape their habitual thinking and acting?

The reflections and experiences described in the previous subchapter can initiate the reshaping of habitual thinking and acting (source: iterative testing). The discomforts and conflicts encountered by policy advisors in different staged experiences can trigger changes in their assumptions about the needs of youth, rooted in invisible underlying beliefs, rules, norms, and roles (Wetter-Edman et al., 2018) (Figure 28). This experiential learning and reflection may lead to a transformation in their future thinking and actions, aligning with the newly acquired understanding of the needs of youth. It involves intentional efforts to create, disrupt, and maintain social structures such as explained in Chapter 3 (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) (Figure 27). These efforts may include:

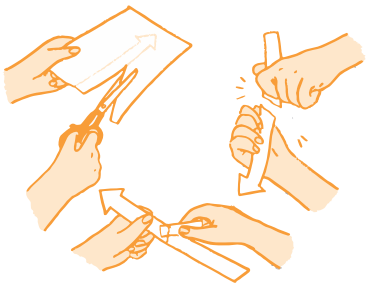


Figure 27. Certain experiences and reflections enable the creation, disruption and maintenance of social structures (visual created by Josina Vink, retrieved from one of their lecture slides).

- **Creating** trust in one's own capabilities (self-efficacy) to involve youth in policy making (related to social structures discussed in Chapter 3.4.1) (Bandura, 1977).
- **Disrupting** the belief that there would already be sufficient knowledge about the needs of youth based on context-less statistical surveys (related to social structures discussed in Chapter 3.2.1). Instead, the belief may emerge that knowledge by experience is also needed.
- **Maintaining** relationships with political actors, as structural advancements in the field of youth participation are more likely to succeed with their support (related to social structures discussed in Chapter 3.3.2).

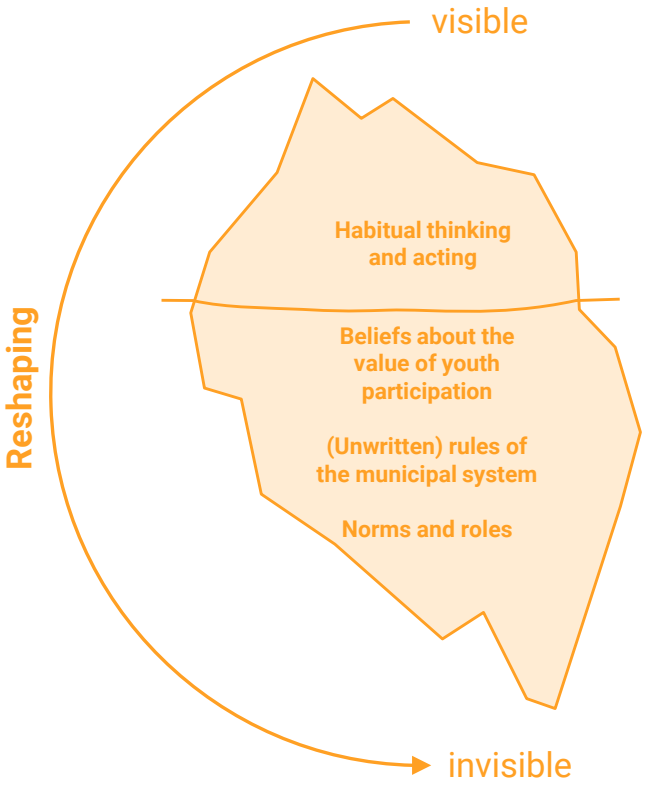


Figure 28. Changing current ways of thinking and acting by reshaping the invisible beliefs, rules, norms and roles.

Articulating the created, disrupted, and/or maintained social structures may be difficult (source: iterative testing). Yet it is precisely these articulations that are necessary to shift habitual thinking and acting within a municipal system moving away from merely maintaining the municipal system, moving towards a focus on responding to the needs of youth. Therefore, attention must be given to making intentions for future efforts explicit, which can be facilitated through symbolic, material, and relational work (Vink et al., 2020).

- **Symbolic** work may involve adapting policy goals or procedures, or changing the language used to reach out to youth.

- **Material** work could entail not displaying municipal badges when engaging with youth or sharing food during interactions with youth involved in policy making.

- **Relational** work focuses on building connections, such as policy advisors volunteering at youth-related initiatives or setting up to co-work with professionals in the field of youth services every other week.

Since the reshaping of habitual thinking and acting stems from individual experiences and reflections, the resulting small or large changes may be different. Each policy advisor is unique in terms of skills, personal characteristics, and motivations (source: municipal observations). Therefore, it is crucial to allow space for individual differences , enabling policy advisors to explore and discover reshaped perspectives autonomously or in collaboration with others (Heijne and Van Der Meer, 2019). Only then the intentions can be intrinsically felt and embraced.

5.3 How to provide policy advisors with a learning process?

Chapter 4 proposes the process of policy advisors challenging their assumptions (Chapter 5.1) and reshaping their habitual thinking and actions (Chapter 5.2), as a learning process: a process of learning about thinking and acting in response to the needs of youth. A characteristic of learning is stepping out of your comfort zone and being allowed to make mistakes. To enable policy advisors to unlock and utilize this learning ability, it is important to take small yet active steps at a time and learn through experience, with the ability to recover from potential 'failures'. While taking certain steps alone allows for personal reflection, taking steps together with other learners (policy advisors in this case) enables learning from each other (Corlett et al., 2021). Thus, a balance must be found, ensuring that the number of learners working together does not interfere with the opportunity to share insecurities, doubts, and feelings. By gradually building on their own and each other's experiences and reflections, policy advisors can enhance their self-efficacy (earlier mentioned in Chapter 3.4.1): the belief in their capacity to carry out their policy work in response to the needs of youth (Bandura, 1977).

Such a learning process results in outcomes that may never be fully controlled or predicted (Vink et al., 2020). However, within the current dominant social structures of the municipal system, there is often a strong desire for control and predictability (Chapter 3), thus enabling people to feel and take space to engage in such learning might be challenging. One way to nonetheless create space for it is to have the process facilitated by someone (source: iterative testing; Brinkman et al., 2023; Heijne and Van Der Meer, 2019). While a facilitator cannot make the learning process entirely controllable, they can ensure that the focus on challenging assumptions and reshaping habitual practices is maintained. Additionally, the facilitator can help anticipate and mitigate potential risks of the learning process, thereby limiting or preventing them.

Chapter 5.1 already emphasized the importance of individual differences in the application and outcomes of the learning process. Therefore, the facilitation of such learning processes should be personalized, considering the policy advisors' needs, personal characteristics, and policy context. Furthermore, such external guidance and encouragement can contribute to the self-efficacy of policy advisors (Bandura, 1977).

To realize the potential value of the learning process, a facilitator requires a set of skills and knowledge.

First, they need basic knowledge of the policy context in which the learning process is applied: familiarity with the policy cycle, the municipal system, and possibly basic knowledge about the policy topic (source: iterative testing).

Second, to guide others in becoming aware of their role and approach in connection with the lifeworld of youth and their needs, the facilitator must already be conscious of the need for youth involvement in policy making and have experience with various forms of youth engagement (source: iterative testing). It can be beneficial if the facilitator is young themselves, as they may be able empathize more easily with young people's experiences and may provide examples from their own lives that inspire the participating policy advisors' discoveries.

Third, as the learning process aims to provide space for learning, participating policy advisors must feel safe enough to open up and express vulnerability, discuss conflict and discomfort, and not shy away from it (Corlett et al., 2021). Therefore, the facilitator must postpone their own judgment about the thinking and acting of the participating policy advisors, trust them, and provide appropriate focus and pace (source: iterative testing; Heijne & Van Der Meer, 2019). A background in or experience with social or pedagogical work, or creative facilitation, may provide these skills. With an open and confidential attitude, the necessary space can be created for the policy advisors' own learning journey. Moreover, the participating policy advisors can then trust the facilitator and the learning process, leading to valuable insights.

To sum up

The main design requirements for a learning process - that challenges policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs and enables reshaped habitual thinking and acting in policy making - are summarised concisely:

- To challenge policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs, policy advisors must experiment with engaging in an experience that triggers reflection on current habitual thinking and acting. Although in different ways, the experiences all have to relate to the connection that policy advisors have (or do not yet have) with the youth for whom they make policy. The type of experience that is suitable depends on the policy advisors' needs, personal character, and policy context. These experiences can be staged and should:
  - Be experiential - to make invisible beliefs, rules, norms and values visible.
  - Be close to everyday life - to touch upon the lifeworld of youth.
  - Prompt explorations and allow for adjustments - to differentiate from current ways of working.
- The discomforts and conflicts confronted with in the experiences and reflections enable for reshaping their habitual thinking and acting, through intentionally disrupting, maintaining, and creating the invisible beliefs, rules, norms and values. Therefore, the concept requires to:
  - Make the intentions of policy advisors explicit, through means of symbolic, material, and relational work.
  - Let policy advisors discover and direct their intentions themselves, giving room for individual differences.
- The process requires to be provided as a learning process that:
  - Allows for: experimentation, taking small steps and recovery from failures.
  - Balances individual and collaborative elements.
  - Is guided by a facilitator, protecting the learning environment by being able to:
    - Maintain focus on the core principles of the process and its goals.
    - Connect with both youth and policy advisors.
    - Trust the policy advisors and the learning process.
    - Provide a confidential collaboration.

6. INTRODUCING A LEARNING APPROACH

In alignment with the defined design goal (Chapter 4) and design requirements (Chapter 5), this chapter presents the developed concept of the project: a learning process supported by tools, that challenges policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs. It enables the reshaping of habitual thinking and acting in policy making. Thereby it aims to foster policy making that meets the needs of youth, rooted in the connection of both policy advisors and youth. The development and evaluations of the learning approach are shared in Chapter 7.

6.0 Approach

In this phase, the final concept of the project is brought together: a facilitated learning process for policy advisors, complemented by supporting tools. This marks the second part of the 'But how?' phase. Employing a research through design approach, the concept is developed through iterative testing, of which the approach and outcomes are shared in the "So what?" phase (Chapter 7). In addition, suggestions on the role and possible evolvement within gemeente Rotterdam are made in this phase, using insights from literature on service ecosystem design.

The following activities were conducted to present the concept:

- **Designing** a learning process and tools, including a set of experiment cards, fill-in sheets, models, and a facilitation manual.
  All final materials developed for the learning process can be found in Appendix G.

- Creating a **photo scenario** to explain the learning process.

- Using **conceptualisations of service ecosystem design** to suggest the role the concept can play within gemeente Rotterdam.

The research question of this chapter is:

How can a learning process challenge policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs, enabling reshaped habitual thinking and acting in policy making?

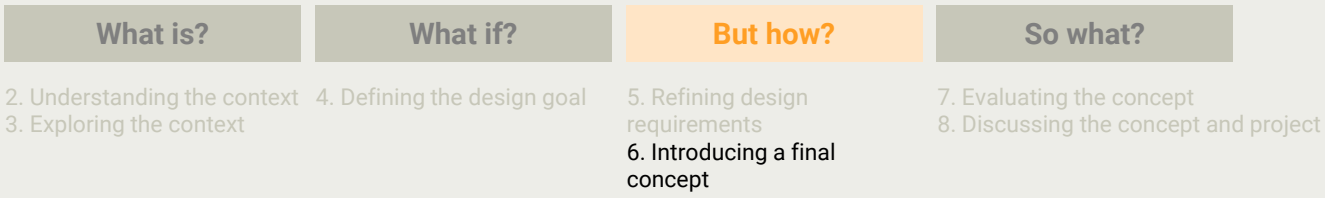


Figure 29. This chapter proposes a concept of how the defined design goal could be manifested.

6.1 A learning process supported by tools

The designed learning process is aimed at policy advisors who would like to involve youth in policy making or who want more knowledge and skills on this, but are not sure where to start. It enables them to gain firsthand experience in the lifeworld of youth and their needs, guided by personal reflections.

This initiates a feedback loop, illustrated in Figure 30. Through these experiences and reflections, advisors can challenge their current thinking and acting in policy making, gaining insights into the connections they have or might have with youth. Consequently, they can review and reshape their beliefs, rules, norms, and roles (the social structures as described in Chapter 3) and learn on how they could establish and nurture their connection with youth. As a result, the learning process aims to inform policy making in response to the needs of the lifeworld, enabling the advancement of structural and meaningful youth participatory approaches (as described in Chapter 4).

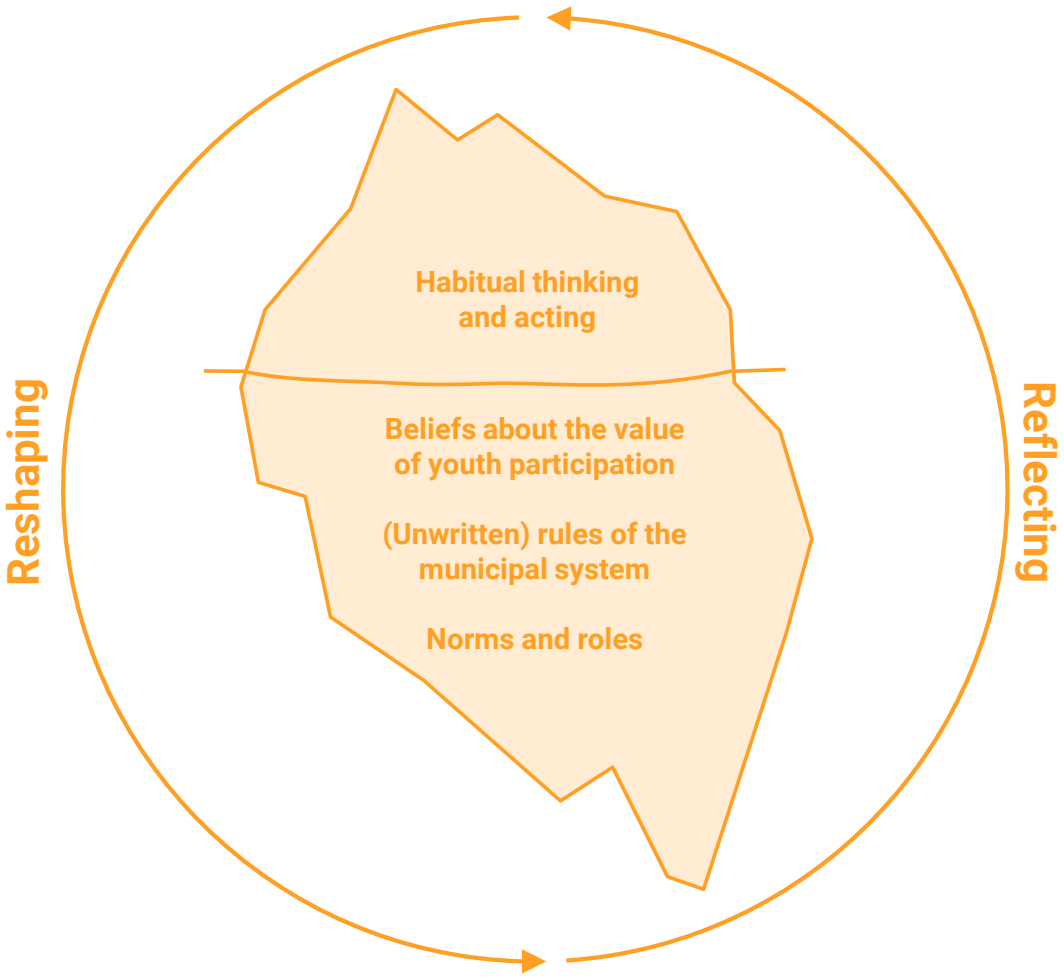


Figure 30. Feedback loop that is aims to be initiated the learning process for policy advisors.

For the learning approach, process steps with accompanying tools have been developed. Figure 31 provides a brief overview of all components. One or more policy advisors are guided by a facilitator, whose role is discussed further in Chapter 6.3. The learning process comprises two guided conversations, focused on preparing and reflecting, and individual experiments conducted by the policy advisors in between. The tools include experiment cards introduced during the first conversation and then applied, as well as sheets and models addressing specific goals and values discussed during these conversations.

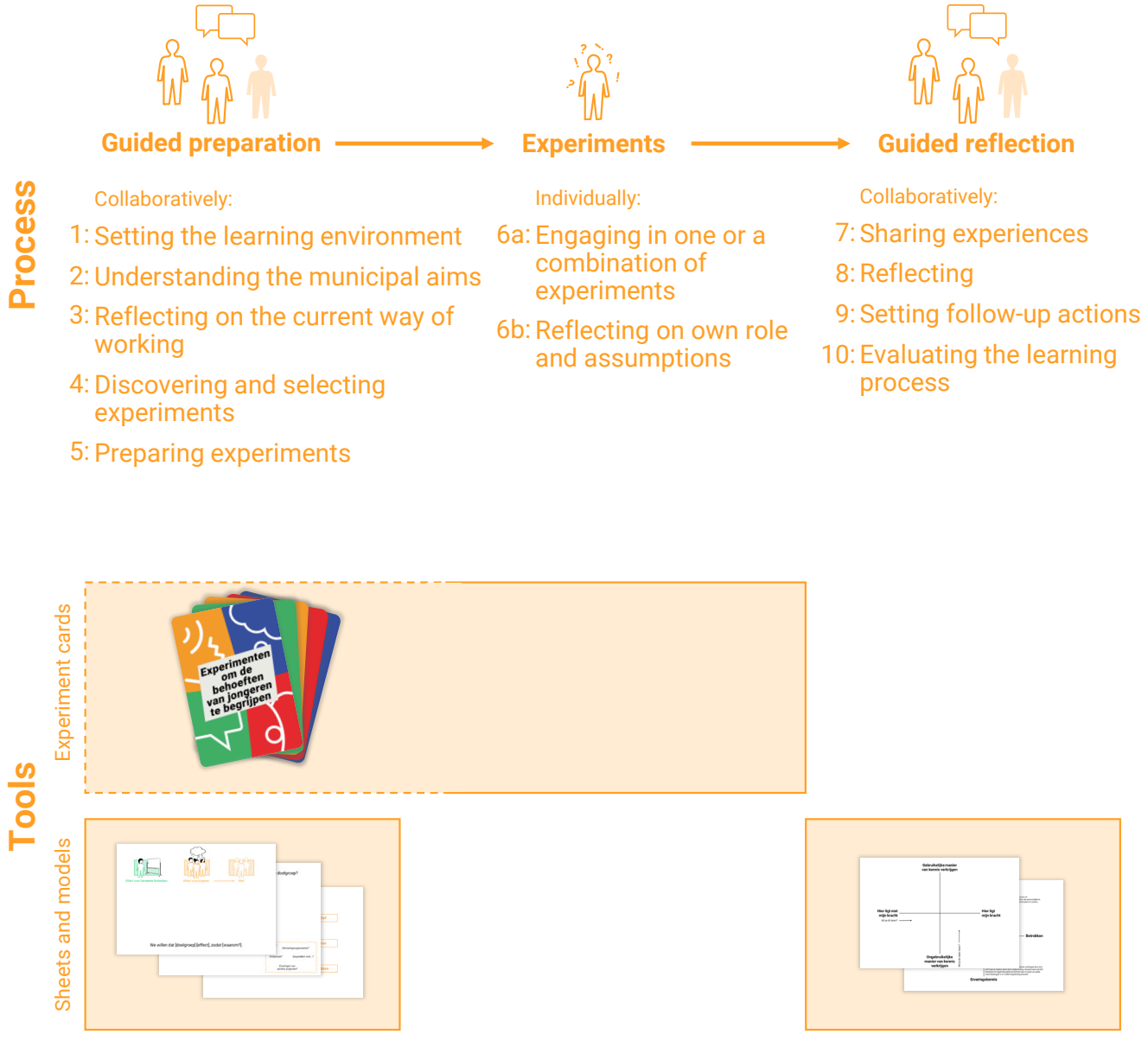


Figure 31. Overview of the proposed learning process and supporting tools.

The learning process includes several core principles derived from the design requirements (described in Chapter 5):

Learning

Becoming able to make policies in response to the needs of youth can be seen as a learning process. This requires a learning environment that allows for uncertainty and ignorance. The exercises policy advisors engage in are called experiments, highlighting that making 'mistakes' is inherent to learning development. It emphasises that 'mistakes' do not halt the learning process but are integral to it.

Safe Learning Environment

Policymakers may step out of their comfort zones during experiments and perform activities outside their usual tasks. While this may enhance the learning process, it is crucial to openly discuss risks when necessary. To address feelings of tension and discomfort, the learning environment must be safe and trusted. Therefore, it is advised not to make the groups for the preparatory and reflection conversations too large. A group of 4 to 5 people is a recommended maximum.

Flexibility

The process can lead to various outcomes and evoke diverse reactions. It is essential to adapt to these while maintaining focus to translate reflection into action. The steps of the learning process should therefore not be seen as a rigid step-by-step plan but rather serve as a foundation to be tailored to individual needs or policy contexts.

Explicit Value

The experiments themselves are highly accessible. However, their value lies in how they are approached. The value derived from them may be vague and challenging to articulate, especially in the municipal culture focused on efficient and measurable results. Hence, it is crucial to explicitly name and/or write down and voice the added value of experiences and reflections, even if the results seem small.

Snowball Effect

The learning process can generate enthusiasm among participating policy advisors, which in turn can inspire other policy advisors. Spreading the energy of the learning process should be encouraged, motivating colleagues to participate or establish more connections with youth.

Continuously in development

The learning process and supporting tools are meant to evolve continually as they are applied. Facilitators and participating policymakers are encouraged to regularly assess and adjust themselves, the process, and the tools. This aims for improved learning processes and meaningful guidance, thereby allowing policy advisors to gain better insights.

Below, the components of the approach are briefly described, illustrated by a photo scenario. All final materials developed for the learning process can be found in Appendix G.

6.1.1 Guided preparation

A first conversation between the facilitator and one or several policy advisors aims to discuss the current goals and practices of the policy advisors and to discover, select, and prepare an experiment. This is supported by addressing the following aspects:

Phase 1: Setting the learning environment
The policy advisors and facilitator introduce themselves, and the facilitator explains the goal and course of the meeting. Emphasis is placed on the shared learning journey, highlighting that both the policy advisors and the facilitator will gain insights into thinking and acting in response to the needs of youth (Figure 32).

Phase 2: Understanding the municipal aims
A shared understanding and focus of the policy advisors' current work are established, supported by collaboratively filling in a goal sheet (Figure 33 and 36). This sheet specifies the intended effects for Gemeente Rotterdam and youth, as well as details about the youth group. The goal statement includes the target audience, desired effect (preferably from the perspective of youth), and overarching significance ('why?'), prompting reflection on core values (inspired by Context and Design Goal sheets used during the Exploring Interactions course within the MSc Design for Interaction at Delft University of Technology). As notes and the goal statement are visible to all, it encourages specific formulations, facilitating clarity and reflection.

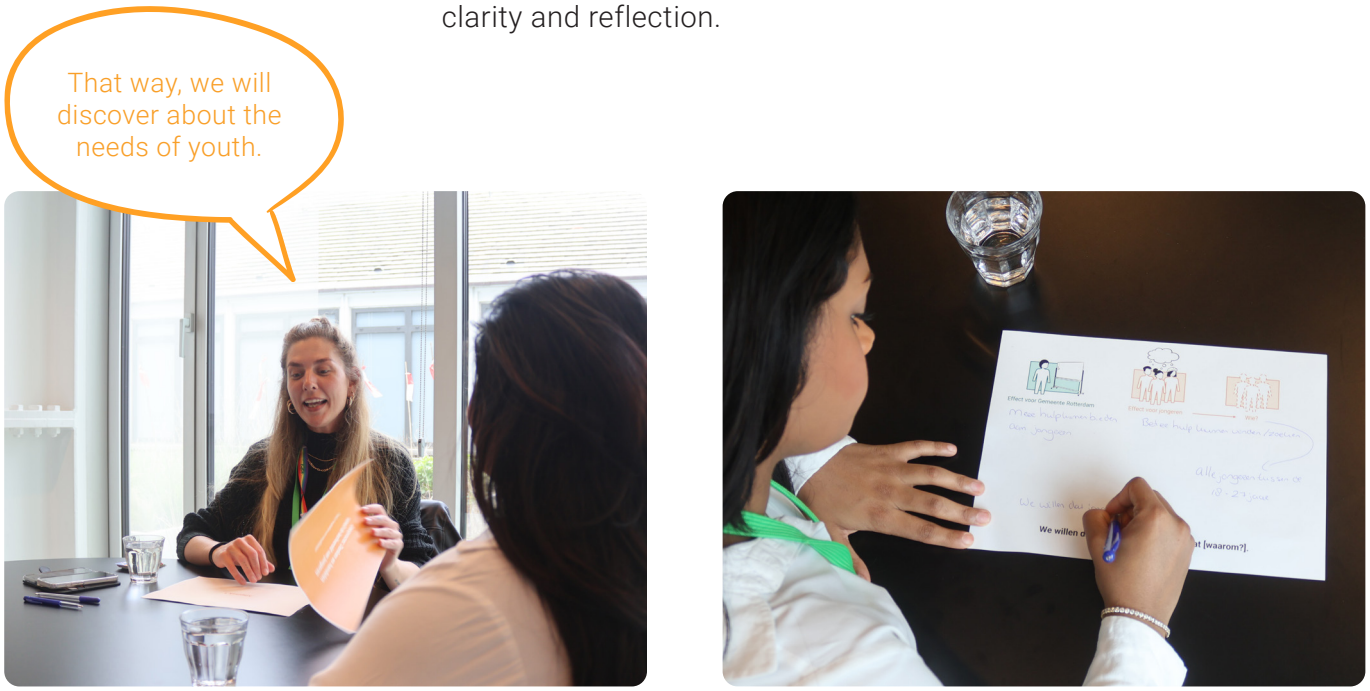


Figure 32 - 35. Photo scenario of the guided preparation.

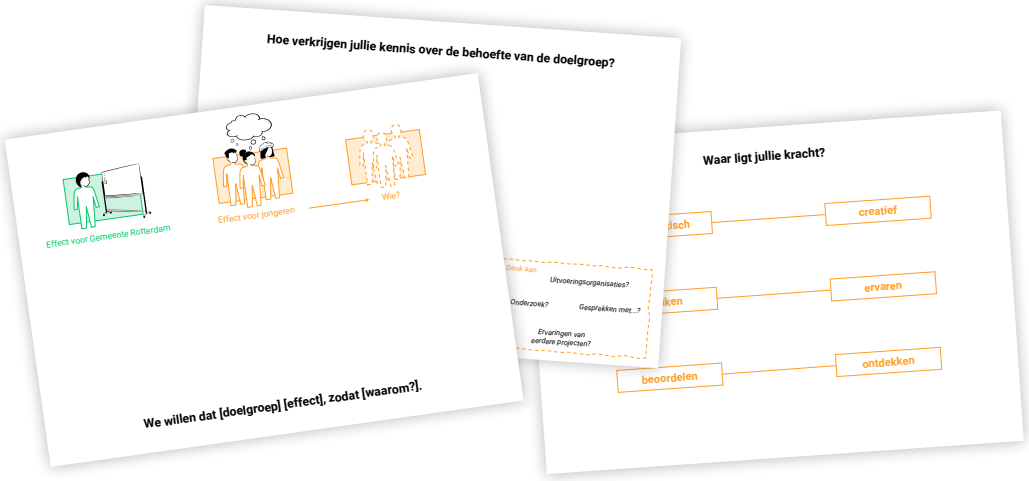


Figure 36 - 38. Fill-in sheets used during the guided preparation: goal sheet, knowledge sheet, and strengths sheet.

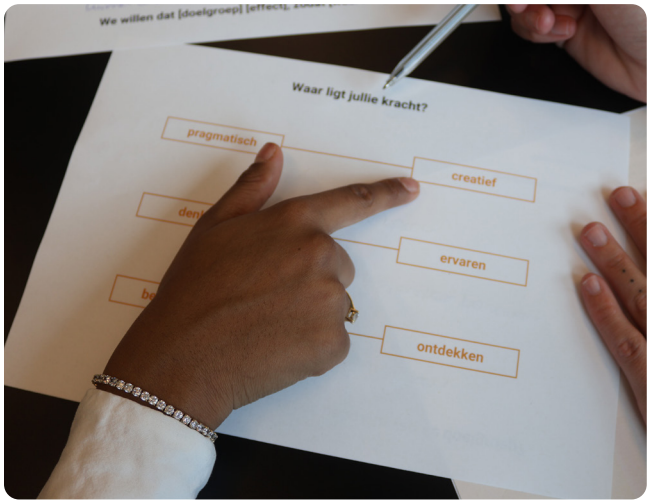
Phase 3: Reflecting on the current ways of working

To encourage reflection on the current ways of working, these are made explicit by collaboratively completing the knowledge sheet (Figure 34 and 37) and the strengths sheet (Figure 35 and 38). The knowledge sheet poses the question: 'How do you acquire knowledge about the needs of the target group?'. By understanding how knowledge is currently gained and what type of knowledge, it becomes apparent which aspects of youth engagement may be desired, allowing for experimentation in those areas. Additionally, it is likely to reveal the phase of the policy process in which the policy advisors are active, enabling the facilitator to better consider suitable youth engagement strategies (as described in Chapter 2.1.2).

The strengths sheet shows three axes representing different skills (loosely inspired by the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator). By making policy advisors aware of the skills they currently possess and mainly use, it becomes clear which practices are comfortable and habitual. Precisely these can then potentially be challenged through experimentation.

Facilitator of the learning process

Policy advisor



Phase 4: Discovering and selecting experiments
The facilitator presents a variety of potential experiments to policy advisors, inviting them to broaden their perspectives and gain deeper insights into the experiences of youth and their needs. These experiments are experiential and diverse, possibly to be tailored to the needs and appropriateness within the policy context, challenging the assumptions of policy advisors, as explained in Chapter 5.1. The experiments are accessible and can be carried out at short notice, so that they fit with the personal learning processes of policy advisors, as discussed in Chapter 5.3.

To facilitate the discovery, selection, and preparation of experiments, they are displayed and explained on separate cards (Figure 39 and 40). The front of each card features a title and a brief explanation of the activity. The back may include additional instructions and tips for the activity. Each category includes a general card explaining the type of experiments and providing general instructions and tips.

Additionally, the card set includes an extra blank card, allowing policy advisors and the facilitator to suggest alternative activities that align with the policy topic and needs, possibly inspired by the other experiment cards.

Figure 39 and 40. Photo scenario of the guided preparation.

The complete set of cards can be found in Appendix G. Many experiments are inspired by methods common to the field of service design. Appendix F specifies which methods were applied. The experiments are divided into four categories, each represented by a different coloured card:

Engaging in dialogue ('In gesprek gaan' in Dutch)
These experiments suggest exploring experiences, needs and expectations by engaging with (relevant) people. Moreover, formal and informal networks and possibly hidden agendas may become known. For example, by asking how the policy topic is experienced by:

- Experts: someone with much experience with the policy topic or target group.
- The youth counter ('Jongerenloket' in Dutch).
- Own family members or friends of the policy advisors who are somehow related to the policy topic or target group.

Immersing in the context ('Onderdompelen' in Dutch)
These experiments are about physically engaging with the topic by visiting relevant locations and participating in local activities. In this way, a policy advisor can get to know the lifeworld of youth by participating in it himself and thus make or build new connections. For example, by:

- Eating dinner at a youth hub.
- Shadowing a relevant person for a day ('meelopen' in Dutch), such as a young person, youth worker or district police officer.
- Becoming a volunteer, possibly related to the policy topic or target group.

Performing thought experiments ('Inbeelden' in Dutch)
These experiments challenge policy advisors to adopt different perspectives and prompt them to think or act from those positions. Questions and activities spark imagination on:

- The role the subject plays or played in one's own life (i.e. of the policymaker) when they were young themselves.
- The role the subject plays in someone else's life.
- How the policy's target group would act, suggesting to perform some of those actions.

Seeking inspiration ('Inspiratie opdoen' in Dutch)
This category includes engagement in various inspiring activities of a cultural, artistic and journalistic nature, which can generate new perspectives and ideas. Such as:

- Visiting a theatre performance, for example, which involves the experience of youth or invites visitors to participate themselves.
- Listening to a podcast created by young people or about the policy topic or target group.
- Creating something with the policy topic in mind, e.g. a poem, drawing, mind map or photo series.

Phase 5: Preparing experiments
Possible preparations for the experiments are made. For example, if someone is planning to get involved with the shadowing experiment ('meelopen' in Dutch), the discussion might be about who to shadow and how to approach them.

To support the experiments and trigger reflection, the facilitator introduces points of attention and reflection questions, also displayed on one of the cards in the experiment card set (Figure 42). The three points of attention are about (1) attentive and intentional observation, (2) applying multiple perspectives, and (3) reflecting on one's own position and assumptions. The three reflection questions inquire about (1) what you did, (2) how you felt about it, and (3) what you learned (inspired by reflection forms used during the Exploring Interactions course within the MSc Design for Interaction at Delft University of Technology).

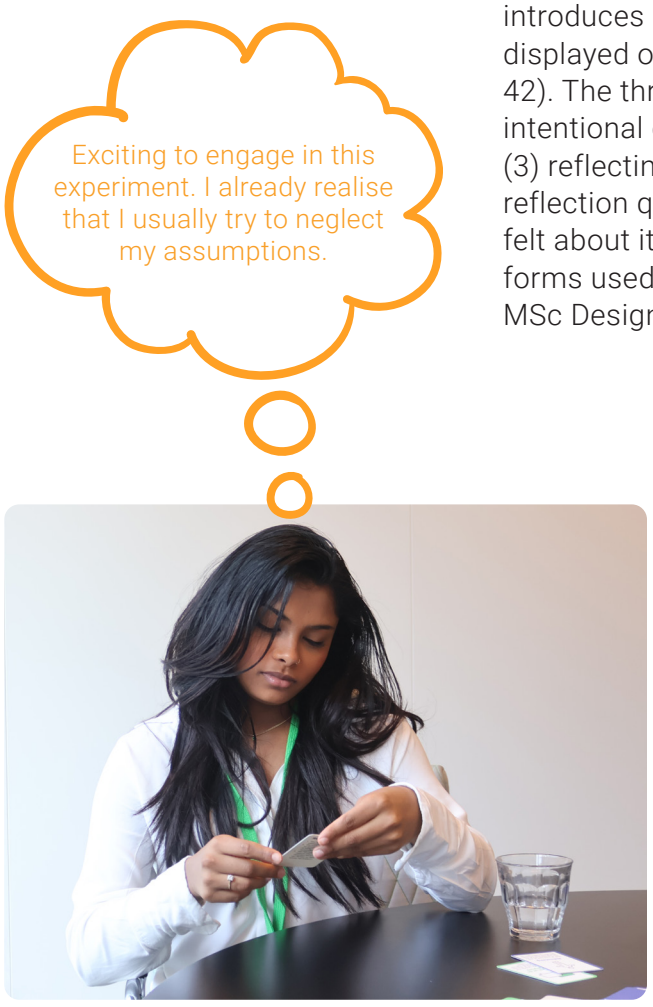


Figure 41. Photo scenario of the guided preparation.

Figure 42. Reflection and attention cards, as part of the experiments card set.

6.1.2 Phase 6: Experiments

The policy advisors conduct one, multiple, or a combination of experiments, further initiating reflection on their current ways of working (43 and 44). This process fosters awareness regarding their existing assumptions about and connection with young people, and how these connections can potentially become more familiar and meaningfully sought. The experiment and focus and reflection cards may provide support in this process.

Figure 43 and 44. Photo scenario of the experiment.

6.1.3 Guided reflection

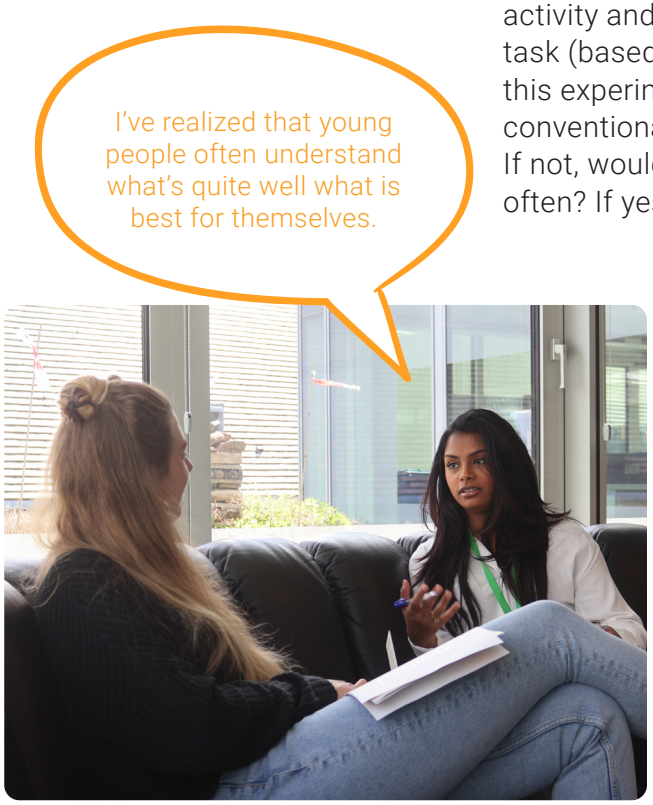
A second conversation, after the policy advisors' engagement with the experiments, aims to facilitate the sharing of experiences and discussing reflections, from which follow-up actions can emerge and are further defined. This is supported by addressing the following aspects:

Phase 7: Sharing experiences

An open discussion takes place, with the facilitator moderating a conversation about the policy advisors' experiences and reflections (Figure 45). What did they do? How did they feel about it? What did they learn? What surprised them? What was challenging? Crucial moments are further explored. Why did something feel uncomfortable? How did it make them feel or what actions did they then take? What led to a particular insight through the experiment, compared to their usual way of working?

Phase 8: Reflecting

Together, the gained insights are connected to the current policy work and approach. This can be supported by revisiting the completed goal sheet. Does this statement still resonate with the policy advisors, or should it be reformulated? To discover what and how policy advisors can continue learning about the alternative ways of working practices with the experiments, a reflection model can be used (Figure 46). The reflection model comprises two axes: the degree of familiarity with the activity and the level of skills a policy advisor has to perform a task (based on the gathered insights shared in Chapter 3). Did this experiment align with their strengths, and was it an (un) conventional way of acquiring knowledge? Why or why not? If not, would they like to learn more about it and/or do it more often? If yes, how?



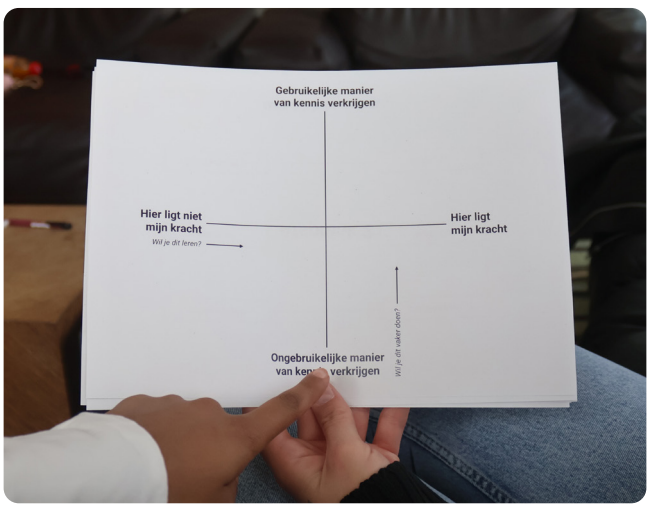


Figure 45 - 48. Photo scenario of the guided reflection.

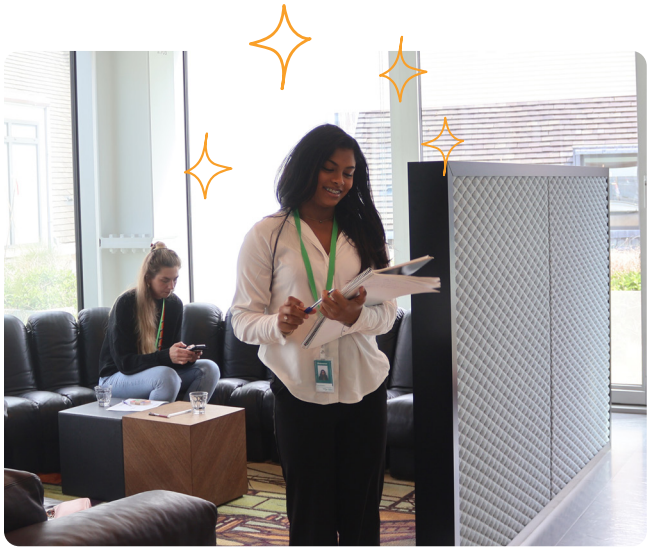
Phase 9: Setting follow-up actions
During the experiments and reflections, intentions may have arisen to think and act more in response to the needs of youth. Guided by the facilitator, these intentions are made explicit by writing down individual or collective action points, as specifically as possible (Figure 47).

It is also discussed how policy advisors can ensure that they continue to focus on these action points, keep learning about them, or remain reminded of them. What can they do themselves to achieve that or what do they need for it?

It may be revealed that the participating policy advisors want to involve youth (more or different than they already do) in their policy assignment. Together with the facilitator, they explore exactly what they are looking for, in relation to their policy topic and needs. The participation model can support this discussion to determine who can be involved and in what way. It shows two axes: the type of experiential knowledge sought for, depending on the policy needs, and the desired degree of involvement of the participating young people (based on the gathered insights shared in Chapter 2).

Numerous other tools, including the participation compass developed by the Municipality of Rotterdam, can then provide support in shaping and organizing meaningful participation. The insights and action points resulting from the experiment may be directly applied in those participation moments and/or shared with the participating youth.

Phase 10: Evaluating the learning process
Finally, the learning process and the facilitator's guidance are evaluated together, in order to keep improving the learning approach.



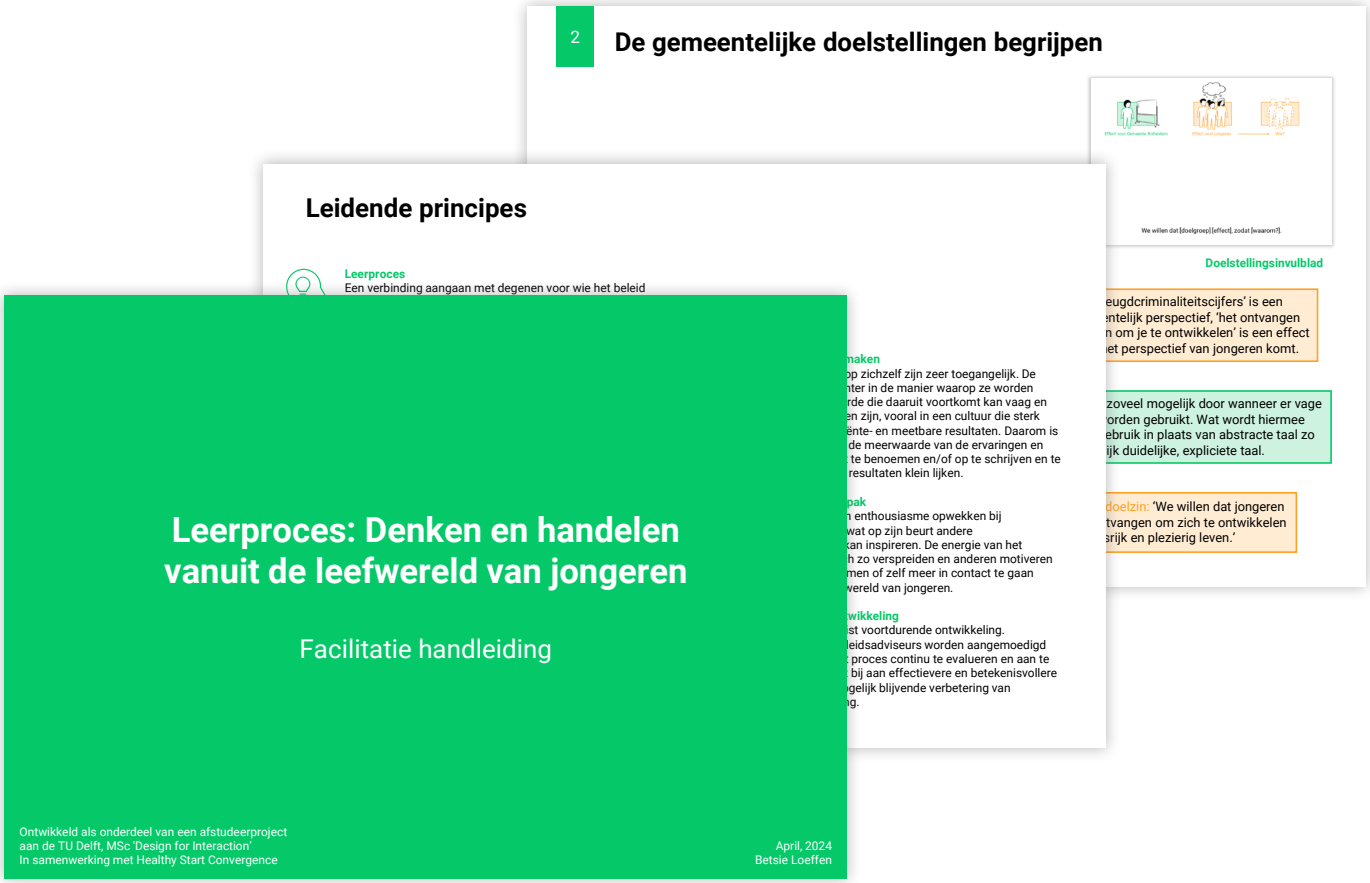


Figure 49. A sneak peak of the facilitator manual.

Supporting the **facilitator**.

Figure 50. A facilitator guides policy advisors through the experiments.

6.2 Facilitation of the learner

The learning process is supported by a facilitator, creating a space for experimentation and learning while maintaining focus and direction towards the intended goal. The facilitator may be an external person or a municipal civil servant. Yet, to realise the potential value of the learning process, the level of skills and knowledge posessed by the facilitator is important and should be taken into account when appointing and training facilitators. These are described in Chapter 5.3 Design Requirements.

To enable potential facilitators to apply the learning process in their own way, a facilitator manual has been developed (Figure 49 and 50). Appendix G provides the fully developed manual. This manual includes practical explanations, tips, and examples of the learning process to guide policy advisors. It outlines the guiding principles and all suggested steps of the learning process and supporting tools. It aims to provide just enough guidance for a facilitator to guide one or more policy advisors for the first time and then adapt it to their own style.

Both the manual as well as the the models and fill-in sheets are made in PowerPoint, making it possible and inviting for facilitators to easily make adjustments while applying the learning process.

6.3 Role of the learning process within gemeente Rotterdam

Value for policy advisors and youth

To extract the value of the learning process for policy advisors and youth, it is relevant to revisit the key challenges identified in fostering youth participation in policy making (Chapter 2): transitioning from intentions to actions, initiating youth participation for the first time, and ensuring meaningful youth participation (delivering value to all involved actors).

Moving from intentions to actions is facilitated by creating a justified space for experimentation and practice, thereby strengthening the connection with youth and enhancing awareness and ability to formulate policies that address youth needs. The approach helps to overcome the initial hesitation of policy advisors that may arise when engaging with youth participation for the first time. Through guided support, policy advisors can address discomfort and conflict, thereby building trust in adopting participatory approaches and recognizing the value of experiential knowledge as well as their own role therein. Moreover, this process may touch upon the original motives of policy advisors to be civil servants, thereby increasing motivation for and enjoyment of their work.

Unlike many tools and approaches developed to promote youth participation in policy development (as described in Chapter 2) this approach contributes to a more fundamental change in attitude and approach needed to enable meaningful youth participation, as outlined in Chapter 4. As a result, when youth is approached by or engaged with policy advisors, it benefits not only the advisors but also the involved youth. With confidence in the value of young people's experiential knowledge and their participatory role in policy, and understanding as to how to give youth a role in policy, policies can be developed that meet the heard and known needs of youth.

Furthermore, the needs, motivations, and expectations of participating youth in the policy making process can be heard and understood as policy advisors become aware of them during the learning process, allowing for meeting these needs. This can vary depending on the situation, policy topic, and participating individual, so it should continue to be discussed each time. Despite inevitable power differences, efforts can be made towards response-able engagement. Young people may then feel more heard and understood, feel safer and be more willing to share their experiences and needs, which also increases trust in municipal organisations and services.

Value and effects for gemeente Rotterdam

The value and effects of the learning process in Gemeente Rotterdam can be discussed at different levels (Figure 51), based on conceptualisations of Service Ecosystem Design by Vink et al. (2020).

At the micro level, the learning process occurs within the ongoing work of policy advisors (Figure 51). The policy topic a policy advisor is engaged with serves as both the starting and ending point of the learning process. Thus, attitudes and approaches within the ongoing policy work of (groups of) individuals can be reconsidered, working towards policy making in response to the needs of youth.

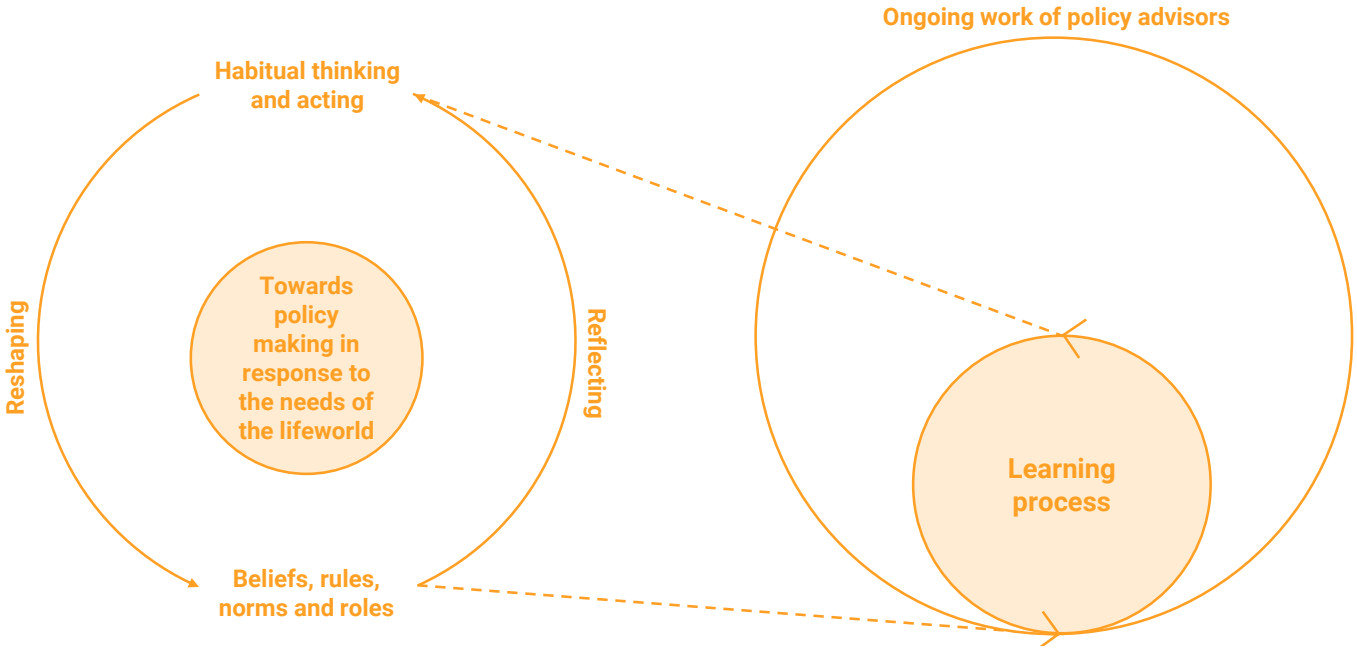


Figure 51. The role of the developed learning process at micro level (visual adapted from Vink et al. (2020)).

At meso level, the intentions of the learning process of policy advisors may differ from and influence each other, and other work processes of policy advisors (Figure 52). For instance:

- Learning processes that **align** with the intention of the learning process: Multiple policy advisors learn about the attitudes and approaches necessary to meaningfully engage youth, potentially leading them to collaborate to organize meaningful participation integrally throughout their ongoing projects.

- Learning processes that **conflict** with the intention of the learning process: Policy advisors find the learning process valuable, but consider it only a checkbox for 'sufficient' engagement with the living world within their current projects and may (unconsciously) counteract participatory approaches taken by colleagues.

- Ongoing work that **conflicts** with the intention of the learning process: Budget cuts prevent the allocation of funds for facilitators.

- Ongoing work that **aligns** with the intention of the learning process: Experience gained through various participation-related projects leads to increased knowledge and inspiring examples of meaningful participation.

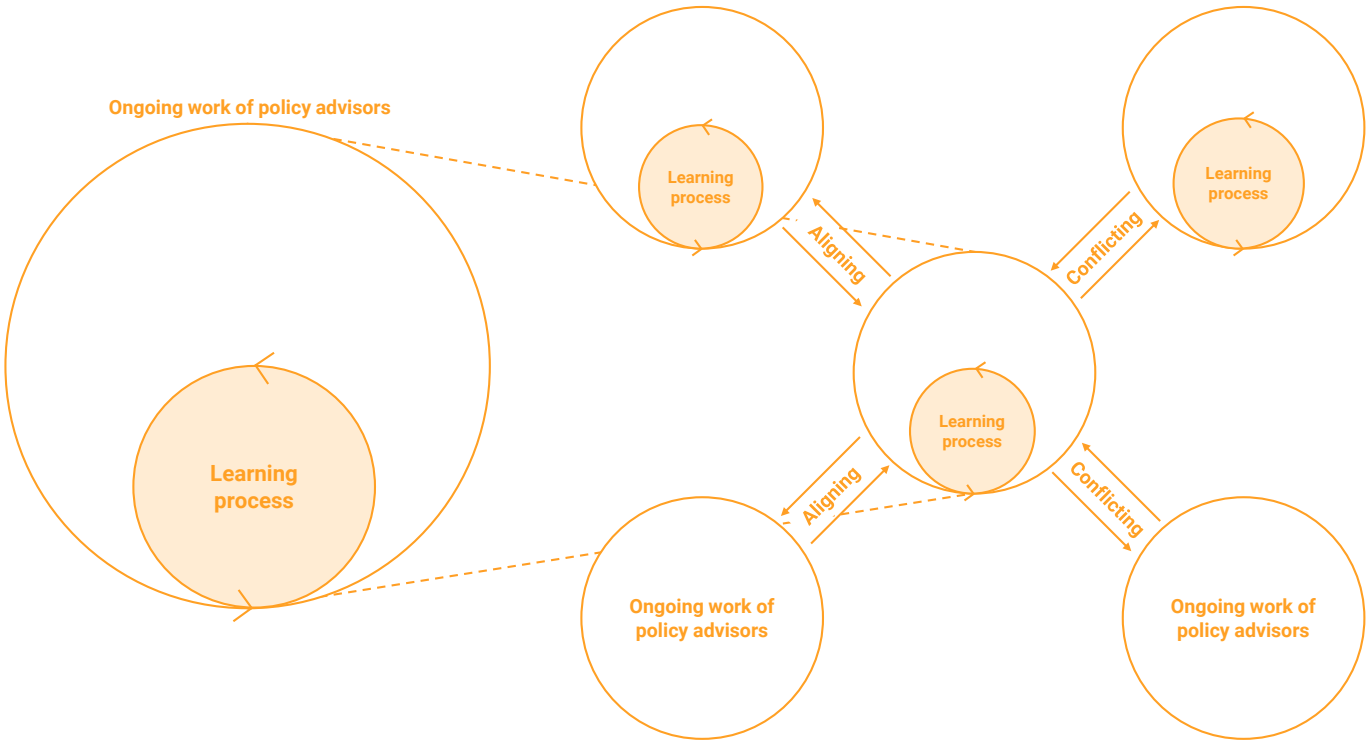


Figure 52. The role of the developed learning process at meso level (visual adapted from Vink et al. (2020)).

To sum up

Answering the research question of this chapter: How can a learning process challenge policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs, enabling reshaped habitual thinking and acting in policy making?

- A learning process is proposed that contributes to a fundamental change in attitude and approach needed to enable meaningful youth participation.
- It includes multiple conversations and conducting small experiments to reflect on current ways of working and discover how it can be reshaped. The experiments prompt experiential activities in the realm of:
  - Engaging in dialogue.
  - Delving into the context.
  - Seeking inspiration.
  - Performing thought experiments.
- While experimenting and reflecting, policy advisors learn about the connection they have, can and should seek with youth, possibly through means of meaningful youth participation, in order to make policies that meet the needs of youth. Thereby, the learning approach aims to result in a confrontation with current ways of thinking and acting, so that it can lead to revising and possibly reshaping those.
- To create a justified and safe space for experimentation and practice, the learning process is guided by a facilitator. A facilitation manual enables facilitators to guide policy advisors through the learning process.

7. EVALUATING THE LEARNING APPROACH

This chapter provides evaluations of the learning approach, of which the final state is presented in the previous chapter. It determines to what extent the learning approach (1) delivers the intended value for policy making in response of the need of youth, (2) is able to be applied and (3) whether it can be applied on a longer term. The conclusions drawn from the evaluation, are built upon in the next chapter.

7.0 Approach

The first part of the “So what?” phase evaluates the concept introduced at the end of the “But How?” phase. As this project adopts a research through design approach, the concept was developed iteratively through testing it throughout the course of the project. Insights from tests informed both the design requirements (Chapter 5), the final concept (Chapter 6) and the evaluation of the final concept. Evaluation insights were gathered through two types of tests: one focusing on policy advisors’ learnings when participating in the learning process and another focusing on the facilitation of the learning process. The subchapters further share the designing and testing approaches in further detail.

Additionally, four interviews were conducted to evaluate the value and potential of applying the learning approach. Two informal conversations were held when the concept was still in development, with:

- Two municipal participation advisors.
- A researcher in the field of design in governmental organisations.

Two semi-structured interviews were held and recorded when the final concept was developed, with:

- A senior policy advisor and a youth participation coordinator, both involved in the municipal program ‘Vastpakken en niet Loslaten’ (improving youth services, taking youth participatory approaches).
- A Healthy Start researcher in the field of neuropsychology and youth participation in research.

Figure 53. This chapter corresponds with the first part of the ‘So what?’ phase.

The insights from the three activities together inform the final conclusions, which is structured by assessing the concept against three factors: desirability, feasibility and viability.

In summary, the following activities inform this part of the 'So what?' phase:

- Three **iterative tests** with **low-fi prototypes** of the concept.
- One **pilot test** with **prototypes** of the final concept.
- Four **(group) interviews** with relevant stakeholders and experts from municipal and research perspectives.

The research question of this chapter is:

To what extent does the application of a learning process challenge policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs and enable reshaped habitual thinking and acting in policy making?

7.1 Policy advisors' learnings

To provide insight into the effectiveness of the application of the learning process for policy advisors, the following subchapters share the approach and gathered insights of the three rounds of tests conducted with policy advisors.

7.1.1 Iterative designing and testing approach

The iterative designing approach involved gradually developing and refining the concept through multiple rounds of tests. This iterative process allowed for adjustments to the concept based on insights gathered from policy advisors participating in the tests as well as gained knowledge from other phases of this project and informal conversations with project members, municipal stakeholders and experts. This approach, characteristic of research through design, not only contributes to the development of the concept and its design requirements, but also to parts of the evaluation of the final concept. As the tests are performed throughout the project, some elements of the final concept were not yet part of the prototypes used in the tests. The main iterations that have been made towards the final concept can be found in Appendix H.

Identifying participants

In total, three rounds of tests were conducted, involving a total of five policy advisors. These policy advisors were identified during my involvement at gemeente Rotterdam, where I encountered individuals who showed a strong interest in involving "society" in the development of youth-related policies. Recognising their enthusiasm and our shared goal of learning more about youth participation, I identified an opportunity for collaboration. I took the role of a facilitator of their learning processes and that of a design researcher.

Evolving aim

While initially trying to guide policy advisors towards participatory practices by letting them discover how they (can) relate to the youth that they make policies for, throughout the tests I discovered more exactly what it could enable. It meant that it would not necessarily directly lead to adopting youth participatory approaches, but would enable a change in the fundamental attitude and approaches that allow meaningful youth participation, whether a policy advisor gets directly or indirectly involved. The previous chapter further describes this.

Framed as a learning process, I mainly aimed to (1) facilitate reflection on policy advisors' current ways of working and (2) let them engage in experiences that let them relate to youth. Thereby I could discover how to guide the questioning of assumptions and reshaping of attitudes and approaches, and discover how both the reflection and the resulting future intentions may be manifested.

Low-fi prototypes

To reach those aims I held two meetings with policy advisors, with their engagement individual activities performed by themselves in between. To support my guidance, I utilized an intermediate version of the learning process and low-fidelity prototypes of the supporting tools to guide the policy advisors through the learning journey.

First meeting

To facilitate reflection of the policy advisors on their current way of working I used my preliminary insights gathered during the “What is?” phase to make and select fill-in sheets and models. It included fill-in sheets containing written questions to collaboratively complete (as can be seen on the Figures in the following insights subchapters) and printed materials featuring self-created or collected models on personality styles and youth participation.

To let policy advisors engage in experiences that let them relate to youth, I wrote en drew various possibilities on four A4 sheets (Figure 54). These were based on my own ideas about different ways I, as a designer, would seek inspiration and exploration of people and their needs. In doing so, I kept two main aspects in mind: the experiences should not require too much effort and be accessible to policy advisors (non-designers), but they should also inspire and challenge them to do something different from what they are used to. I framed them as experiments, to trigger a feeling of learning in which confrontation or mistakes are allowed. Chapter 5 provides more theoretical background on the purpose and possible ways to perform such experiments, and Chapter 6 contains the final version of the experiments.

Second meeting

To reflect on the experiences, confrontations, and insights I facilitated an open discussion, supported by models based on preliminary insights gathered during the “What is?” phase, and by revisiting the completed sheets from the first conversation.

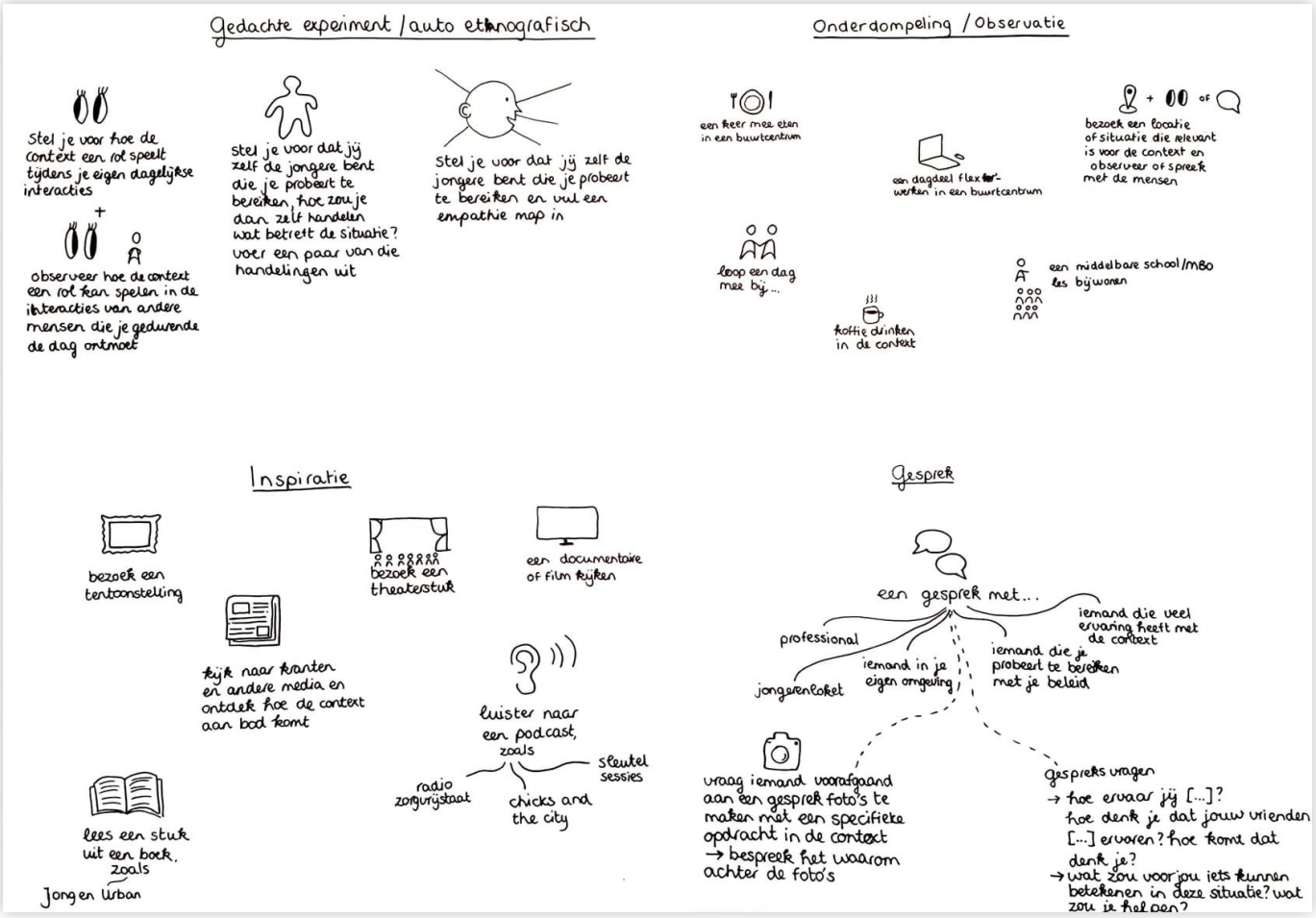


Figure 54. The first version of the experiments.

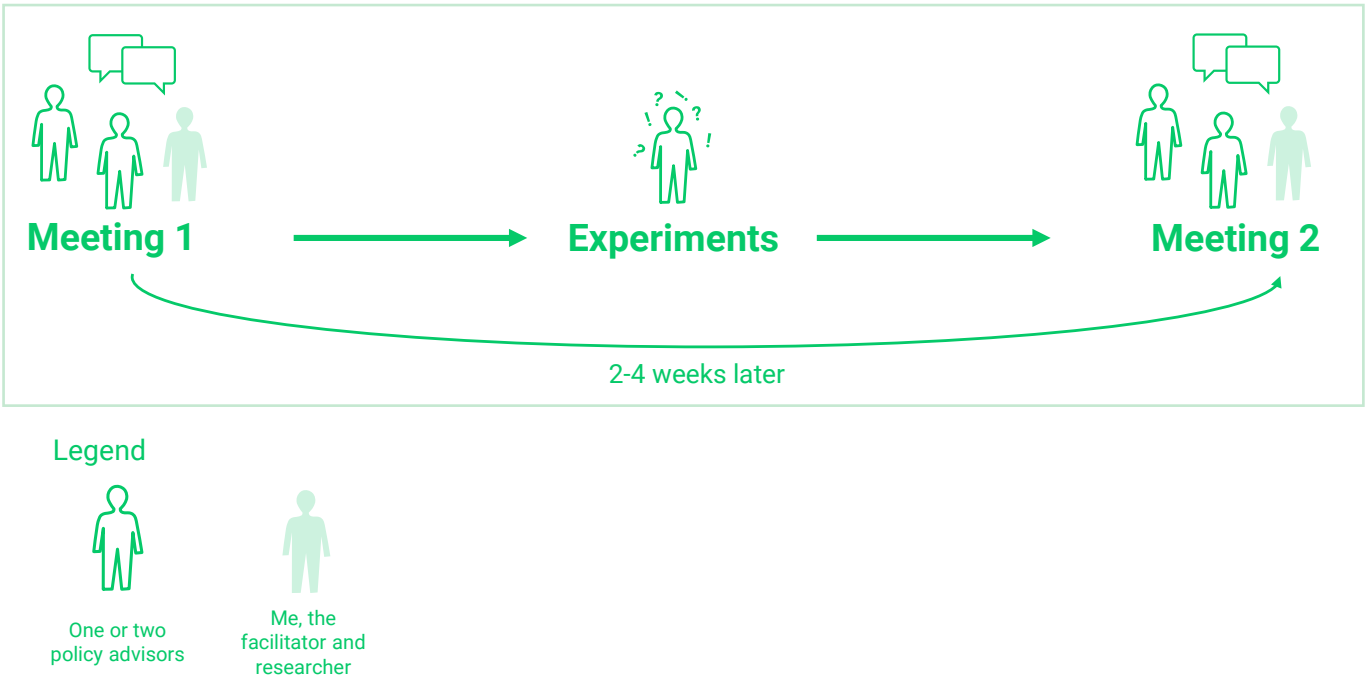


Figure 55. Overview of the test setup

Testing setup
The participants consisted of two policy advisors working on the same program, another two policy advisors working on the same program, and one policy advisor working on another program. Each test included two reflection conversations with me as the facilitator and one or a combination of experiments performed individually by the policy advisors (Figure 55). There was about 2 to 4 time weeks between the first and second conversation, between which the experiments were performed. The conversations took place at the municipalities' office or online, with the policy advisors individually or in pairs of two, depending on the program they were working on.

No audio recordings of the meetings were made to maintain an environment where the participating policy advisors did not feel scrutinized, which could have limited their ability to be vulnerable. Instead, insights from the tests are based on my interpretations of the conversations, supported by my notes taken during the meetings and my reflections written immediately afterwards. These were compiled into narratives shared with the participating policy advisors, who indicated they recognized themselves in them and approved their sharing.

It is challenging to determine how much the usual ways of working of policy advisors, without my suggested learning process, would have influenced the main outcomes and to precisely define the added value of the experiments and reflections. This assessment might only be possible after an extended period. Therefore, the test insights in the next subchapter primarily emphasize the experiences during the learning process itself and the awareness and intentions expressed for future actions. Chapter 8 further discusses this limitation and suggests ways to strengthen the evaluation and improvement of the learning process.

7.1.2 Insights

The three rounds of testing with the policy advisors led to different insights and values. Each round highlighted different outcomes of the learning process, which intended to challenge policy advisors' assumptions about youth and their needs and enable changed habitual thinking and acting in policy making.

To maintain the richness of the tests, I briefly introduce the policy advisors and their quest for youth participation, the course of the preparatory meeting, the chosen experiments, and the course of the reflection meeting. Finally, I conclude each test with main effect of the learning process, in relation to social structures (as described in Chapter 3) that might have been reshaped.

To preserve anonymity, the names of the participating policy advisors are fictitious.

Test 1: Policy assignment on care needs

Policy advisors and their quest for youth participation

In the context of healthcare budget cuts, policy advisor Sarah and communication advisor Roan are tasked with implementing interventions that encourage people to think about their own care needs and those of their family members, both now and in the future. To brainstorm which interventions could reach youth and how, they consider involving youth themselves, but they are unsure how to do so and where to start.

Preparatory meeting

Specifying the target group "youth" is experienced to be difficult because the way they received the assignment from their managers is quite broad and general. They seem to be particularly searching for new interventions and believe that traditional communication approaches, such as informing through letters and banners, may not effectively reach youth.

Figure 56 shows some sheets used and filled in during the conversation.

Experiments

Browsing through the different experiments seems to immediately provide an inspiration boost. Sarah chooses to watch a relevant documentary and reflect on her personal experiences with care needs, while Roan plans to listen to a relevant podcast and have a conversation with her teenage son. **They note that none of the exercises are currently being used by them or their direct colleagues**, or at least not consciously, and some fall slightly outside their comfort zone, such as the conversation with a family member and personal reflection. But it is precisely because of the personal nature of these experiments that their curiosity arouses.

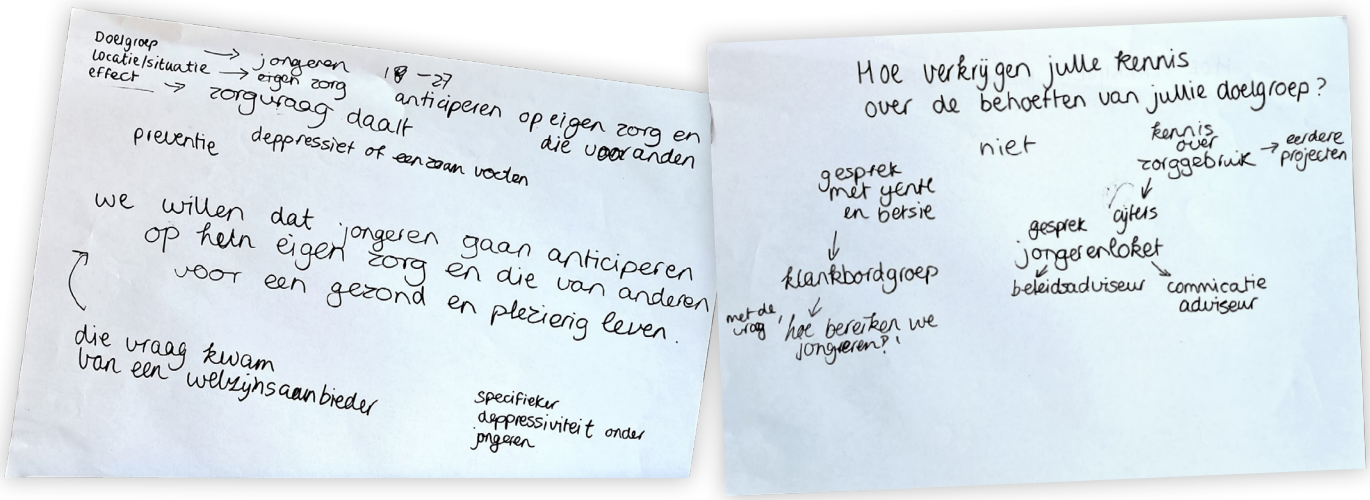


Figure 56. Some of the sheets filled in during the preparatory meeting.

Reflection meeting

A few weeks later, the debriefing takes place, though separately with each of them due to circumstances. Sarah enthusiastically shares that **the experiment has opened her perspective**; she has learned a lot about the context in which today's youth are growing up and how it differs (or not) from her own. By engaging in the experiment, existing initiatives suddenly became noticeable to Sarah, such as a campaign by SIRE, a foundation that raises awareness of social issues. In her day-to-day work, she would be less likely to make those connections. This might be due to the high work pace and requirements, where conventional solutions may be more likely to rely on, as their implementation and effect are known better.

Together, Sarah and I make a fundamental change in the project's vision: from 'anticipating your care needs for later' to 'offering and/or asking what someone needs'. Sarah notes that these exercises and reflections take time, time that one would normally not invest in such activities, but because she felt it could lead to something valuable, she would like to do it more often. The experiment itself was valuable to her and pulled her out of the automated way of working. It showed her that by engaging with the issue in other ways, the positioning and approach can become more grounded and motivating. She says she would like to adopt this different way of working more often but emphasizes that our conversations were essential for her because they brought out truly new considerations and ideas.

Sometime later, I also manage to meet up with Roan again, mainly to brainstorm about organizing an upcoming input session with youth. I ask her about her experiences with the experiment and she explains that by asking questions of her own teenage son, she learned more about what questions within this topic make sense to ask youth. From the somewhat abstract main topic, she indicated several subtopics that more directly concern young people, making a conversation with them about it valuable.

Main outcomes

- **Reformulating** the project's vision statement.
- **Noticing** existing interventions.
- **Learning** how to talk with youth about the topic.

In relation to the social structures described in Chapter 3, Sarah and Roan's process mainly led to awareness of the initial perspective they took in their assignment, which somewhat leaned towards scientific research and municipal objectives. Through the gained experiences and reflections, they have reconsidered this perspective and have made adjustments and new plans to further engage with youth in this project, with more confidence in how to do so.

Test 2: Municipal program related to youth crime

Policy advisors and their quest for youth participation

Two senior policy advisors, Jasmina and Alice, work closely with executive organizations to prevent and reduce the breeding ground for youth crime. They aim to question the municipal current approaches and are eager to involve (experienced) youth in this process. However, they are still searching for how to do this.

Preparatory meeting

We discuss the objectives of their project and their current way of working. As their role lies between policy development and execution, they often provide guidance and have to make many choices based on program requirements. They are curious about the experiments and easily choose which ones to carry out: talking to professionals and shadowing youth workers ('meelopen' in Dutch). They choose these experiments because they immediately recognised their purpose and they had long desired to get involved in such experiences.

Figure 57 shows some sheets used and filled in during the conversation.

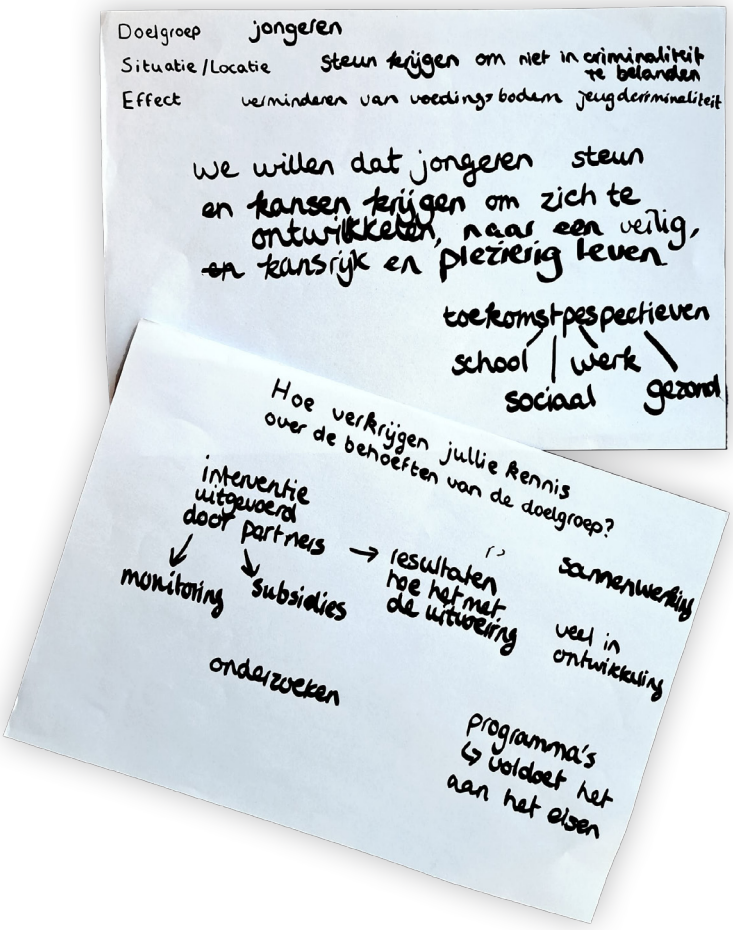


Figure 57. Some of the sheets filled in during the preparatory meeting.

Experiments
Jasmina decides to take time and attention to engage in conversations with people working daily with youth, at two previously planned meetings related to youth crime. She hears two social workers complain about the 'endless theoretical municipal discussions' about the challenges, while at their work the next day they have to have difficult conversations with parents about the problems their children are facing. That is where the municipal system and the lifeworld clash, Jasmina realizes. **Even though she regularly meets with professionals, now that she explicitly takes the time and attention to engage with them, the roles become more visible.** She further engages in conversation with them during the break, which increases her understanding but also makes her feel uncomfortable about her role and function in that meeting. How do I relate to these community workers and how do I best serve them? She was suddenly not so sure.

Alice shadows youth workers at a community center for an afternoon ('meelopen' in Dutch). The conversation flows smoothly, and the youth workers seem eager to share stories and challenges. They take her to a music studio where she talks with some of the youth hanging out there. There, she begins to feel a bit uncomfortable. She explains why she is there but finds it difficult to find the right words. The word 'youth crime' comes up, creating a slight tension in the air. When she mentions 'participation,' she immediately feels that it is more of a term used by the municipality and does not directly mean much to the youth. She realises that this interaction with her assumed role may be **slightly outside her comfort zone**, as she feels a bit of an intruder in their world. To truly connect with youth, you must let go of the formal role, which for Alice at this time is difficult because her presence was framed as 'that person from gemeente Rotterdam'.

Reflection meeting
Together, we brainstorm how these insights can be translated into concrete follow-up steps, both in terms of content and process. Concrete action points are difficult to specify based on these experiences, but many ideas emerge about their attitude and approach. They want to pay more attention to building connections with stakeholders, such as youth, colleagues in the neighbourhood, and operational professionals. Although they were already planning to do this, the experiments seem to have highlighted different important aspects of this connection. For example, Jasmina decides to pay more attention to the perspectives of others and openly discuss the accompanying discomfort, which may require a certain vulnerability from her. It could possibly be discussed via a check-in at a meeting: what are everyone's expectations? This could create space for connection and honest collaboration.

Alice learned about the key attitudes for connecting with youth: stepping out of the formal municipal role by, for example, using common language and both sharing stories. Though she may not directly interact with youth during and for her work in future, she wants to carry this knowledge forward, for example when collaborating with others who engage with youth.

They both found the experiment motivating, and it particularly gave Alice **a gentle nudge providing space to finally do what she had long wanted**: shadowing a youth worker ('meelopen' in Dutch). She often feels she lacks the time or opportunity for this amid her daily responsibilities, with numerous meetings and routine work processes consistently taking precedence.

Connecting the experiments with structural participatory approaches is experienced to be challenging, although they felt it brought them a step closer in terms of their attitude. They mention that my guidance, along with the accompanying questions, helped stimulate their thinking and consciously approach an interaction with a different perspective, both on the topic and on themselves.

Main outcomes

- **Feeling discomfort** in collaborations with stakeholders.
- **Understanding the boundaries** of their comfort zone, in relation to their role as policy advisors.
- **Fuelling motivation** to connect with operational stakeholders.

In relation to the social structures described in Chapter 3, Jasmina and Alice's process mainly led to awareness of the space they are allowed and able to take when connecting with stakeholders. Through the gained experiences and reflections, they have reconsidered this and have committed to acting on it in the future, with more knowledge about the attitude needed to seek connection more often and more honestly.

Test 3: Opening youth hubs

Policy advisor and her quest for youth participation

Policy advisor Kyra is working on opening numerous youth hubs in Rotterdam, where young people can gather, develop their talents, organize activities, and ask questions. The youth hubs have been largely developed in collaboration with youth, so Kyra has had many conversations with them: from youth council Young010 to local youths in different neighborhoods, and beyond. Now, in the implementation phase, it remains just as important to keep the perspective of youth central. Despite her experience in participatory practices, she remains curious to keep learning about it.

Preparatory meeting

The types of experiments I propose are not new to Kyra, and some have already been extensively carried out: such as talking to young people, experts, and other stakeholders, and immersing oneself in the context. However, Kyra indicates that she often enters these with a focused approach: "how can I turn this into policy?". **The suggested questions in some experiments are therefore refreshing**, such as "how would young people experience this meeting?" and "how would I have experienced this when I was young?". For the experiments, she attends two already planned appointments with these questions in mind.

Experiments

At the opening of a youth hub, she especially notices the enthusiasm of the children. They talk proudly about what they have done and seek appreciation from the municipal stakeholders. The modest attitude of the alderman inspires her and makes her realize that this is not always common in the municipality, both internally and externally. There is often much talk and praise about what the municipality has achieved, while they should actually focus on how youth experience the effects of a policy, regardless of how long and complicated the municipality's efforts were. Because Kyra is normally quite driven by thinking in terms of policy, the questions from the experiments help her become aware of this shift in focus.

Another appointment she attends with a reflective perspective is a day visit from a group of civil servants from another municipality who come to learn about the youth participation in Rotterdam. They see many obstacles to youth participation because they doubt whether "ideas of children can ever be realized". When trying to sense this limiting hesitation from the perspective of young people, or her younger self, Kyra discovers that the fear of not being able to realize ideas should be transformed into an attitude that understands the perspectives of youth precisely because of their enthusiasm and ideas. Then the ability can arise to think and act more from their perspective. She therefore suggests paying more attention to avoiding such limiting thoughts by entering conversations without prejudices.

Reflection meeting

Kyra explains that she approached the appointments with a different perspective than usual. She took a step back, observed, reflected, and gained new insights. **Normally, she would attend an appointment as a policy advisor who already has her opinion ready and knows what needs to be done**, such as answering questions from the alderman at the opening of the youth hub. Now she actively questioned the impact of her work on society. Although she was already strongly convinced of the value of youth participation, as a regular part of her work, she realizes (again) that participation is not something that should be done because it is imposed, but because it arises from necessity: without the target group shaping policy, you cannot implement it successfully in practice.

Together we reformulate the objective we had made in the first appointment. Kyra realizes that 'we want' should be removed from the sentence because it assumes the municipal perspective, and the goal can then only be achieved in theory. Instead, the target group should be central, with the municipality taking on a facilitating role and positioning itself more in the background in both internal and external communication.

Kyra suggests that it would be beneficial to repeat these types of experiments and reflections occasionally, because working within and for the municipal system requires regular questioning to prevent getting stuck in it. She indicates that she could also do without someone to conduct the reflective conversations around it.

Figure 58 shows some completed materials from our conversations that took place online, before and after the experiment.

Main outcomes

- **Shifting the focus** of her work: onto youth instead of the municipality.
- **Strengthening knowledge** on removing mental barriers to youth participation, for herself and for convincing colleagues.
- **Discovering the value** of stepping out of her formal role.

Regarding the social structures described in Chapter 3, Kyra's process mainly served as a reminder of how youth can and should be meaningfully involved: not to check it off, but from the fundamental need to make youth hubs a valuable and enjoyable place for youth. Through the experiences and reflections gained, her awareness of this has been sharpened, and she has committed herself to acting on it in the future, with a strengthened dedication to prioritizing the lifeworld over the municipal system.

Figure 58. Some of the sheets filled in during the online meetings with Kyra.

7.2 Facilitation of the learning process

To provide insight into the ability to facilitate the learning process of policy advisor, the following subchapters share the approach, the course of test, and gathered insights of the pilot test conducted with a possible facilitator.

7.2.1 Designing and testing approach

The need to make the facilitation of the learning process repeatable and transferable arose during the iterative design process of the learning process. Based on the insights gathered during that process, as described in Chapter 7.1, I compiled a facilitation manual, the final version of which is presented in Chapter 6. To assess the extent to which the facilitation of the learning process using the facilitation manual and supporting tools by someone other than myself (as in the earlier tests) is possible and effective, a pilot test was conducted. Additionally, it offered an opportunity to gain further insights into the applicability of the learning process, once again leading to new insights into possible outcomes of the learning process.

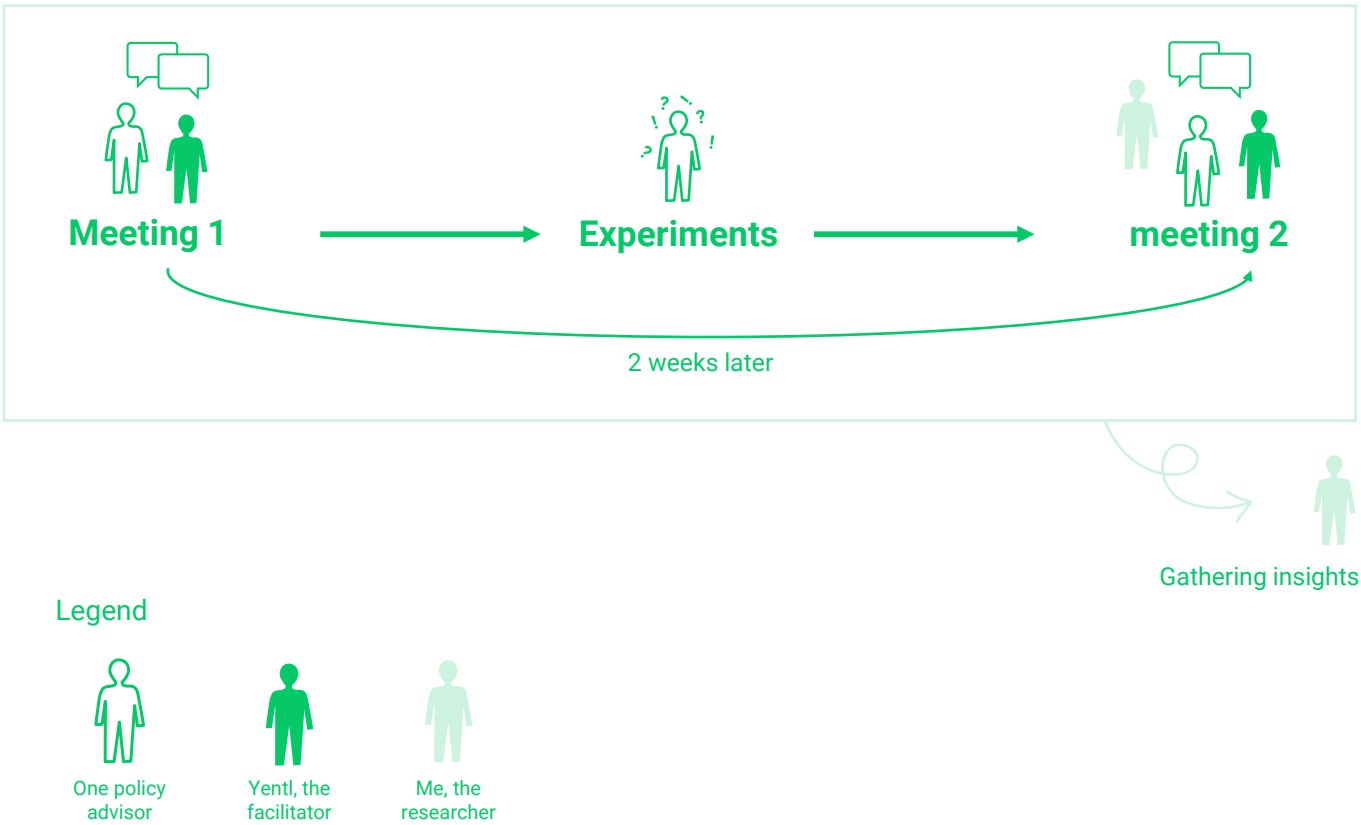


Figure 59. Overview of the test setup

Test set-up
For the pilot test I asked Yentl Lieuwma, the youth participation coordinator at gemeente Rotterdam, to be the facilitator. Yentl is well-suited for this role as she possesses valuable skills gained from her experience in social work and regularly interacts with both youth and policy advisors in her work. These skills are among the key skills proposed for the facilitator, as described in Chapter 6.3. Furthermore, Yentl had been highly involved throughout my project. Therefore, she was already somewhat familiar with and enthusiastic about (parts of the) the learning process, making her curious to apply it herself. Yentl used the facilitation manual to familiarize herself with the suggested steps of the learning process and printed out all the tools to use in the conversations before and after the experiment.

In the pilot test, Yentl facilitated a learning process of a communication intern from a policy department on the topic of care, who encountered Yentl while searching for a form of youth participation. The learner of this pilot test, the communication intern, is in the text referred to as Noah, which is a fictional name to maintain anonymity. Additionally, one of Yentl's interns was also involved in the pilot test, taking on an observing and occasionally supporting role.

In between and after the preparatory conversation, the experiment, and the reflection conversation of the pilot test, I had conversations with Yentl, with the aim to gain insights into the applicability of the learning process using the manual and other tools (Figure 59). Additionally, I observed the reflection conversation between Yentl and Noah. My presence during this last part of the learning process may have influenced the outcomes of this pilot test, as I also posed some reflective questions to Noah.

A brief summary of how this facilitation and the learning process unfolded is provided below. These results, along with the subsequent insights, are my own interpretations of the observed conversation between Yentl and Noah and the conversations between Yentl and myself. They were shared with Yentl and the participating learner, who both indicated that they recognized themselves in them.

7.2.2 Course of the facilitated learning process

Noah is conducting research on youth volunteering, as part of policies and communication strategies around fostering youth volunteering. She is now running an online survey about experiences with and attitudes towards volunteering. However, Noah would like to reach more and diverse young people but is still figuring out how to do so.

Together with Yentl, they discuss Noah's goals, strengths, and decide on an experiment: to visit a location where many young people go to. With the help of Yentl's contacts, they prepare a visit to the a college in Rotterdam, where Noah can engage with students. Yentl decides to accompany Noah to support her during the experiment.

During the visit, Noah approaches numerous college students, mainly asking them to fill out her survey. Many students are willing to participate, but some decline, leaving Noah feeling somewhat rejected and insecure: "Is it me that they don't want to help?" Nevertheless, Noah remains focused on her goal of engaging as many young people as possible and continues to reach out to students. Fortunately, Noah and Yentl encounter school coaches who assist them in engaging with students. Noah notices that these school coaches easily connect with the students, as they are already familiar with them.

In the reflection conversation, Yentl and Noah discuss the experiences and the challenging moments. Yentl mainly uses the sheet with the three reflection questions for this: what happened, how did it make you feel, and what will you take away from it. From this, three action points emerge that Noah would like to apply if she were to engage with youth in a similar way in the future:

- **Establishing collaboration** with potential intermediaries already in the preparation of such interactions, as they might play a crucial role in facilitating meaningful connections with youth.

- **Increasing the preparation or learning more** about the attitude that suits the youth you want to engage with, enabling confidence in/and constructive conversations.

- **Ensuring there are no predetermined or imposed goals** when engaging with people, such as speaking with a certain number of individuals. This pressure can limit the desired attitude and the possibility of unexpected outcomes.

7.2.3 Insights

The learning process

This learning process seemed to give Noah the ability to expand her initial survey approach in a way that allowed her to initiate contact with students herself and gain experience in doing so. However, it appeared that there was not so much perceived space for experimentation, but rather a predetermined goal (to obtain as many survey responses as possible) for which the experiment was used as a means and which guided the execution of the experiment. This led to Noah having to step out of her comfort zone heavily, in order to achieve that goal. The learning process thus resulted in insightful learning points for Noah, but at the same time, it did not always seem "safe" and meaningful for both Noah and the youth approached during the experiment. Noah felt somewhat upset after the action at the college, due to the occasional blunt rejections and the pressure to achieve the targeted number of completed surveys.

The approached students may not have felt completely understood when they were abruptly approached by a stranger to do something for.

The facilitators' perspective

As a facilitator, Yentl identifies with the insight explained above and would like to take this into account in future application of the learning process. Additionally, Yentl mentions that guiding someone before and after the experiment, and viewing it as a learning process, made her more aware that not everyone has the skills needed to establish responsible and pleasant contact with youth. **She realizes that some people need much more practice and experience to develop these skills.** If Noah expresses a desire to learn more in the realm of youth participation, Yentl explains that she would continue training Noah in this area through further providing and guiding experimentation and practice.

In contrast to how she would typically assist civil servants towards youth participation, in her role as youth participation coordinator, she mentions that the learning process helped her to momentarily detach someone from their predetermined goals and means. Instead, **it allowed space for reflection on underlying beliefs and emotions, which differ from person to person**.

The ability to facilitate

Yentl found the facilitation to have gone well and mentions that she benefited from applying the suggested steps and use the tools, even though she did not strictly adhere to all of them. Since it was her first time using the process steps and tools, she noticed that she sometimes had to search for what the next step or question was, which she did not want to overlook. This, combined with the fact that all the tools were printed on separate sheets, sometimes caused some chaos and ambiguity during the conversations. Yentl suggests that this could be addressed by making an overview of the steps (which is currently only displayed in the facilitator manual) available as an additional tool for the facilitator, next to the other physical tools. Further recommendations for facilitating the learning process is provided in Chapter 8.

7.3 Conclusions

Conclusions are drawn by assessing the concept on its desirability, feasibility and viability, informed by the test insights explained in the previous subchapters and 4 (group) interviews with relevant stakeholders and experts from municipal and research perspectives.

7.3.1 Potential value for municipal policy making in response to the needs of youth

Challenging assumptions on youth and their needs and enable reshaped thinking and acting

Based on the conversations following the four tests of the learning process, various learning points and resulting intentions regarding their habitual thinking and acting in the future emerged. These can be linked to the social structures described in Chapter 3. For example, the learning process led to increased trust in the value of ideas of youth, adjusting the policy approaches to prioritize youth needs over the municipal system, and acquiring skills related to the language and questions used in conversations that align with the needs of youth.

Because the learning process is tailored to the participating policy advisors' needs and their policy context, it serves a slightly different primary purpose each time. However, overall, it seems that the learning process primarily contributes to creating responsible and meaningful space for gaining experiences and reflection on habitual thinking and acting. This makes the implicitness of the underlying attitude tangible, sparking unbiased curiosity about the needs of youth.

While based on these tests and interviews it can be concluded that the learning process challenges assumptions on youth and their needs, it remains difficult to determine whether intentions of reshaped thinking and acting are actually adopted, and whether it lasts. This limitation is further explained, and recommendations are provided in Chapter 8.

Value and role of the learning process for Gemeente Rotterdam

Participation and policy advisors of gemeente Rotterdam emphasize the value they see in the learning approach as a starting point for policy advisors to gradually gain confidence in themselves, in the value of experiences of youth, and in the importance of involving youth in policy making. They note that policy advisors might transition from being unconsciously incompetent to consciously incompetent, which opens up opportunities for growth and development. They consider this approach as part of a broader strategy aimed at fostering youth participation in policy making, where the application of existing or future tools for meaningful participation are complementary or follow-up steps.

“When you enter such a learning process you learn by actually engaging in conversations with young people and thinking, ‘Why do I feel this way?’ and ‘Why am I acting like this?’ Only then do you realize, ‘Yes, what I’m doing is not complete’, because you can approach and tackle a policy assignment in many different ways.”

Policy advisor

“This helps, I think, to overcome fears and remove ‘yes, buts’.”

Policy advisor

7.3.2 Ability to be applied

Participation and policy advisors of gemeente Rotterdam suggest that they envision (parts of) the learning process being offered as stand-alone training sessions, but they also see potential for integration into municipal projects, programs, and departments. They emphasize that the facilitation plays a crucial role in the application of the learning process, which is also addressed by the participating policy advisors of the tests. This underscores two conclusions regarding the feasibility of applying the learning process.

Firstly, facilitation enabled policy advisors to feel and take the space to engage with the experiments and thereby with youth perspectives. Despite the seeming simplicity of the experiments, policy advisors indicate that they are currently barely conducted. Encouraging policy advisors to carry out the experiments and providing the necessary guidance can create space to initiate them now.

Secondly, the conversations prompted the challenges to delve deeper into one's own role, attitude, and approach, relating to the needs of youth. A neuropsychology researcher from Healthy Start, working in the field of youth participation, emphasizes that this allowance for individual differences makes this approach unique and highly valuable. It thereby moves away from the notion that there is only one best way to approach youth participation, meaning there is also no single set of skills required to engage in youth participation initiatives.

Based on the pilot test, the facilitation manual seems to provide sufficient guidelines to apply the learning process. However, the potential value of the learning process leans heavily on the role and skills of the facilitator. This is addressed further in the discussion.

> **“I find it powerful that it’s not a one size fits all solution, but that experiments and reflection help to figure it out and also to look at ‘well, who is actually my target audience?’”**
>
> *Healthy Start Researcher*

7.3.3 Application implications on a longer term

Participation and policy advisors of gemeente Rotterdam indicate that they foresee the approach evolving continuously during its application. Hopefully, over time, this learning process is no longer necessary as policy advisors become more conscious of their role, and skilled at involving youth in policy making, doing so more structurally and meaningfully.

8. DISCUSSING THE CONCEPT AND PROJECT

This chapter provides limitations and recommendations for future iterations of the final concept. Next, a call to action states the next steps for application of the concept. Finally, I reflect on the final concept and the project as a whole.

8.0 Approach

The second part of the “So what?” phase critically reviews the results and insights of the first part of the “So what?” phase (Chapter 7). Therefore, the same activities that informed the previous chapter (iterative tests and interviews) inform this chapter, identifying constraints and calls to action, offering suggestions to move the project forward.

Finally, drawing from my experiences during this project, I reflect on the project myself and share personal highlights and lessons learned.

The main research question of this chapter is:

How can the proposed learning process be further developed and applied?

Figure 60. This chapter concludes the ‘So what?’ phase, thereby suggesting openings to possible future projects and applications of the concept.

8.1 Limitations

The subchapters below outline the limitations of the project and the final concept, leading to recommendations regarding the evidence of the value and effects of the learning approach, its applicability, and possible explorations beyond it.

8.1.1 Validating the value and effects of the learning approach

This project was approached in an exploratory manner, emphasizing the identification of a concept over its statistical validation. Many results are based on empirical data which are self-reported and may therefore contain bias and complicate repeatability. Furthermore, some design choices may only be explained or justified to a certain extent, as there is always a degree of designer intuition involved. Although the repeated testing of a progressively developed learning approach (characteristic of a research through design approach), the continuous involvement of research and municipal stakeholders and the use of supporting literature and data from an interview study mitigated these effects to some extent, the results are still influenced by my own perspective. For example, in most of the tests with the learning process, I was the facilitator and because I possess certain design skills and could also be considered a 'young person' myself, may lead me contribute with ideas and inspiration others might have not given.

Therefore, in future studies, the final concept could be further validated for various purposes. For example, (1) to determine the type of impact of the learning approach on fostering meaningful youth participation, (2) to assess its influence on attitudes, beliefs, and motivation towards youth participation and the perceived ability to connect with youth, or (3) even more broadly, to examine its impact on the ability to think and act in response to the needs of youth. Effects research such as randomized control trials or multiple single case studies could be conducted for this purpose. This would allow for an investigation into how policy advisors develop with and without the learning process: what happens naturally and when is guidance or an extra push needed? Within the municipality, the effects could potentially be measured by implementing key performance indicators.

These studies may take place simultaneously with the continuous application and improvement of the learning approach, so that the research remains grounded with its involvement in real-world practices.

8.1.2 Applying the learning approach

One of the core principles of the proposed learning approach is that it must remain in constant development to remain relevant and effective (Chapter 6). Each application (iterative tests) of the learning process within this project resulted in new small improvements to the process steps and supporting tools, and provided different insights for participating policy advisors. It is crucial that this iterative character is maintained in future application of the learning approach. However, due to the time available for this project, there were limited opportunities for focus in applying the learning process and a limited number of iterative cycles. As a result, a number of key areas for improvement emerged during and at the end of the project:

Further exploration on the incorporation of insights and intentions among policy advisors, arising from the learning process

While insights from service ecosystem design, facilitation and self-efficacy theories show that there is the potential for the approach to maximise retention of insights and intentions (Chapter 5), I suggest further testing and research to improve this within or outside the learning process. For example, by guiding policy advisors through experiments and reflections multiple times over an extended period, or by iterating on methods or reminders to reinforce the intentions from the learning process.

Further exploration on supporting the facilitator

The materials developed to support a facilitator to guide policy advisors through a learning process were tested only once in the project (Chapter 7.2). More challenges might arise and would need to be addressed when the learning process is applied more often. In the pilot test performed in this project, the materials appeared to provide sufficient support for the facilitator, albeit with some initial unfamiliarity. More frequent application of the learning approach might mitigate this by increasing familiarity with the process and tools, and by allowing facilitators to tailor it more personally to their own preferences and needs over time. This could be supported by a practice session of facilitating the learning process, possibly with multiple facilitators together as a train the trainer workshop. Additionally, providing an overview of tailored steps that the facilitator wishes to follow with policy advisors (currently only displayed in the facilitator manual) as an additional tool could serve as a helpful reminder.

Further exploration on the dependency on the role and skills of the facilitator of the learning process

Due to the need for personalized guidance and the creation of responsible and meaningful space for such learning processes (Chapter 5.3), the proposed approach heavily relies on the presence of a facilitator and their skills. Further exploration and design might be valuable to discover how a learning process can be applied more independently with less or no involvement of a facilitator.

Further exploration on youth needs within municipal participation
This project focused on the position and role of policy advisors in fostering youth participation, with limited inclusion of the perspective of youth themselves. While the learning process aims to enhance participatory opportunities for youth by empowering policy advisors to shape them structurally and meaningfully, future projects could delve deeper into the needs of youth in the context of fostering youth participation in policy making. Questions such as, what do they require – perhaps in terms of a 'learning process' – to effectively and meaningfully participate in municipal policy making? Alternatively, how might both youth and policy advisors engage in reflective learning together regarding youth participation? These research directions may further enrich the understanding and practice of youth participation in policy making processes.

8.1.3 Exploration beyond the scope of this project

Beyond youth
This project aimed to promote youth participation in policy making. However, research shows that many similar barriers are faced with adult participation (Migchelbrink & Van De Walle, 2021). Therefore, it could be further explored how the developed learning approach could be used to improve participation in policy making of other target groups.

Beyond policy advisors
This project focused on enabling policy advisors to foster youth participation in policy making by addressing the fundamental mindset that contributes to structural and meaningful participatory approaches. However, many more stakeholders involved in policy making are contributing to such fundamental mindsets and all play a role in limiting or fostering municipal youth participation. Therefore, it could be explored how the developed learning approach can also be applied for internal or external municipal stakeholders.

Beyond gemeente Rotterdam
This project took place in the context of the municipality of Rotterdam, linking it to factors such as the size of the city and municipal organisation, and the local culture. Yet many municipalities throughout the Netherlands are looking for ways to involve (young) citizens in policy making, so it could be explored how this project and the developed approach may serve other municipalities.

8.2 Call to action

Given the increasing wish and demand from municipalities and a growing group of policy advisors to engage in youth participation, coupled with the expectations and challenges involved, the proposed learning approach of this project has the potential to be valuable in this movement. (Components of) the learning approach could initially be embraced by municipal enthusiasts ('koplopers' in Dutch), while gradually improving it over time. As more people are inspired and brought along, it might become increasingly common to adopt attitudes and approaches to make policies in response to the needs of youth. However, there may remain a risk the application still being somewhat arbitrary and optional and therefore may gain enough traction to become impactful.

"I think you have to offer this for a very long time and really need to have a bit of endurance."

Policy advisor

To maximize the impact of the learning approach, the political and managing layers must be involved: for the structural implementation of new ways of working, mandate and direction are required. By convincing the governing bodies of such a learning approach – possibly by letting them experience the learning process themselves – the necessary time and resources can be allocated, and teams can be directed accordingly. Perhaps starting in one department and then expanding beyond.

"We need someone from the top to say 'yes, we're going to tackle this as an organization and this is a great way to do it'."

Policy advisor

The approach could potentially reach the governing body by connecting it the motion adopted in 2021 to systematically involve children and young people in policy, and its corresponding policy framework currently under development. The motion sends a clear signal that action is wanted within the area of youth participation, and the developed learning process can be offered as one of the ways to learn more about this and work towards structural and meaningful youth participation.

In doing so, the learning approach can be part of a broader municipal approach, aligning with the approaches currently being taken. For example, a supporting internal or external "travel" agency could be established (Osinga, 2024), where various youth participation experts and experienced individuals work to guide civil servants in their quest for youth participation, offer training (such as the developed learning process of this project), continuously improve approaches and tools, and share knowledge and examples. They may be seen as ambassadors for learning about and applying youth participation. Integration of such a "travel agency" is possible in various places: as an additional part of the existing 'participation and elections' team of gemeente Rotterdam, as new dedicated teams within departments, and/or in collaboration with external organizations.

(At the time of writing this,) co-creation sessions are scheduled to be organized by gemeente Rotterdam in collaboration with the Healthy Start project. At these moments an overarching approach can be further shaped and activated by taking the first steps together.

Lastly, perhaps the most important aspect in all further application and integration of new ideas, is that the learning process with supporting tools (but also other developed interventions or guidelines fostering youth participation) should never become the goal in itself, but only enable an iterative way to work towards overarching objectives based on shared values: i.e. policy making responsive to the needs of youth. Appropriate to each individual's character, it can thereby contribute to a learning municipal organization that is connected to its (young) residents.

"I think youth participation has to become more like a cultural norm. That awareness grows within the organisation. That policy advisors also just experience the added value first-hand and that it can have some kind of snowball effect."

Civil servant in managing position

8.3 Personal reflection

In my proposed learning approach of this project, experiences lead to reflections and intentions. Similarly, my whole project also offered myself numerous opportunities for self-reflection and the emergence of new intentions. Many of these reflections have been subtly incorporated into the above report, but some have a particularly personal nature that I would like to highlight here.

As a novice design student, I aimed to develop design skills to serve a particular user or client, placing humans at the center with underlying values of usability, growth, and controllability. Gradually this shifted, supported by courses, projects, and activities both within and outside (Delft) design faculties and study environments. I began to aspire to develop and apply design skills that serve people, society, and the world, with pressing questions: what are in this case the underlying values, and what could be my own role? This project made a valuable contribution to this discovery.

I came to understand more and more that the underlying values from which you design (and also, for example, create policies) are not universal and never will be: design is inherently political. Within municipalities' quest for more connection and mutual trust with young people, there will always be different opinions on the right way to approach this or on the goal in itself. During my observations and conversations with civil servants, I sometimes felt frustrated or disappointed when I saw or heard about practices that did not align with my somewhat idealized view of how society could be like.

Figure 61. Snapshots of me during the project.

However, the pragmatic, positive, and proactive attitudes of the civil servants involved in my project taught me that despite these obstacles, many things are possible. While dialogue, persuasion, and collaboration are essen tial, I learned that different attitudes and approaches will always exist and can coexist. Furthermore, by exposing myself to and seeking connection with aspects that initially frustrated me, I sometimes began to appreciate their value.

My experience as a designing action researcher sharpened my underlying values and role by being confronted with the enjoyable but sometimes complicated conflicts between design, research, and practice. Academic norms and (unwritten) rules brought moments of uncertainty and irritation because it was precisely the liberation from that academic urge for explainability that allowed me to work intuitively and pragmatically, in connection with reality. At the same time, I began to understand more clearly how strong reasoning with already existing underlying theory can strengthen the presentation, justification, and credibility of insights and narratives. Ultimately, value can be found by combining or transcending these disciplines, but even though I feel this may not be truly achievable, I think it could and should be striven for when dealing with societal challenges.

Finally, this project has deeply inspired me. During this project, which took place in the context of Rotterdam, I moved to Rotterdam myself. So, both in my own life and in the approach I took in this project, I engaged with the city, its people, and issues at hand. Through these experiences, I learned about the many different skills, strengths, and motivations that people possess and use to contribute to an enjoyable city. This inspires and motivates me to implement my grounded values in my own way, with the humility and openness to always continue learning and discovering.

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