



UNIVERSITETET I AGDER

Empowering Youth for Participation in Civic Engagement

An Ethnographic Study at an International Summer Camp

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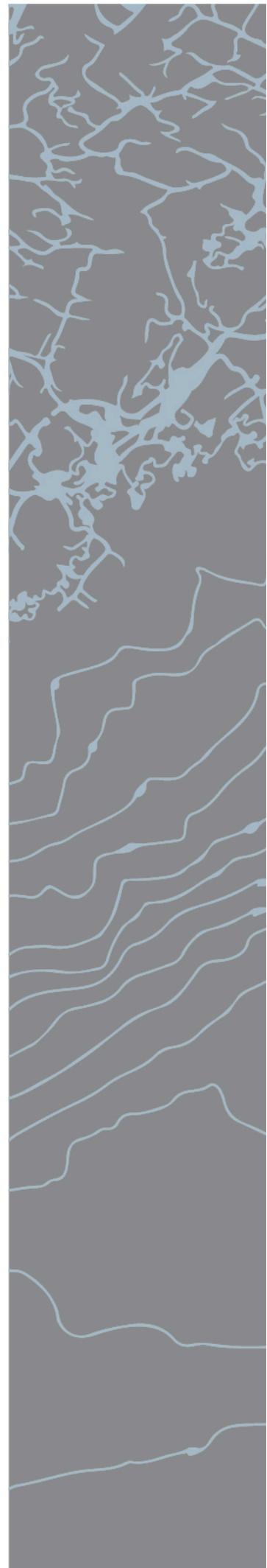


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1 Background

CISV is an international organization working towards peace and intercultural friendship among young people, with the objective to promote active global citizenships. For almost 70 years volunteers have organized a wide range of programs and camps for young people and adults in, and from, over 60 countries. I have been deeply involved in this organization for the past three years, contributing as leader and staff member in several programs and as a chapter board member. During my camp experiences I have been astonished by how resourceful and capable children and youth can be. I wanted to investigate the mechanisms behind the amazing occurrences within the camp setting. What makes them so eager to participate and share of themselves in this arena, whereas in other forums (e.g., political forums) they are an underrepresented group?

In September 2015, the United Nations adopted the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the year 2030, setting an ambition for a safe and sustainable future for everyone. The 17 goals provide a global framework for action, and governments, organizations and individuals everywhere are starting to act. However, a comprehensive report from 2016 states that none of the SDGs will be fulfilled within the deadline of 2030, unless efforts are significantly increased (DNV GL AS, 2016). Is it possible we could still reach some of the goals by dipping into a pool of unused resources? Could children be the necessary agents to change the world? After all, there are more young people in the world than ever before, states recent report from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2016).

Perhaps it is too ambitious to expect our children to save the world for us, but this is not the only reason behind the importance of youth participation. Child involvement, as summarised by Sinclair and Franklin (2000), can promote personal development, enhance self-esteem and help the children develop knowledge and practical skills. Moreover, child involvement can lead to more effective and relevant decisions more likely to be implemented. Services can be improved when children are given a level of influence that enables them to communicate their wants and needs. This way, democratic processes are strengthened, as children become more active members of the local community and society at large. Child involvement is also important in upholding children's right, fulfilling legal responsibilities, and in turn promoting children's protection (Sinclair & Franklin, 2000, pp. 1-2).

Admittedly, it might not always be in the best interest of children to have too much responsibility. While adults might be responsible for protection of children's best interests,

we must also consider preparing children and youth for what is to come. Their situation even more peculiar as “children are more fundamentally but less permanently powerless; their main remedy is to grow up” (O’Neill, 1992, p. 39). Soon they will be adults, real citizens, and the future of the world will at last be on their shoulders.

As this paper is connected to a bachelor’s degree in social work, I wish to clarify the relevance of the chosen theme. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) defines the guiding principles of social work to include social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities. The field of social work promotes social change and development and aims to engage people in addressing life challenges and enhance wellbeing (IFSW, 2014). Ensuring a diverse democracy where everyone is respected (and children are included as part of this democracy), upholding children’s rights (such as the right to protection and the right to participation), and promoting collective responsibility where children could be contributing, are all important challenges in social work practice. In addition, when engaging people in addressing life challenges we must remember adults are not the only ones faced with challenges. It is important to empower children and youth to overcome their own challenges, which might not be the same problems adults are facing.

The findings in this paper are based on an ethnographic study done at CISV Step Up Camp where I followed a group of thirty-six 14 year olds from nine different nations. The purpose was to describe youth participation during camp, to better understand the processes of youth empowerment through peace education, and to investigate indicators of civic engagement at camp. By exploring this, I hope to gain insight to how (some) youth of the world are currently being empowered to contribute in civic engagement, and additionally how CISV can improve in stimulating active global citizenships in future camps. Finally, because of the international setting in which the research was developed and the global issues it addresses, I have chosen the English language to communicate the content of this paper.

2 Conceptual Framework

2.1 Children and Youth

In many ways, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (UNCRC) exemplifies that the international community unanimously acknowledges the existents of oppression of children and youth. Consequently, separate rights for children are needed for them to be a part of the political agenda (Flem, 2015 p. 126). In UNCRC, four areas are especially emphasized: the right to survival, the right to development, the right to protection and the right to participation (UNICEF, 2014).

UNCRC (1989) defines children as all persons under 18 years. This broad definition allows protection and inclusion for all the children in the world. Hence, the term covers a diverse group. To start with, children's personal circumstances vary with regards to age, sex, ethnicity and culture. Children's levels of functioning and ability can vary, as well as their social and economic circumstances (Sinclair, 2004). Therefore, it is safe to assume that children will have different interests from one another. As I will discuss later, advocating for a group this diverse will bring some challenges. However, what differentiates this group from that of adults is how children's interests and capabilities inevitably change, as they grow older (Sinclair, 2004).

Several aspects are present when defining youth, such as developmental factors (e.g. puberty, psychological changes), cultural aspects (e.g. rites of passage), and political and legal aspects (e.g. age limits) (Svartdal & Tønnesson, 2013). UNESCO (2018) states: "Youth' is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group" (UNESCO, 2018). Therefore, the youth described in the prior research may refer to a large age span of youth compared to the youth in this study, being represented by 14-15 year olds.

2.1.1 Child Perspectives and Children's Perspectives

Ensuring the upholding of UNCRC can be demanding, as conflicting interests can occur within the UNCRC provisions. As will be discussed later, the child's need for protection and the child's rights of participation are not always easily unified. Moreover, who decides what is in the best interest of the child - adults or the children?

When adults take the perspective of protecting children's interests, promote their conditions and further investigate cultures created for children, they have a child perspective

(Halldén, 2003). According to Halldén (2003), a child perspective considers children's stand in society, what kind of experiences children have, and how children express these experiences. It also entails promoting children's interests. Nevertheless, a child perspective is characterized by adult's interpretation of children's conditions, experiences, perceptions and actions. By contrast, a child's perspective is not an interpretation by an adult into a social context defined by adults. A child's perspective is characterized by the child's own perspective on the conditions, experiences, perceptions and actions, based on what they find important (Halldén, 2003).

The perspective of adults can generally be said to take precedence over the child's perspective, according to the asymmetry naturally present in terms of power, knowledge, responsibility and authority (Christensen & James, 2008). Bourdillon (2004) explains different reasons why adults think they know best. Firstly, adults have a broader and longer life experience than children. Children can therefore be prejudiced and limited by their short experience. Furthermore, adults have a responsibility to prepare children for their future life, guide them to take a long-term perspective and protect them against harm and injury. In this way, we must recognise the limitations of children's knowledge and agency (Bourdillon, 2004). However, it is important to note that adult perspectives and knowledge can be flawed as well. We must therefore separate when adults actually know best and when children can decide for themselves (Bourdillon, 2004).

Halldén (2003) considers that a participant perspective is a way to deal with the issues this asymmetry represents. In order to relate to the child as a participant, it is essential to attempt to gain access to the child's perspective and experience. Furthermore, to be able to relate to the child's perspective depends on a good relationship developed through the meeting with the child. Still, the child perspective contains something beyond reflecting the child's perspective on different phenomena; it promotes action for upholding children's rights (Halldén, 2003). The responsibility of adults and society is emphasized throughout the UNCRC. When working with children's rights, it is necessary to mobilize not only children but also adults, who must take responsibility to engage and ensure that voices of children are heard. Both perspectives are required to perceive and encounter children as equal human beings (Sommer et al., 2010).

2.1.2 Becoming and Being

As we will discover in this paper there are reservations against accepting children as "real" citizens. Different views on childhood are also present in the literature. White (2002)

surveys some of these views in her article. The first view sees the child as a pre-social savage. In order to develop appropriately, strict discipline is required. The second sees the child as innocent and in need of protection. The third view focus on stages of development where adult training is crucial. In all these approaches, adults hold considerable power, but yield it in different ways. A fourth approach considers childhood as a sub-culture, with its own distinctive logic and meanings. To gain insight, it needs to be understood in children's own terms. White (2002) states that the dominant approach is to see children as 'becoming', rather than 'being'. In this view, she says, "children are unfinished products, and inspire interest not so much for what they are intrinsically, but for the sake of the adults they will become" (White, 2002, p. 1096).

Arneil (2002) points out some consequences of the 'becoming' view of childhood. She claims that when childhood is seen as a condition where intellectual, physical, and moral capacities are undeveloped, this will in turn exclude children as members of the society. In the extreme, children are born without rights, and without possession of rights throughout their entire childhood, that is until they come of age. Arneil (2002) concludes that the child must be viewed as a 'being', as the child is now, and not in relation to a future self, someone 'becoming' (Arneil 2002, p. 88). This view is also supported by UNICEF (2011), stating in their report that:

This quintile of the global populace is commonly referred to as the 'next generation' of adults, the 'future generation' or simply 'the future'. But adolescents are also firmly part of the present – living, working, contributing to households, communities, societies and economies. (pp. 4–7).

Thus, there is a clean distinction between childhood and adulthood. Adults are characterized as fully autonomous agents who have fully developed moral sense and have reached the end of their cognitive development, whereas children are still under development (Kennedy, 2006). This deficit view of childhood, as Kennedy describes it, implies that the state, constituted and legitimized by adults, accepts an end-point for the moral development of its citizens (Kennedy, 2006). Furthermore, it systematically discredits particular universal features of humanity, implying that dependency and growth are characteristics of childhood only (Kennedy, 2006).

White (2002) proposes that rather than viewing adults and children as two fixed categories; both adults and children can be seen as 'being' and 'becoming' at the same time. Human beings negotiate their present in relation to their past selves and in response to encounter with others (White, 2002). Indeed, Arneil (2002) states that "a universal characteristic of childhood is dependency and its correlating need for care: part of being a child is to be dependent upon others, necessitating care from adults" (p. 88). Løgstrup (1956) uses a similar example. However, he continues to explain how this is true for all relationship in which we, humans, deal with one another. Løgstrup (1956) illustrate this human interdependence by saying "an individual never has something to do with another person without him holding something of their life in his hands" (p. 25).

2.2 Participation

Children's right to participation is protected by UNCRC (1989). Still, what constitutes participation? UNCRC (1989) participation rights include the right to express opinions and be heard, the right to information and freedom of association. Thus, children are entitled to the freedom to express opinions and to have a say in matters affecting their social, economic, religious, cultural and political life (UNICEF, 2014). Furthermore, article 12 emphasises that children should have enough information to form an opinion and that this opinion should be considered in decision-making processes. It does, however, not clarify that children should have the power to actually make the decision. This power still lies with the adults.

2.2.1 Levels of Participation

Several theorists have postulated participation as a concept with different levels. Commonly implemented, is Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969). She outlines eight levels for public participation corresponding to the extent of citizen power. The lower levels, such as manipulation and therapy, represent powerlessness. The middle levels, consultation and placation, represent a symbolic or limited influence, whereas the higher levels, such as partnership, delegated power and citizen control, represent a real participation with different degrees of citizen power. However, the important thing here is the interaction between the powerful and the powerless. Why give up the power, Arnstein (1969) asks. She observed that 'since those who have power normally want to hang on to it, historically it has to be wrestled by the powerless rather than proffered by the powerful' (p.216).

Others have since adapted Arnstein's work. Applied to a child context, Hart's (1992) 'Ladder of Participation' is the most cited, ranging from 'manipulation' to 'children sharing

decisions with adults'. According to Hart (1992), to be truly participatory, four requirements must be met:

- 1) Children must understand the intention of the project
- 2) Children must know who make decisions regarding their own involvement of why they are involved
- 3) Children must have a meaningful (rather than 'decorative') role, and
- 4) Children must voluntarily participate after the project has been made clear for them.

2.2.2 Roles for Participation

The ladder approaches to participation have received criticism for implying higher levels are better, and climbing to the next rung is possible in order to reach the top (Sinclair, 2004). This is not always the case. Different circumstances might call for different levels of child participation. In addition, these models give a simplistic representation of reality. Boundaries between different levels are not as easy to differentiate in real life, and they are far from being mutually exclusive (Sinclair, 2004). Reddy and Ratna (2002) shares this view and proposed a modified version of Hart's (1992) ladder of participation. They stress how children's participation can either be facilitated or constricted by the adult, and children's participation is in fact dependent on the role of adults. By proposing a 'role' approach, rather than a 'ladder' approach, they argue "it is possible that the same group of adults play one or several of these roles with the same group of children or different groups of children at different times" (Reddy & Ratna p. 31). Reddy and Ratna's (2002, p. 29-30) model contains 13 roles that adults can play either intentionally or unintentionally in facilitating or hindering children's participation, ranging from negative roles for participation to positive roles for participation:

- 1) Active resistance: Adults who actively resist children's participation. This could be due to the 'deficit' views on childhood as describes by Kennedy (2006), or the fear of losing power to children.
- 2) Hindrance: Adults overtly or covertly block opportunities and discourage children from participating, or interact with them in a way that hinders their participation.
- 3) Manipulation: Adults who use children to further their own agenda. Adults can coach or interpret children in a way to best suit themselves. Sometimes this is done

‘in the best interest of the child’, according to the adults. Even the best child facilitators may end up manipulating children unintentionally and unconsciously, so it is important to be constantly vigilant.

- 4) Decoration: Adults who treat children more or less like decorative objects, for instance with making them present bouquets or preform a song.
- 5) Tokenism: Adults who pretend children have been given opportunities to participate in order to use their presence to be counted as advocates of children’s rights and to be politically correct.
- 6) Tolerance: Adults who bear with the notion of children’s participation to please someone above them, or to ‘entertain’ children who have demanded to be listened to.
- 7) Indulgence: Adults may listen attentively to the opinions expressed by children and find them ‘interesting’ or ‘cute’, but may not follow them up with seriousness.
- 8) Children assigned but informed: Adults decide what to be done, but keep the children informed, and encourage them to be actively involved.
- 9) Children consulted and informed: Adults take the lead, but inform the children and seek their opinion. Thus, children have a sense of ownership, but under adult supervision.
- 10) Adult initiated, shared decisions with children: Adults initiate a program, but are willing to share decision with the children, making it a joint effort.
- 11) Children initiated, shared decisions with adults: Children (and their organisations) initiate the program, and invite adult to collaborate with them. Children ensure shared ownership of the process and outcome.
- 12) Children initiated and directed: Children (and their organisations) are in total control of the process and outcome. They choose to involve adults or not.
- 13) Jointly initiated and directed by children and adults: Mutually respectful partnership where both children and adults are empowered. They have joint ownership of the idea, the process and the outcome.

2.2.3 Issues with Child Participation

Common criticisms of children and youth participation are often paradoxical (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013). On one hand, the children and youth should represent their own interest and those of other children and youth. On the other, the adults expect them to adhere to the rules of the adults and act accordingly. If children act too much as a child, the grown-ups will

accuse them of rudeness and may think to replace the children participants. However, if the youth participants act according to adult rules, they can find themselves criticised for acting “adult-like” and not be a good representative for the children. This highlights again that the role of the adults are of utmost importance in the facilitation of young people’s participation. Adults need to accommodate the children in the public sphere in order to let them engage efficiently (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013). In addition, participation can benefit the most outspoken and resourceful citizens more than other groups (Thyness, 2004). Can we expect ‘powerful’ groups to exercise solidarity with vulnerable groups, especially if they have different interests? Thyness (2004) give warning about the possibility of the weakest groups becoming more invisible in the empowerment process, and stresses the importance of a spokesperson to ensure equal participation within a community.

2.3 Empowerment

Adu-Gyamfi (2013) argues that even in cases where participation leads to increased self-confidence, it might not lead to empowered children. What it leads to, he discovered, was reports of children's positive development of individual identity, a sense of responsibility, a sense of belonging in the community, and a feeling that they can improve things or make a difference, in addition to growth in confidence and self-esteem (Adu-Gyamfi, 2013). When adults are in control of the decision-making, children will be unable of empowerment, as they cannot yield any power against the adults. In fact, Adu-Gyamfi (2013) states that through participatory initiatives, children and youth only gain recognition and a chance to form a dialogue with adults, not empowerment. Hence, the process of getting children to participate is in and of itself not enough to empower them. Steps need to be taken in order to ensure empowerment.

2.3.1 Definition of Empowerment

Empowerment is a widely used term. Its multifaceted and highly applicable nature makes it a keyword in different domains, organisations and businesses. The popularity of the word might be related to the positive associations of strength, force and power, and other words like confidence, competence and control (Askheim & Starrin, 2007). World Health Organization (WHO, 1998) have proposed the following definition:

Empowerment may be a social, cultural, psychological or political process through which individuals and social groups are able to express their needs, present their

concerns, devise strategies for involvement in decision-making, and achieve political, social and cultural action to meet those needs. Through such a process people see a closer correspondence between their goals in life and a sense of how to achieve them, and a relationship between their efforts and life outcomes. (p. 6).

Still, we find ambiguous definitions and understandings of the empowerment concept. Askheim and Starrin (2007) have done extensive research on the empowerment concept and offers three directions of understanding. These include empowerment as the establishment of counter power, a market-oriented approach, and a therapeutic approach.

2.3.2 Empowerment as the Establishment of Counter-Power

Essential for this approach, is the relationship between the individual and the structured societal conditions (Askheim & Starrin, 2007). In this direction, the first dimension put responsibilities mainly on the structural conditions, pointing out the processes needed for giving power in whatever ways possible (e.g., resources, education, political and self-awareness). Thus, the structural dimension deals with barriers, power relations and the social context the individual is in. The other dimension focus on processes of increasing interpersonal, or political power so that individuals can take action to improve their own life situation. The goal for the individual dimension may include greater control over one's own life, better self-esteem, increased knowledge and skills. The core of this approach is to strengthen individuals or groups in order for them to change the conditions for their powerless situation. To succeed in the process of transferring power, individual, political and educational resources, and the relationship among these, are important elements (Askheim & Starrin, 2007).

2.3.3 Market-Oriented Approach of Empowerment

In this approach, empowerment is used to describe the individual freedom to choose between different services, and refers to the consumer's rights and power to control the market through supply and demand (Askheim & Starrin, 2007). Consequently, consumer control ensures equality, empowerment and justice in society through a market where everyone should have the freedom to meet their individual needs such as one wish and find appropriate. Questions are being raised on how the market will manage to take care of the needs of marginalized groups. They do not constitute an important marked factor, and their

financial resources are often limited. Despite the fact that the two approaches, counter-power and market-oriented approach have different theoretical bases and different consequences, they exist side by side in many societies today (Askheim & Starrin, 2007).

2.3.4 Therapeutic Approach of Empowerment

The focus on individual self-realization to reduce problems to mental phenomena without regard for social or structural factors makes the concept of power non-existent in this approach (Askheim & Starrin, 2007). The coping term is often associated with this approach, and describes the ability to handle challenges. This perspective focus on new possibilities and discover unused resources instead of deficiencies or problems. It also equates the professional's knowledge with that of the client. The strength perspective of empowerment emphasizes giving someone means of opportunity and power. Thus, it also requires action and power transfer from one person to another. Empowerment also occurs as a cost-reducing concept, the goal being that a strengthened patient becomes less dependent on health care, more self-propelled and thus cheaper for society (Askheim & Starrin, 2007).

To conclude, empowerment can be viewed as a theory, principle, perspective, and as both a means and a goal of itself. It challenges our understanding of children and humanity. In working with youth civic engagement, Checkoway and Aldana (2013) state that we must assume “that young people are competent citizens and community builders rather than problems in society and recipients of services” (p. 1897). They should participate actively with real influence in decisions, not just their passive presence as token members of adult agencies.

2.4 Civic engagement

Children hold certain civic and social rights, but are excluded from most political rights, such as the right to vote. This might be one of the reasons why children are often left out of discussions about citizenship and democracy (Kjørholt, 2008). Regardless of age, engaging in civic activities benefits both the individual and the context (Bobek, Zaff, Li, & Lerner, 2009). In addition, youth are strategically situated for civic engagement (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013). Youth are predisposed to social justice; they know when something is unfair. They are searching for social identities in order to integrate their own interests with that of the society. In this task, they are searching for role models. They are curious about the social environment and are concerned with fairness and equality (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013).

Admittedly, giving children rights as citizens is not unproblematic. The issues communities and the world are facing today are not easy tasks to solve. Some have warned against the danger of placing a heavy burden on children's shoulders, especially in cases where the children are the ones who should be given care and protection (Kjørholt, 2008). However, youth civic engagement is brought forward as essential for the quality of democratic life, as emphasised in academic, educational and political discourse (Ferreira, Azevedo, & Menezes, 2012). It is crucial to unite citizen rights for children and the right to protection and development, thus, creating environments to ensure both participation and good life quality for children (Kjørholt, 2008).

2.4.1 What is Civic Engagement?

In their article, Adler and Goggin (2005) reviewed existing definitions of civic engagement. They discovered different specific and broad definitions. Among the specific definitions, civic engagement was viewed as ranging from community service, collective action, political involvement and social change. The broad definitions of civic engagement include both individual and collective actions towards identifying and addressing issues of public concern, both directly and through working with others. Some of the broad definitions also include informal social activities as well as formal activities. Adler and Goggin (2005) conclude there is no single, widely agreed-upon meaning for the term, and proposed this useful definition:

Civic engagement describes how an active citizen participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future. (Adler & Goggin, 2005, p. 241).

Amnå (2012) states that Adler and Goggin have made progress by suggesting the previous definition, but stresses that such a definition may put too much emphasis on local issues. He is also concerned with the focus mostly on measurable activities. Amnå argues that "Generally, civic engagement deals with values, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, knowledge, skills and behaviors concerned with conditions outside the immediate environment of family and friends" (Amnå, 2012 p. 613). He goes on to explain how civic engagement can be expressed in various acts in different spheres, such as the public, market, civil, and personal sphere.

Furthermore, civic engagement is expressed in the integrated sphere of life and politics represented by eating, clothing, reading and jamming choices (Amnå, 2012).

To summarize, we can see that civic engagement can be understood at three interconnected levels (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013):

- 1) The individual level: concerned with identity, wellbeing and socialization.
- 2) The interpersonal level: concerned with social capital and social connections.
- 3) In society at large: concerned with social change, democracy and rights.

2.4.2 Development of Civic Engagement

Bobek et al. (2009, p. 616) have reviewed literature on the development of civic engagement in youth. It is suggested that in order for individual to be active and engaged citizens, four interrelated constructs may be necessary:

- 1) Social cohesion: sense of generalized reciprocity, trust, and bonding to others.
- 2) Civic skills: ability to be involved in civil society and democracy.
- 3) Civic commitment: desire and mind-set to make positive contributions to society
- 4) Civic action: participation in activities for the betterment of one's community

The arenas in which youth can develop into active and engaged citizens are commonly referred in the literature as: family, schools, peers, and associational life (Amnå, 2012). Additionally, Checkoway and Aldana (2013) points out that the forms in which youth practice civic engagement vary in accordance with our diverse democracy. Inequalities among groups demand different orientations to power, varying from established institutional power to power derived from building groups and relations between people (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013).

2.4.3 Uncivil Sides of Civic Engagement

The academic community has extensively explored the benefits of participation. However, prior studies have failed to identify the negative results of participation, with a few exceptions (Ferreira et al., 2012). The outcome of the development of civic engagement is an open question, Amnå (2012) states. He admits that such development can lead to “more engaged citizens, who peacefully support their current governments and regimes, or to

citizens who violently attempt to discard their leaders and challenge political stability” (p. 617). In the literature, the term civic engagement is often considered a synonym of prosocial behaviour (Marzana, Marta, & Pozzi, 2012). However, the root of civic engagement does not spring from peace and harmony. It is a reaction to social injustice and a wish for change. Considering democratic dilemmas, we must be aware that youth involvement may produce negative social norms and intolerant attitudes (Amnå, 2012).

3 About CISV and the Step Up Program

3.1 CISV – Peace Education

CISV is an organization for children and youth working toward peace, intercultural cooperation and understanding (CISV International, 2018). For almost 70 years volunteers have organized a wide range of programs for young people and adults in, and from, over 60 countries (CISV International, 2018). With intent to promote inclusion, social justice, non-violent resolutions to conflict and sustainable development, the programs use experiential learning to provide the participants with the attitudes, skills and knowledge (ASK) they need to become agents of change (CISV International, 2009). Peace education encourages participants to do, reflect, generalize and apply the ASKs accumulated throughout the program (CISV International, 2009). The mission statement “CISV educates and inspires action for a more just and peaceful world” reflects the focus on empowering children and youth to achieve their full potential and to play an active role in creating a better world both locally and globally, in other words, to become active global citizens (CISV International, 2018; CISV International, 2009).

3.2 The Step Up Program

The Step Up program brings together 36 youths from nine different nations to a camp with the duration of three weeks (CISV International, n.d.). The 14 and 15 year olds, with support from the leaders and the host staff will be responsible for running the camp on their own. This includes but is not limited to: setting the schedule, calling camp meetings, developing the camp theme, contributing with content, and ensure progress and inclusion. The goal of developing leadership skills is very important for the Step Up program. Through adult facilitation, the participants are encouraged to actively, creatively and responsibly participate in planning and decision-making processes. There is a strong expectation that the participants will contribute in the planning and running of the activities, contribute in group discussion

and evaluations and to suggest solutions to conflicts (at camp, in their own community and in the world) (CISV International, n.d.).

The program should also provide an opportunity for the participants to build self-esteem and stimulate critical thinking (CISV Norge, 2018). By leading the daily program with minimal assistance from adult leaders, the youths can develop more self-understanding. This can also be accomplished through expressing independent ideas to promote the group and camp development and through contributing to the discussion by sharing personal feelings and thoughts. The program also wants to give young people a chance to live in a peaceful community where they can learn the value of caring for others. Through developing cooperative skills the youths will be given the chance to help others feel included in the group, and see the benefits they achieve by working with other participants. An overall goal for all CISV programs is to develop an intercultural awareness. Sharing their own culture and listening to others can help them understand and appreciate other cultures, including their own (CISV Norge, 2018). The program encourages participants to transfer all this learning to their local communities and environment after the program ends (CISV International, n.d.)

4 Methodology

4.1 Research questions

Based on the research in the previous section, it can be concluded that for youth to actually be able to have an impact on the world, adults must view them as competent citizens. Organizations all over the world, CISV included, are working towards this goal. Through participation and empowerment processes, the youth might gain the necessary attitudes, skills and knowledge to challenge the powers of adulthood. Thus, contributing to the world in a way that is yet to be discovered. The purpose of this ethnographic study was to understand the processes within a CISV Step Up Program that stimulates active global citizenships. More specifically, exploring the processes of participation and empowerment at camp as a prerequisite for the development of civic engagement in the delegates.

The main research question is as follows:

In what ways do the CISV Step Up program strengthen youth participation and empower youth in civic engagement?

In addition, three sub-questions are presented:

Q1: In what degree did the youth participate and how?

Q2: What mechanisms of empowerment could be observed?

Q3: What indicators of civic engagement were present?

4.2 Qualitative Design

A qualitative design is characterised by descriptions of people's daily life and their real-life experiences. The descriptions should be as rich and detailed as possible to provide a clear picture of the situation or experience (Howitt, 2013). Qualitative research is often done in fields with limited knowledge to develop new theories and research questions (Howitt, 2013). The current research consists of two parts: a literature search and an ethnographic study. Following a hermeneutical approach, the findings in this paper are based on my own interpretation of the phenomenon observed, construed by my own experiences and understanding.

4.2.1 Literature Search

Data collection was mainly based on searching, selecting, analysing and interpreting exciting research and literature on the topic and surrounding areas. The database Google Scholar was used in order to gain an overview from several disciplines. Most applicable proved to be social work, political science, developmental psychology, social pedagogy and multidisciplinary literature. Search words included: empowerment, civic engagement, social impact, participation, strengthen, children, youth, involvement, and different combinations of these. In this process source criticism was a central part of the inclusion selection. The requirements consisted of peer review and impact factor/citations. Overview articles were prioritised, as well as established/classic articles. Primary sources were reviewed and used whenever possible. CISV specific content was discovered at cisv.org.

4.2.2 Ethnography

Ethnography refers to a broad strategy for collecting data in a field setting. It involves collecting a variety of different sorts of data pertinent to answering the research question. Through participant observation, where the researchers involves themselves extensively and

in depth within a group or community, one can better understand the operation of a naturally occurring group, community or culture (Howitt, 2013).

4.2.2.1 Preparations for Fieldwork

I started planning this project in early 2017, following the 11 steps for conducting ethnography outlined by Howitt (2013). I had a general idea about the theme and where I wanted to do the field study. Applications had to be filed and approved by CISV International. As part of this process, I started reviewing the theoretical background and defined what was to be addressed in the observation process. In November of 2017 the research received final approval and the field study was to start by the end of December 2017.

A major part of the final preparations was to define my role as both researcher and delegation leader at the camp. As a complete participant observer it was crucial to fulfil my role as a leader, giving me a natural gateway to the community. Even so, being a leader takes a lot of effort and energy. Consequently, my focus and time spent towards the research could suffer as a result of my responsibilities as a leader. On one hand, my position as a leader would give me an unique opportunity to gather the information necessary for my research, without the participants feeling like test-subjects. On the other, it could limit my ability to assume a critical position. By reflecting on past camp experiences and my own preconceptions, I would hopefully become more aware of the possible challenges I might encounter during this project.

4.2.2.2 Procedure

Data were collected over the three-week duration of the camp. Direct observation as a participant in the life of the group was the main source of data. This included for instance specific events, interactions between the participants (among the delegates, and between youths and adults), conversation topics in and outside activities, other non-verbal forms of expression (music-requests, clothing, food choices), and collective discussions regarding social and contemporary issues, which was well integrated in the camp structure. In addition to observations, I also conducted informal interviews with participants in order to gain more insight in view of certain situations. Moreover, I developed a deeper connection with some of the delegates who could to some extent be seen as key informants, helping me get more insight to the adult-free forums at camp.

Extensive field notes were normally written down twice a day, during siesta and after bedtime. The end of each note-taking session ended with a few minutes of re-reading the last

entry, reflecting on the content and a self-analysis. On some occasions, if something particularly interesting happened, or someone had a specific comment, I sometimes wrote it down immediately in order for the wording not to change in my memory during the day.

4.3 Participants

Participants in this study all attended the same Step Up camp. The delegates aged 14-15 years, leaders over 21 years and staff member over 19 years of age. 10 different nationalities were represented at the camp, from four different continents. The male/female ratio was close to 50/50.

4.4 Ethics

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, no personal identifiers were collected for the data material. For the published version, where my own identity is known, some of this information can be tied to me indirectly through social media. Therefore, it was crucial for my data collection to have a group focus in my observation and not single out individuals. Thus, the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) did not require notification. CISV International, as well as the host chapter had to approve the research, and all the leaders were informed beforehand.

4.5 Analysis

One of the most common forms of analysis in qualitative research is thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is used to organize a data set of rich descriptions. It allows for the subjective human experience to unfold by giving a voice to the other. Thematic analysis is used to identify patterns or themes within the data. These themes are related to the research question, and are important for describing a phenomenon. They should be broad enough to summarise the content of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

I started with getting familiarized with the written data through reading and rereading my journal. I continued by generating initial codes of the interesting parts of the field notes. The codes were given a description explaining the content of the extract. Among the codes, I searched for themes. I asked myself which descriptions seemed to belong together and could benefit from being seen as one theme. After the first round, I had several smaller themes. When reviewing them in the next round, fewer and broader themes arose. The reviewing of the themes went on for more rounds, continuing to define and name themes that made sense in and of their own, in addition to being relevant to the research questions.

5 Results

Altogether, the analysis revealed a total of five core themes. These themes describe the full spectrum of the observations done at camp, illustrated with a few characteristic incidents. Stepping Up, Safe Space, Spokesperson, Adult power and Personal Expression are seemingly all connected to youth participation and empowerment for future civic engagement. Additional scenarios portraying smaller incidents will be added in the discussion.

5.1 Stepping Up

The first important theme covers the aspect of possibility for youth participation. At a Step Up, youth are enabled and encouraged to participate as equal members of the camp community. They are responsible for all aspects of running the camp (schedule, activities, keeping a safe social and physical environment, etc.). In order to make this happen, the leaders chose to counteract the inherent power imbalance between children and adults as well as between delegates and leaders. The leaders gave a declaration to the delegates, telling them that 'we are handing the power and responsibility over to you, this is your camp'.

Decisions-making forums included the 'camp meeting'. During the course of three weeks, two such meetings were held (whereas leaders and staffs had meetings once a day). Observation during the first youth-led meeting uncovered a show of hands voting system without a tally or anonymity. Further information and facilitation was given to the youth towards aspects for running a camp (schedule, rules, etc.) and how to make sure everyone is included (voicing and asking opinions, voting, etc.). A series of issues arose showing that not all the delegates used this opportunity to its full extent, as will be disclosed in the next themes.

5.2 Spokesperson

Some delegates had concerns about certain decisions being made at the camp meeting and (lacking) implementation of these. Their response was to consult the leaders. In turn, the leaders encouraged them to call a new camp meeting to voice their opinions, suggesting anonymous notes and voting. The importance being that decisions reflected the will of all the participants at camp (including leaders and staff) and not the ones who had the strongest voices in the discussions.

Notably, some delegates were not comfortable sharing their opinions and thoughts in bigger groups. In order to empower the youth to participate to a fuller extent, planning groups were encouraged to make more groups with fewer members. The observed changes being an

atmosphere more likely to stimulate balanced contributions in the groups, especially when receiving outside facilitation from leaders or planning group members. In turn, the opinions and creative solutions made by the smaller groups were presented in plenary, often by a group leader role, or a presentation where all the members contributed equally. In cases of language barriers (the camp language is English, and most of the delegations were not native English speakers), the leaders also played an important role. By formulating thoughts in a native language it was easier for the delegates to form an opinion and express their viewpoints.

5.3 Adult Power

A large number of observed incidents related to disagreements between the youth and the adults, the adults seemingly had the so-called 'last word'. To illustrate, curfew and bedtime was a subject of debate. The adults discussed whether to give the delegates 'free reins' and see what they do, or to set some restrictions in order to prevent them from 'digging their own grave'. During the camp meeting where the schedule was to be set, the adults did not participate in the discussion or voting. When it was suggested to place the leaders meeting during siesta, the leaders looked at each other with unease. The consequences of no siesta, in addition to a late curfew, meant possible sleep deprivation for the adults. After the leaders commented: "we are human too", a compromise was reached.

Afterwards, the leaders discussed feeling as a lesser priority at camp. That, combined with several youth complaining to their leaders about the schedule, may have contributed to the leaders intervening. Instead of pulling back, letting the youth figure out everything themselves, the leaders started providing information about group dynamics and the importance of democracy and inclusiveness.

5.4 Safe Space

When asked what CISV has given them, many delegates commented on CISV being a safe space where they could just be themselves. Identity and figuring out who you are, was a recurring conversation topic initiated by the youth. In some cases, when delegates reported feeling insecure, it could limit their participation and involvement. Especially 'free time' was challenging for some. This seemed to motivate them to seek comfort and validation with a fellow delegate or leader. Over the course of the camp it was an unmistakable transformation in the group. The youth become more aware of their social identity, found a place in the group, and in turn felt safer and wanted to share more of their feelings, opinions and experiences.

Considering the current affairs being deliberated, as well as taboo issues and the diverse cultural aspect of the group, the safe space was imperative for the heavy group discussions following numerous activities. It was possible to explore different points of view in a respectful manner and obtain more information about a topic. Thus earning a foundation to form, or even change, opinions. Nevertheless, by the end of the camp some leaders expressed that we might have created too safe of an atmosphere. This comment was related to the discovery of possible mental health issues among several youths during a deep activity. This was a serious issue in which the leaders might not have the expertise to follow up on, and still had to find a way to deal with in the short amount of time remaining at camp.

5.5 Personal Expression

The final theme identified was related to the individuality of the participants, as well as the camp's own signature culture. Much of the variation could be observed in statement clothing, showing protest against specific issues or giving the impression of a certain political standpoint. A number of the youth shared reflective thoughts on what they choose to eat and drink or abstain from. When an issue of interest appeared in an activity, the youth's who had knowledge and passion about the particular issue shared this enthusiastically with the group. Observations of these incidents state that the room was more quiet, indicating the youth paid closer attention than the other youth. As for music choices, some delegates listened to music with a social message, while other delegates made it a point to listen to music with explicit language and thus defying agreed upon rules of the camp.

Every morning and evening the camp stands in a circle, singing the CISV song. After every meal, everyone jumps and sings a 'thanks for the food' song. Every night, the camp gathers on mattresses on the floor, singing lullabies before going to sleep. Clothing featuring the CISV logo and quotes about peace, friendship, and other related subjects are visible in the camp culture. CISV merchandise is also used as a camp currency, being traded with other participants.

6 Discussion

The evidence seems to indicate that the youths participated in various degrees and in different ways. This was expected due to the diversity of the group. In the beginning, the youths displayed different strategies for voicing their opinions (e.g. in big or small groups, spontaneous, when asked, or through a leader). By the end of camp, more youth seemed comfortable sharing their thoughts in bigger groups. Those who took a larger space at the start

of camp gave room for others to step up. The youths also showed different areas of involvement or interest (e.g. feminism, sports, LGBTQ+ rights, indigenous people, finding a partner, international politics, food, sustainable development). When a topic of special interest was presented, a handful of youths who knew a lot about the topic, shared their knowledge with the rest of the group. Particularly activities with a clear personal content increased the entire groups commitment to participate.

From this study, it became apparent that adult input seemed to play an important part in empowering the youth. This was key for providing the youth with the skills and knowledge they needed in order to form opinions and attitudes about the state of the world today. In the daily running of the camp, the adults willingly gave up some of their power to the youth. By creating a safe atmosphere in camp, the youths received information from different viewpoints as well as being able to share and form their own. Thus, the youth were treated as competent citizens, able to debate the rights and wrongs of the world.

One especially important phenomenon was the personal expressions in which the youth made statements. Everything from eating habits, clothing and music preferences illuminated the individual differences among the youth, opening up for various ways to participate and sharing of oneself. Still, it was possible to recognize a unifying culture within the CISV clothing, classical songs about peace, war and friendship, and other CISV traditions. It is possible that for the youth to be themselves, and still be a part of something bigger, the youth gain an emerging understanding on how they could contribute in the world.

6.1 To What Extent Did the Youth Participate?

Following Harts (1992) requirements for participation, the youth participating in the Step Up program had been made aware of CISV's mission and the program guidelines in training prior to camp. As to their level of understanding, interviews conducted during camp deduced that most of the youth concentrate on building global friendship. Even though they planned activities to cover certain program specific objectives, how deeply they reflected on these varied across the group. Thus, also knowing why they are involved and who makes decision regarding their own involvement. As discussed previously, the data revealed some inconsistencies in the decision-making, and how much influence the youth actually had. Still, most decisions were based on a mutual partnership between youth and adults. The youth are the core of the program and therefore had an undisputedly meaningful role. Lastly, all participation in CISV programs is based on consent. To conclude, Harts (1992) requirements

for participation are met within the current camp. In the following section, I will investigate to what extent the youth participation unfolded.

Based on the roles of participation by Reddy and Ratna (2002) it is possible to recognize several of these in the camp participation. The youths and adults were outwardly equal members of the camp. However, the evidence revealed inconsistent and surprising power-relations between youths and adults. The camp in and of itself can be said to be adult-initiated, though it has clear guidelines for youth involvement. From the point where the adults 'handed over' the camp to the youth, the program had the potential to be children initiated and directed, also following the Step Up guidelines of minimal assistance from adults. In the first camp meeting the adults did not even partake in the decision-making process. Nonetheless, this was by the choice of the adults, not the youth. Additionally, the results show contradictorily strategies among the youth for involving the adults. Because of the lacking unanimity within the delegate group, the adults decided to take more control of the process. Therefore, the camp seemed to transition into an adult initiated, shared decision with children phase. Since the program is dependant on youth participation and the role of the adults was to facilitate this, the adults were clearly willing to share the decision making space with the youth, as showed in the camp meetings.

Still, what made the adults step in to provide more protection for one group and leave the other group without real decision-making power? True enough, some youths asked the adults for assistance in this matter, inviting them to join. However, this was just after the leaders reported on the difficulties in giving up power. On one hand, the results can be interpreted as the adults protecting a marginalized group. On the other hand, it can be viewed as taking advantage of an opportunity to justify getting the power back. If it turned out the latter is correct, the adults would be guilty in imposing negative roles to the youth participation. Another possible interpretation could be that some of the youth knowingly used the adults as tools to get their way, when the rest of group was seemingly indifferent to their opinions. Depending on the standpoint, the youth participation can be said to range from: manipulation (where both adults and youths!) could be said to use the other to further their own agenda; tolerance or indulgence, when adults give the youth total control over the decision-making processes, only to overwrite their decisions at a later point; or working towards a jointly initiated and directed by children and adults.

The youth-adult relationship developed over the course of the camp. As the delegate group became more unified, it was easier to create a useful partnership between adults and

youth. Moreover, as the group got to know each other better, especially in the planning groups, the youths and adults could tap into the others strengths to achieve their common task.

Regardless, in order to make the partnership possible, both sides must be empowered. According to Adu-Gyamfi (2013), this implies if the youth are unable to yield any power over the adults, they are not empowered. This makes me wonder – does reaching a compromise constitute as yielding power? It certainly shows how the youth had the possibility to express their opinions and be heard in situations affecting them, as stated in the UNCRC. Thus, in order to know if the jointly initiated and directed by children and adults is a possibility, it is crucial to consider the ways in which the youth may or may not have been empowered.

6.2 Was the Youth Empowered?

Adu-Gyamfi's (2013) statement of yielding power over someone in order to be empowered is problematic when trying to unify it with the statement of dependency by Reddy and Ratna (2002). They underline the assumption that children's roles are in fact dependant of the role of adults. Does that make empowerment of children impossible? Yet, when supplying different definitions of empowerment, another conclusion is attainable. Following WHO's (1998) definition of empowerment, the observations confirm the youth's ability to express their needs and concerns. Additionally, they devised strategies for involvement in decision-making (e.g. using the camp meeting or consulting the leaders).

As seen in the topic of bedtime, the leaders were left frustrated that the youth did not care about bigger issues, and only thought about themselves. However, the leaders were also guilty in caring a great deal about this issue, hence the argument. The two groups had different priorities at camp. This begs the question, when the youth's wants was not a perfect match with that of the adults or the programs intention was the adults to fast to rule it as something to be avoided? This can also be seen in context with the rebellious acts in music. On one hand, this could be interpreted as the youth not being mature enough to contribute in a respectful manner. On the other, it could be a consequence of lacking ownership to the camp and decisions being made. Within this frame, the transformation during camp can also be a result of the development in the leaders group and their ability to further empower the delegate group as a whole.

6.3 Can the Youth Develop a Sense of Civic Engagement?

The observations generated evidence supporting the possibility of developing a sense of civic engagement at camp as portrayed by Bobek et al. (2009). In terms of social cohesion,

the unfolding of a safe space and efforts given towards an inclusive camp environment has precedence here. The youth's willingness to share personal problems during the last activities can also be seen as an indicator of high levels of trust in the group. In addition, the several characteristic camp traditions could contribute towards creating a bond between the participants.

When it comes to the development of civic skills, it all depends on the youth's ability to generalize the methods and tools used during camp. The youth did not participate in actual civil society, but several aspects of camp are meant to simulate a miniature democratic society. Numerous activities had the direct intent to simulate how people were treated in different societies at different times in history. Thus, by learning how one would react in this situation, and discussing what could have been done differently, and what actually was done, the youth had a potential to develop an understanding of what is possible to do in 'the real world'.

Considering the aspect of civic commitment or civic duty is more challenging. The research method chosen for this paper is not adequate to answer for developmental changes in the desire and mind-set to make positive contributions to society during camp. However, observations correspondent with the findings in the 'personal expression' theme shows how some delegates already had these attitudes before arriving at camp. Also connected to certain contributions in activities at camp, the results do to a certain degree manifest that these desire and mind-sets are present in most of the delegates. For instance, in one activity, the youth were supposed to choose an optional challenge the world is facing today, and present possible solutions to the issue or crisis. A majority of the groups focused on sustainable development, and gave a range of practical every day solutions to new inventions and social movements against corporations. During this activity, the youth had a visible commitment to solving this challenges, not merely because there was a prize to win, but for the responsibility they felt in solving it. In other areas of the camp, this kind of initiative was not always this pronounced.

Finally, participating in activities for the betterment of one's community and showing a sense of civic action, must be considered. The Step Up program has a 'local impact day' for this exact purpose. On this day, all the members of the camp take part in helping an already chosen organisation, business, etc. in the local community. With this being a mandatory assignment at camp, it is difficult to predict if the youth will show initiative to do similar actions in their own local community when they arrive home. Since one's community can be defined at the largest and smallest possible levels, actions being done towards betterment can be hard to identify. For example, several participants had a vegetarian diet in order to stand up

for animal rights and contribute to a more sustainable food industry. Yet, when it came to keeping the campsite clean and tidy, it was a continuous problem even with assigned cleaning time every day. This provides inconclusive results, as there are individual differences among the participants, in addition to discrepancies in actions being done at different levels of what can be viewed as one's community. A major shortcoming of this paper is that the data do not cover the youth's participation in the outside world. Several indicators were however observed, such as wearing, eating and listening to things that could be defined within the life/politic sphere as illustrated by Amnå (2012).

To summarize, social cohesion was the most prominent of the civic engagement development constructs. In the camp setting, there was an easily observable progress in bonding and trust within the group. The Step Up platform also provided a practice ground for democracy and civil society, as seen in the civic skills construct. However, observations revealed some individual differences in the youth's applicability of these skills and their ability to generalize it to real world settings. Individual differences were also present in the following two development constructs. Whereas civic action entails actual participation, civic commitment focuses primarily on the individual's intention towards positive contributions to society. The peace educational content of camp gives the possibility to stimulate both. Several of the youth displayed this desire and mind-set, as observed both in activities and personal expression. Delegates also sought out more information, asking and talking to their leaders about specific issues.

6.4 Critical remarks

A disadvantage of this framework is, as the case with any ethnographic study, the researcher inherently influences the results. I adhered to standard ethnographic methods to manage potential bias and to ensure that the data collection frame was open and wide, but it is possible that other observers might have developed different conclusions.

To stay transparent, my personal opinion is that children and youth are important actors, capable of incredible actions. I would even stretch so far to say necessary agents for a more sustainable future. The world could benefit from the innovative ideas brought forward by children and youth, as they also can provide a wake up call for adults. There are numerous examples of this in news all over the world, e.g. Malala standing up for girls right to education, or the more recent youth protests for gun violence spreading through the United States of America to mention some.

Nevertheless, I have worked methodically through the literature in order to limit the likelihood of biases, although it is impossible to prevent them completely. Furthermore, I have put in significant efforts to contribute different viewpoints and upholding a critical perspective while producing this text.

This study also falls short of addressing actual participation in civic engagement beyond camp. It would be interesting to investigate the differences in level of involvement in civic engagement before and after participating in a CISV program. Thus, determining a possible effect of the peace education and empowerment in camp. In turn, if the results show an increase in civic engagement, further examinations could scope if this civic engagement has the potential to cause a substantial social impact.

6.5 Conclusion

To conclude, this Step Up camp provided a sufficient platform for the youth to participate. However, the actual youth participation varied in terms of contributions and strategies in line with the diversity of the group. Further, adult facilitation played an important role in the youth empowerment, and it was not unproblematic. Sufficient leader training is necessary to find the balance of adult power. Working towards the goal of offering youth the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to become active global citizen, and in such, for them to develop a sense of civic engagement, adults must leave enough space for the youth to step up. The structure and platform of the Step Up program provides a setting to stimulate civic engagement in youth (and also adults, I myself learned a lot!). But it falls short of actually being able to say anything about life after camp. I ask myself - can one summer camp have ripple effects on the world? Even if only one child every camp gains enough confidence to stand up for something with new tools to make a change, there is a chance. Especially considering it will add up to 300 people per year corresponding to the number of CISV camps. With this in mind; I would like to end with one of my all time favourite quotes:

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful
committed citizens can change the world;
indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

(Margaret Mead (disputed) / Unknown)

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