Power, trust, and youth climate dialogues

An Analysis of Young Participants' Experiences in Dialogue with Policymakers

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Abstract

The increasing concern among young people about the climate crisis has led to greater action and demands for policy change. One of these ways is through dialogue with policymakers, which aims to get the youth's input on policy. According to the literature, climate-related youth dialogues have not achieved this goal as youth have been unable to participate meaningfully. Two of the most critical barriers to meaningful participation are a lack of trust and power imbalances. Because of this, two frameworks centering trust (Trinity of Voice) and power (Powercube) were used to analyse the experiences of six young dialogue participants. The findings suggest that there are numerous shortcomings in youth dialogues, which continue to prevent meaningful participation. To build trust and address power, dialogue processes must provide youth with adequate resources to participate, foster a collaborative atmosphere, clearly specify dialogue goals, and increase transparency regarding the use of the youth's input. This could increase meaningful participation of youth in dialogues and thus improve the ability for youth's input to be applied to policy. In the process of growing youth influence, the broader democratic implications of including youth more than other societal groups need to be considered to ensure just and democratic decision-making processes for everyone. For youth to influence policy, other methods than dialogues may be required, as there is a risk that the status quo cannot be effectively questioned through dialogue. Further research is necessary to produce more generalizable results and strategies that can aid in implementing actionable steps to address these shortcomings.

Keywords: Youth, Participation, Dialogue, Trust, Power, Collaboration, Environmental Governance

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change
EYD	European Youth Dialogues
EU	European Union
YOUNGO	United Nations youth constituency for UNFCCC conferences

1. Introduction

The climate crisis is a complex problem, where solutions are met with several challenges, including weak political action and diverging interests (Levin et al., 2012). The stakes are high to address this, particularly for youth, who are confronted with the future risks and worsening consequences of a changing climate. As described by O'Brien et al. (2018:1), the situation illustrates an "age-old political problem where marginalised citizens and those living in distant places and times are being materially and existentially threatened by the decisions and actions of other individuals, companies, or states.". As a result, an increasing number of youth are demanding climate action, often taking the form of climate activism (ibid., 2018).

Climate action by youth outside formal decision-making could be linked to the lack of representation of young people in formal decision-making processes. The European Youth Forum reports that while 50% of the world's population is under 30, only 2.91% of parliamentarians globally are under 30. This number is even smaller in the European Union, where 0.28% of parliament members are under 30 (European Youth Forum, 2024). Decision-making bodies have created other formal ways to hear young voices to remedy the lack of youth representation. Such efforts include youth dialogues, where decision makers and youth interact with the aim of increasing youth representation in policy.

Even with an increase in youth presence, emerging research on the topic questions whether youth inclusion initiatives can reach their intended outcome. Both Marquardt et al. (2024) and Buhre & Josefsson (2024) explored youth participation in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Through their research, they recognised multiple barriers to meaningful youth participation. In the case of UNFCCC, both an understanding of specific rules and skills are needed to reflect critically on the negotiation agenda. Young people may not have the time, talents, or resources to reach the critical reflection required to represent their agenda in constructive, socially acceptable ways at UNFCCC (Marquardt et al. 2024). Young representatives are often financially constrained, as many youth delegates are unpaid, sometimes with a long history of unpaid labour to gain the experience needed to join (Buhre & Josefsson, 2024). As summarised by Marquard et al. (2024:38), youth representation at UNFCCC is not a "level playing field" as "inviting young people to attend UN Climate Change Conferences is not enough," because "youth delegates need epistemic and material resources to gain access and make their participation meaningful".

As noted above, in the case of UNFCCC, youth are invited to take part in a non-youth conference, which leads to questioning whether similar criticisms also exist for dialogues designed for youth participation. The European Youth Dialogues (EYD) initiative at the EU level aims to unite young people and policymakers to discuss European policy. These events are designed to increase youth representation as a part of the EU youth strategy (European Youth Portal, 2025).

Despite their goal, the literature has questioned the ability to increase youth involvement in policy through these events. Firstly, EYDs are small, accommodating about 150 carefully selected participants, who are often already politically active (Oross & Pokornyi, 2019). This fails to represent the vast majority of youth, questioning whether youth as a whole is being represented (Pušnik & Banjac, 2023). Secondly, it is uncertain whether dialogues offer the conditions for young people to be able to speak freely. As stated by Pušnik (2023), the process itself remains heavily guided by top-down principles and ideas, which limit the youth's ability to express ideas that are seen as more radical to meet the pre-determined expectations. Following this argumentation, it is clear that well-meaning consultation processes can fail to bridge the gap needed for youth to participate adequately.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

There are multiple unexplored areas in the current academic understanding of youth participation in climate policy. Currently, research on youth in climate dialogues has been sparse, with only a few studies centering on the experiences of youth. This research has focused on significant events, such as the UNFCCC. Consequently, little academic research has been done on the impact of smaller initiatives, which may happen at national, regional, or municipal levels. Such initiatives offer different conditions for youth involvement, often requiring another set of skills, knowledge, and experience for global events. Studying smaller dialogues provides an opportunity to explore youth participation in different spaces, which can shed light on whether or not the same critiques can apply to smaller and differently designed events.

In terms of theoretical lenses, youth participation has been studied from a number of angles, such as feminist perspectives (Knappe, 2023), materiality scholarship (Buhre & Josefsson, 2024), and justice (Thew et. al, 2020). Still, the application of power to youth dialogues other than UNFCCC remains limited due to the lack of research into other climate dialogues. Additionally, to my knowledge, power has not been explored through a holistic framework, which integrates the implicit and explicit uses of power in the context in which they're placed. The Powercube by Gaventa (2006) could be a helpful framework to apply to the experiences of young people to gain such an understanding.

In addition to power, there is a need to understand whether or not the aforementioned barriers to youth's meaningful participation are present in smaller dialogue events. The Trinity of Voice (TOV) by Senecah (2004) provides a useful framework to understand these barriers holistically by centering trust in policymakers and decision-making processes. As TOV was created through a combination of theoretical and practical insights, it aids in cross-referencing young participants' experiences and the conditions needed for effective collaborative policymaking. Additionally, the TOV has not been included

previously in the context of youth dialogues in previously published literature to my knowledge, showing a gap in the literature.

The synergies and differences between the Powercube and the TOV can allow for insights that could not be found using only one framework. Therefore, this thesis aims to apply these theories to the experiences of young participants to elaborate on the experiences of young participants in terms of youth climate dialogues in their context. To investigate this, the following research questions were formulated:

- How do young participants experience youth climate dialogues?
- How can the Trinity of Voice and the Powercube explain/elaborate on these experiences?
- What are the broader implications of analysing youth participation through the Trinity of Voice and the Powercube in terms of youth dialogues, democracy, and theory?

The thesis will be structured as follows: After introducing the topic and the aim, the background and theoretical foundations of the thesis will be discussed. This will be followed by a description of data collection and analysis, along with an exploration of reflexivity. The findings from the interviews will then be discussed in the context of the theoretical frameworks. The findings will then be elaborated on and situated in their context through the discussion, followed by the conclusion.

2. Research Design

The research design section will outline relevant theoretical concepts and methods. In 2.1, participatory decision-making and its theoretical foundations are discussed along with reflections on the relevance of power. This is followed by 2.2, which outlines the two theoretical frameworks used and their theoretical foundations. Section 2.3 discusses research methodology with reference to literature, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, section 2.4 outlines the author's position as an analyst, reflecting on potential biases and the validity of research.

2.1 Collaborative decision-making, trust, and power

2.1.1 From government to collaborative governance

During the past decades, environmental decision-making has shifted from government-focused decision-making to governance. As Hysing (2009) described, this narrative stems from the observed shift of environmental decision-making on the spectrum from full state intervention (i.e., government) towards societal autonomy or governance. This shift is not easy to condense, as governance can take many forms depending on its context. To differentiate between government and governance, Hysing (2009) proposes that the division between the two exists in three distinct aspects, one of which is a difference in the relationship between public and private actors. Consequently, governance indicates increased participation from the public, which often includes specific stakeholders and interest groups, such as youth.

These new structures show potential for increased collaboration in policy through new modes of making decisions, such as collaborative policymaking. As Innes & Boheer (2003) described, collaborative policymaking is an "emerging mode of governance", which has risen from the complex needs of a globalized world in the information age. This type of policymaking occurs through dialogue between various groups, including key stakeholders and decision-makers, which can lead to multiple benefits that 'government-like' decision-making cannot. Collaborative dialogue can help create relationships, increase the potential for mutual understanding between actors, foster a deeper understanding of interdependence between actors, and facilitate creative problem solving leading to innovative policies (Innes & Boheer, 2003; Senecah, 2024).

2.1.2 Conditions for effective collaboration

However, as Senecah (2024) recognizes, effective collaborative processes are challenging to design and facilitate. To understand why this is the case, we must closely examine the components required to create an effective collaborative process.

Communicative rationality and authentic dialogue

Innes & Boheer (2003) highlight that effective collaboration between stakeholders requires authentic dialogue. To reach authentic dialogues, conditions based on Habermas's (1981) theory of communicative rationality need to be met. When dialogue is authentic, speakers legitimately represent the interests they claim to speak sincerely and accurately, which can be understood by others (ibid, 1981). These conditions are difficult to reach in reality because dialogues do not happen in vacuums where all participants are given the same abilities and resources to participate. Thus, Innes (1998) includes an elaboration of communicative rationality in the context of power. Authentic dialogue requires all participants to be "equally empowered in the discussion" without power differences influencing who is allowed to speak and who is listened to (ibid., 1998:60). Additionally, "individuals representing all important interests in the issue must be at the table" (ibid., 1998:60), which can be influenced by power relations (see Hidden power, section 2.2.2). Thus, there is an inherent link between power and authentic dialogue.

Trust

Though conditions of communicative rationality are essential for effective collaborative processes, trust cannot be ignored as a contributing factor. This is in line with the argumentation of Senecah (2024), who recognises that complex collaborative processes in environmental and natural resource management tend to lack trust. The consequences of the lack of trust are ineffective collaborative processes, which do not lead to the benefits that effective collaboration can provide. To foster and sustain trust between actors can help address environmental and natural resource management challenges effectively (ibid, 2024). But what is needed to build and sustain trust?

Trust must be developed for both interpersonal relationships and the collective decision-making process. Both types of trust are developed through continuous formal and informal interactions, which center constructive dialogue (Senecah, 2024). Building relationships between those involved in collaborative decision-making is vital for interpersonal trust. Without building relationships, it may be difficult to collaborate through dialogue in situations where actors' perspectives differ. As phrased by Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006:47), relationships built on trust are the "lubricant and the glue—that is, they facilitate the work of collaboration and they hold the collaboration together".

Though building relationships is essential, trust in collective decision-making processes requires more than rapport among the actors involved. Simplified, there are three interrelated components that collaborative policymaking processes are created from: the substance or topic of the process, the relationships, and the procedure (Daniels & Walker, 2001). As Senecah (2024) argued, processes often overemphasize the substance while underemphasizing relationships. Therefore, trust in the procedure itself can be increased by creating better relationships

among actors. This does not mean the two other aspects should be ignored, as they are still crucial in developing trusting relationships.

Power, trust, and communicative rationality

Flyvbjerg & Richardson (2002) recognize the importance of power in understanding the creation of authentic dialogue. The authentic dialogue discussed in Innes & Boheer (2003) has its basis in Habermas's rather idealistic perception of dialogue and thus society. Thus, it is crucial to recognize that Habermas's communicative rationality should not be seen as an achievable goal but rather a normative ideal to strive for. Flyvbjerg & Richardson (2002:8) then argue that the focus needed to come closer to this ideal should not be to "understand the utopia of communicative rationality but to understand the realities of power". In other words, understanding power is a fundamental requirement in creating effective collaborative processes, as without an understanding of power, it is challenging to address power relations.

Senecah (2024) also recognises that power imbalances reinforce themselves and are the most common barrier to trust. Investigating power and identifying how power shows up in a dialogue can allow for a temperature check on the collaboration itself. Suppose power dictates the conditions for authentic dialogue, preventing actors from speaking their minds. In that case, there is a risk that the situation cannot be considered a collaboration per definition by Innes & Boheer (2003). If power imbalances create barriers for building and sustaining trust, as Senecah (2024) argued, they must be an important factor in understanding whether processes work. Addressing power and trust, or the lack thereof, must be crucial to creating effective collaborative processes among actors.

2.2 Theoretical framework

The two theoretical frameworks will be used as analytical tools to understand this. These frameworks help apply the difficult-to-define concepts of trust and power to the experiences of young participants.

2.2.1 Trinity of Voice

The Trinity of Voice is a flexible, practice-based theory that can be used to analyse and evaluate participatory processes (Senecah, 2004). The theory centers trust as "the presence or lack of trust is what allows or denies participants to have a voice" (Senecah, 2024). By doing this, the TOV creates a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of collaborative processes (ibid., 2024). The trinity itself refers to access, (civic) standing, and influence, which are three interconnected criteria that "must be present to build and maintain trust" (Senecah, 2004:23).

The first of the three components of the TOV is access. Access refers to sufficient and appropriate support to understand the policymaking process in an active capacity (Senecah, 2004). As phrased by Senecah (2004:23), the minimum requirement for access seems to be characterised by "an attitude of collaboration, convenient times, convenient places, readily available information and education, technical assistance to gain a basic grasp of the issues and choices, early public involvement, and ongoing opportunities for involvement". Thus, access can refer to the resources and capacities required for a participant to be able to meaningfully contribute to a process in which they are not an expert. For youth, this could mean accommodations in language, various forms of training, meeting youth in places convenient to them, and providing financial resources to attend dialogues.

Standing or civic standing refers to "the respect, the esteem and the consideration that all stakeholders' perspectives should be given" (Senecah, 2004:24). To have standing requires "opportunities for dialogue, active listening, courtesy, clear expectations for what participation can lead to…., and genuine empathy for the concerns of other perspectives, dialogue debate and feedback" (ibid, 2004:24). Standing means that participants are "honored, not rejected or dismissed, not patronised" and that the participants know what will happen to their input after participating (Senecah, 2024:2100). Thus, standing also allows participants to hold decision makers accountable for having the intention to do something productive with participant input (ibid, 2024). While civic standing and access are interconnected, the presence of one does not guarantee the other. If one has access to comment at a public hearing, it does not mean that these comments will be considered as valid input when developing policy

What is done with this input is vital when analysing influence, which refers to having ideas of dialogue participants being "respectfully considered along with those of other stakeholders" (Senecah, 2004:25). This does not mean that the specific wishes of participants need to be fulfilled, but rather that input from participants has been considered in the process of making the decision (ibid, 2004). According to Senecah (2024), influence is the most neglected aspect of the trinity as it is difficult to provide. However, influence remains crucial as disregarding it can "destroy public confidence" (Senecah, 2024). Participation without influence can create the sense that participants are being used as a communication tool for industry (Parkins, 2010) when the decision has already been made prior to the participatory process (Senecah, 2024).

It is important to know that these three aspects together make up the TOV are strongly interdependent. As mentioned before, access is required to reach standing. The same applies to influence as access is necessary to be able to show up at an event where a decision is made. This highlights a link between access and hidden power, as unmitigated hidden power can limit participants to the select few who benefit those in power (section 2.2.2). Standing and influence are also interlinked, as influence is unlikely to work without a predetermined intention to use participant input for decisions. Thus, the triangle creates a collection of three

equally important priorities that need to be considered when designing participatory decision-making processes.

2.2.2 Power

Power has been explored through a number of lenses, and it has different implications for what power refers to conceptually. On a societal level, power has been referred to as an omnipresent entity, one which can never be excluded from communication as an inherent part of society (Foucault, 1988:11). Thus, power is not something that is exercised; it just is, and its presence is undeniable whenever there is dialogue. Giddens (1984), on the other hand, recognises that though power is domination, it does not mean that the existence of power within societal structures negates agency. Power can be exercised by people (or 'agents') to influence something. However, whether or not an 'agent' can exercise power is dependent on societal rules and resources, which are not equally distributed. Thus, power relations are not inevitable and unchangeable, recognizing the possibility for resistance. Yet, people with more resources have more opportunities to exercise power, which means that power is often reproduced by 'agents' through their actions (ibid., 1984: 14-16). Power is structural yet possible to exercise; it is both action and context.

Power has also been described through three dimensions by Lukes (1974; 2005), who builds on the work of two previous understandings of power. According to Dahl (1958), power is about direct influence, which explicitly shows up during decision-making where the powerful have the final say over the less powerful. The notion that power can only be exercised through direct interaction was questioned by Bachrach and Baratz (1962), who argued that power could be present outside of these interactions. Power can be seen in social norms and values that benefit certain groups over others. Thus, power can also take shape in implicit ways, which dictate, for example, who and what is being decided in decision-making procedures. Lukes (1974; 2005) adds another dimension to these descriptions of power by arguing that power does not need disagreement; rather, it shapes what people believe is possible. According to Lukes (2005; 1974), these create the three faces of power, which build on each other's strengths, while addressing weaknesses of the first two dimensions.

More recently, Gaventa (2006) builds on the faces of power by Lukes (1974; 2005) by exploring two other power dimensions: spaces and levels. Spaces of power refer to settings, which can be either physical locations or moments, where power relations are present in interactions. Gaventa (2006) uses this concept to shed light on how accessible these spaces of power are to the more powerful and powerless. Closed spaces refer to spaces that are only available to a select few powerful actors without creating space for participation. Invited spaces refer to situations where the powerful actor invites other actors to state their opinions through formal events, such as participatory processes or dialogue. Claimed spaces, on the other hand, refer to the less powerful taking control of a space to push their own agenda (ibid., 2006).

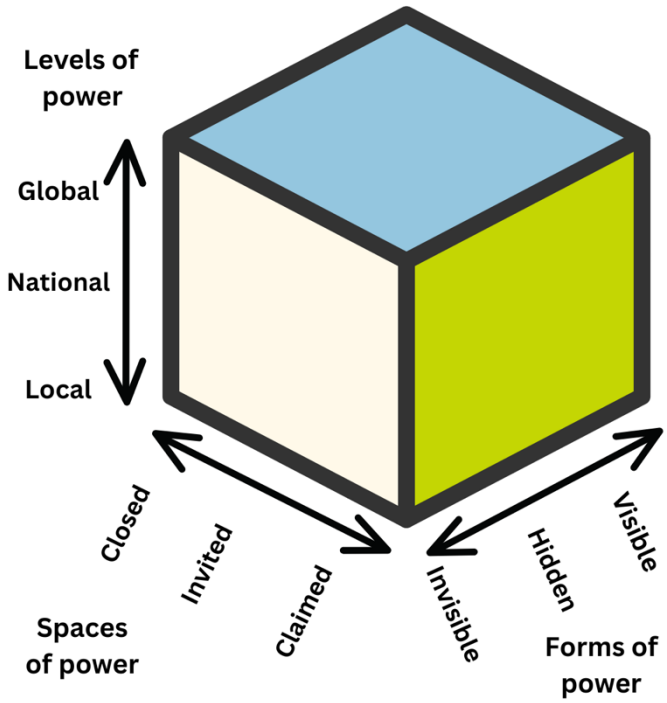

Figure 1. An illustration of the Powercube adapted from Gaventa (2006).

Gaventa's (2006) levels of power refer to whether power relations are local, regional, or global. These levels create overlapping participatory processes. This is also present in the aforementioned youth involvement initiatives, such as the UNFCCC participation, the European Union, the national level, and at the local level. There is a significant interplay between these different arenas, both on individual levels and as an implication through policy. Specifically, the same young person may be involved in dialogues on local, national, and global levels at the same time. Additionally, decisions trickle down into everyday lives at the local level.

2.3 Methodology: Data collection & methods for analysis

In order to find out about young participants' experiences, six interviews were conducted (see 3.1 for summary). The interviewees were found through my personal network on Instagram, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn, as someone who has attended climate-related youth events. The interviews loosely followed an interview guide (Appendix 1). The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed them to be guided by the flow of the discussion, leaving room for follow-up questions as described in Chapter 12 of Robson & McCartan (2016). This was useful in providing enough structure and flexibility to gain data as a researcher with little experience, in contrast to unstructured interviews, which are more

challenging to master (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were held digitally on Zoom and thus also recorded via the Zoom recording function. The audio files of the recordings were transcribed using Microsoft Word's transcribe function on the university's OneDrive.

The data was then analysed in Qualcoder through inductive coding based on recurring themes between interviewees, which were informed by the theoretical frameworks. The codes were then used to write a summary document, creating a basis for the results and discussion sections. After this, the results were analysed based on the six themes in the theoretical frameworks and structured according to the themes in written form. Throughout the coding and analysis process, I stayed flexible in my approach, moving back and forth between theory and my data. This is similar to the puzzle approach by Schwartz-Sea and Yanow (2011), which describes how the researcher simultaneously creates an understanding of literature and findings when constructing knowledge. In practice, this approach was used most when writing text for the findings and discussion.

A number of ethical considerations were taken to ensure the safety and anonymity of participants. All interviewees signed a consent form prior to being included in the research (Appendix 2). This consent form stipulated that their identities would be concealed in the thesis and informed them of the option to opt out at any point during the research process. I also chose not to mention specific dialogues and countries of origin by name to respect the privacy of interviewees, similar to suggestions made by Creswell & Creswell (2018). This was the result of ethical concerns, as climate activism and political involvement can be considered sensitive information in the current political climate. Other ethical considerations in the research included a careful approach to storing personal data by only using university servers on OneDrive or storing it locally on either paper or my laptop.

2.3.1 Reflexivity & Validity

Creswell & Creswell (2018: 258) describe reflexivity as the researcher reflecting on how "their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations". To recognise reflexivity is a key feature in qualitative research, as it relies strongly on interpretations, which can be rather subjective (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This section will focus on instilling self-reflection and the author's background in the research.

I got the idea for this thesis during the 2024 summer break after attending a youth climate dialogue myself and witnessing interactions between young people and policymakers. To me, much of the dialogue felt performative, leading me to question why we were here discussing these topics and what these discussions would lead to. Many of my fellow young participants shared similar thoughts as we debriefed after the dialogues. I felt called to write about the topic and analyse it further with the help of the tools I had been given during my education. Because of this, my position is similar to those I interviewed, although I had not attended any other dialogue events. I recognise that the close proximity between myself and young attendees impacts my worldview and approach to analysis. This thesis

does not arise from a fully neutral space; instead, its basis arose from certain biases about climate dialogues. Namely, I witnessed the influence of unmitigated power relations in practice, which is where I got the idea to analyse power.

Steps have been taken to preserve the academic integrity of this research. Firstly, while interviewing participants, I focused on asking questions that would leave as much room for interpretation as possible, aiming to minimise influence from my own interpretation of events. It was important to me that interviewees felt they could state their opinions/experiences without judgment, even if they contradicted my own. However, the questions I decided to ask were based on my own experiences, which framed the interviews. In the case where interviews were completely unstructured, the answers may have been different, and reflections more varied. Due to the time constraints of this thesis, I considered semi-structured, and the framing I chose was essential to gain knowledge that is similar enough to analyse and condense into a Master's thesis. A study with a mix of interviews and ethnographic methodology could have been an interesting approach to gain more unprompted data in dialogue situations, making an interesting inquiry for future research.

Secondly, by using theoretical tools to analyse interviews, I was able to create distance between my own experience and the data. By borrowing the 'glasses' of Senecah (2004) and Gaventa (2006), I was able to reflect on youth dialogue experiences through a less personal frame. Though the choice of this frame is subjective, the insights I gained could only have been created by stepping into the role of an analyst. This allowed me to step out of my role as a past dialogue participant.

Even using these lenses, I did not abandon the assumption that youth involvement in decision-making needs to be studied. Additionally, there is an underlying assumption that youth dialogues are worth studying and critical to understand, especially when there are a number of other essential inquiries to be made. For example, why did this thesis not focus on unorganised youth instead of organised dialogues, which are very limited spaces with relatively homogenous youth groups involved?

Studying youth dialogues allows for a closer look at the metaphorical bubble created when participatory methods are used to increase the involvement of marginalised groups in society. The fact that even the youth, who are organised and thus are trying hard to be heard, are not able to influence policy could be seen as something that sets the tone for all youths' influence in policy. If dialogues are to be the solution that will strengthen democracy, it is interesting to note that there is such a separation between organised and unorganised youth. Future studies could focus on creating a better understanding of whether and how youth who are not active in dialogues presently influence climate policy along with their motivations to do so.

Finally, it is important to note that including so few participants is a significant limitation of this study, which has implications for the generalisability of findings.

The six participants chosen have all taken part in a youth dialogue. Therefore, interviewees likely have a certain level of trust when it comes to dialogue processes, justifying their participation. This may exclude perspectives, such as those that fundamentally criticise the presence of dialogues as a decision-making tool. In addition, six participants are not a group large enough to reach saturation of data, which indicates that most perspectives in the context of youth dialogues have been collected (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Thus, findings cannot be said to represent young dialogue participants in general; instead, they are representative of a small sample. It is possible that there are opinions, experiences, and interpretations of events that have not been included. Therefore, findings in this thesis are subjective and not representative of all youth. To create such an understanding would require wider and longer studies, making it an intriguing topic for future research.

3. Findings & Analysis

This section will present the findings from the interviews while applying them to the theoretical frameworks, aiming to answer the first two research questions. The section is structured as follows. First, 3.1 briefly summarizes the interviewees and the types of dialogues they attended. In 3.2, the interview data will be connected to the TOV, outlining interviewees' experiences through access, civic standing, and influence. A similar structure will be followed with the Powercube in 3.3, which explores the connection between the experiences of interviewees through the forms, levels, and spaces of power.

Certain underlying assumptions are accepted in the findings related to what can and should be addressed when discussing the differences between young participants and older generations. It is impossible for youth to gain the older generations' skills, competencies, and resources. Youth is not able to enter dialogue with the experience of someone who is older and has worked with climate politics or lobbying for decades, nor can this be remedied through training. Youth are not included in the same social networks as older decision makers with years of networking experience. Youth cannot gain the same positions in their careers as older generations. These aspects cannot be solved, at least not in their entirety. Many of them are inherent qualities of youth, being young. Instead, the points made in the analysis below should be seen in the context of youth dialogues as a tool, and any contradictions between the aim to include youth and the reality that young participants experience in dialogues.

3.1 Interviewees and types of dialogues

The six interviewees attended dialogues, which differed in their structure, organisation, and attendees (Table 1). It is essential to provide a correct context. Not all dialogues are created the same; some are easier to enter with limited knowledge. In contrast, others require an expert-level understanding of global decision-making to participate meaningfully. Although some of the descriptions include details that can be found on the websites describing dialogue events, sources have been excluded to protect the identities of interviewees.

Table 1. Summary of interviewees and attended youth dialogues. Source: author

Interviewee	**Age**	**Type(s) of youth dialogue discussed**
Interviewee 1	27	Youth-organised dialogue in Baltic Sea region, municipal dialogue events in Nordic countries, dialogue events organised by UN
Interviewee 2	28	Youth-organised dialogue in Baltic Sea region
Interviewee 3	24	European level youth dialogue, youth-organised dialogue in Baltic Sea region
Interviewee 4	22	National level youth consultancy in a Nordic country
Interviewee 5	17	Municipal youth council in a Nordic country
Interviewee 6	24	Climate Delegation from Europe at UNFCCC conference

The dialogue in the Baltic Sea region (**Interviewees 1, 2, and 3**) is organised by a youth-run environmental non-governmental organisation. The dialogue is a part of a week-long summer camp, which is open to youth between the ages of 15 and 30. All participants either live in or have a connection to one of the countries along the Baltic Sea. The policymakers attending these dialogues are from the same countries as the participants and are active on various levels. Local, national, and EU-level policymakers and other senior executives who represent the private sector are involved. The policymakers are invited to dialogues, which were facilitated and organised by youth organisations. Therefore, these dialogues often included interactions between youth and policymakers, who were not from the same country. These dialogues did not aim to influence a specific policy and instead focused on sharing perspectives on climate issues on a more general level.

The European-level dialogue attended by **Interviewee 3** was a youth consultation event. The aim was for the youth to create a vision for the next five years in the European Union. The event included policymakers from European parliamentary levels and national-level politicians from the host country. It took place over multiple days with large plenary discussions.

The national level consultation attended by **Interviewee 4** is a youth group, consisting of selected youth representatives, who attend various meetings and workshops with national-level officials. Each member is between the ages of 15 and 28 and is selected to be part of the group for two years. The goal for the group is to provide youth input into national-level policy on various topics as a part of the country's sustainable development strategy.

The municipal youth council attended by **Interviewee 5** consists of a group of young people who their peers have elected to represent youth in municipal decision-making. The group is between 13 and 18 years old, although certain municipalities include participants up to the age of 29. Youth council representatives tend to be elected for two years at a time, though it is not uncommon to be part of the youth council for multiple terms. The youth council is not part of the municipal council and only attends one council meeting per month. Thus, they have a consulting role in decision-making.

Interviewee 6 attended the UNFCCC conference. This work is part of the youth constituency, YOUNGO, representing youth at UNFCCC. Such global representation is similar to that researched in Buhre & Josefsson (2024) and Marquardt et al. (2024).

The rest of the dialogues described by interviewees are one-off events, focusing on a specific topic or specific goal. For example, the municipal dialogue events discussed by **Interviewee 1** were focused on providing input on climate issues. The UN dialogue events were similar, where youth gathered to discuss specific themes either online or in person.

3.2 Trinity of Voice

3.2.1 Access

The topic of access was brought up through reflections on unequal resources, which prevent or allow youth to engage meaningfully in dialogue. Finances, skills, capacity building, and knowledge were all identified as barriers that make youth involvement in dialogue processes more difficult. By highlighting these themes, interviewees often identified discrepancies between youth and policymakers, which highlighted similar experiences to what Marquardt et al. (2024) described as the uneven playing field.

As recognised by both Marquartd et al. (2024) and interviewees, financial resources can impact whether youth can access climate dialogues. Firstly, on a personal level, the monetary compensation for the time spent working as a youth representative can play a significant role in whether young people can participate meaningfully. As discussed in **Interview 5:**

> *"Young people are expected to study and work, and then do politics and advocacy on top of that. You don't necessarily have the resources in your life to be an activist and then also study and maybe work. It narrows the people who can participate."*

Interviewee 6 also mentioned that the organization they're involved in is mostly run by volunteers, recognizing the limitation that the lack of financial compensation creates on an organizational level.

> *"Everything is volunteer work, so everyone is doing this on the side, and there are always some members who are putting a lot of work into this."*

This is especially important as youth representation is often closely linked to youth organisations. This was brought up by **Interviewee 1**, who described that most opportunities to represent youth came through the organization they were part of, which was noted as a privileged position due to the resources required for a member to be actively involved in a youth organization:

> *"I feel that the opportunities always come through an organisation. Still, there are so many young people who also care about the climate, who probably aren't with any organisation because they don't have the time or energy."*

Therefore, compensating young people for their time spent on youth dialogues can be crucial to ensuring access. Without financial compensation, young people often struggle to find the time and energy needed to be present, prepared, and, in some cases, even invited to take part in dialogues.

However, financial resources are not the only factor creating an uneven playing field between youth and other generations. Unequal resources and knowledge are also visible in youth participation. This shows up in different ways depending on

the situation and interviewee. For example, **Interviewee 4** described that the language used in policymaking can be inaccessible for young people, making it difficult for them to contribute in dialogue situations.

> *"I could not read any fancy political text before joining the national consultancy."*

In addition to language, there is a lack of overall expertise to provide concrete suggestions, which are easier to implement in dialogue situations compared to more general notions. This was reflected on by **Interviewee 6** in the context of being young in the UNFCCC space:

> *"I would say oftentimes we don't have the expertise to say 'OK, I want you to integrate this in this way here' and then they just have to say 'Yes, of course'. It's very difficult to focus on your niche or even find your niche so early in our careers. At this stage, we're still a bit broad, so we don't have that precise knowledge, and we don't have advanced lobbying techniques because we don't have 10 years of lobbying experience."*

The above quote also highlights that young people can be at a disadvantage because they have not had the opportunity to gain decades of experience before entering spaces such as UNFCCC. Therefore, access requires interventions or accommodations, which can level the playing field when it comes to years of experience. How this should be done is unclear, as developing years of experience means that youth will no longer be considered youth if they have gone through years of training.

Finally, **Interviewee 6** also highlighted the importance of social connections, which may be difficult to gain as young people, who are often relatively new in the UNFCCC space.

> *"There are barriers we've already elaborated on a lot, such as knowledge but it's a barrier to have access in terms of social networks. And with networks we're fighting to have an established position."*

What is clear is that ensuring access requires more financial resources to be allocated to youth to gain as much knowledge and experience as possible and attend dialogues meaningfully. This could help overcome the difficulties young people face in having to split their time between studying, working, and being active in collaborative governance.

3.2.2 Civic standing

Some of the discussed dialogues created a collaborative atmosphere, which is one of the conditions needed for civic standing. For example, **Interviewee 2** discussed a dialogue, where both young people and decision-makers treated each other with a similar level of respect:

”It's not that you're the boss, because the entire point of these dialogues, especially like that first year, was that it was all about’ we’re all equal’. We're all listening to each other. And the group that I facilitated worked really well; people actually listened to each other. There was a really nice dialogue.”

Another crucial aspect in creating this mutual respect was described in **Interview 4**:

“You know it’s been a good dialogue when they say we’re happy that you’re here and openly show gratitude that we attended. Then we know that they’re not doing this just because it says in the legislation that they need to include youth, but that they really want to listen to us.”

Thus, creating a collaborative atmosphere requires that all perspectives are treated as equal and that youth participation is openly valued during dialogues and after. This collaborative atmosphere was not always a given quality displayed by decision makers in dialogue situations. This was discussed by **Interviewee 2**:

”I also heard from other people that year, especially the people who were with the EU Commissioner, that he was very disrespectful. He was always on his phone and didn't listen. I mean, he even left halfway through. It was supposed to be a dialogue, and it wasn't.”

In addition to a collaborative atmosphere, civic standing also requires that participants know what will happen to their input after the dialogue (Senecah, 2023). Based on the interviews, this was trickier to evaluate for young participants due to a lack of transparency in the process. As described in **Interview 1**:

“Sometimes we can see how much the policymakers are getting challenged, but most of the time, especially in the youth dialogue sessions that I have attended, they only listened to us and took notes. There was no feedback session, which I greatly missed, and I think that should be included in every youth dialogue.”

Interviewee 5 also discussed this, while highlighting the disconnect that can often happen when there is a collaborative atmosphere, yet uncertainty of results:

”I wouldn't say it feels like it doesn't matter what I say. Sometimes it feels a bit pretentious from certain people who always hype me up, saying ’ what you said was very smart’ but then they don't do anything about it.”

Finally, stereotypes also played a role in whether young people had an experience where they felt “respected and honored, not rejected or dismissed, not patronized” (Senecah, 2024). This was discussed in **Interview 5**, who reflected on how being young influences whether you’re taken seriously in the dialogue space:

”I feel like when you are a young person and you are a representative in a conference, you’re still kind of looked at as this idealistic and unrealistically thinking person who doesn’t know anything about real politics and real life.”

It can be questioned in this case whether stereotypes attached to young people make it difficult for young participants to be respected and honored in the same way older participants would be.

3.2.3 Influence

When it comes to influence, all interviewees recognised that youth dialogues have the potential to increase youth representation, providing an opportunity for young people to influence policy. According to **Interviewee 3**, youth can bring different opinions to the table, helping come up with solutions to climate issues:

“Youth provides a fresh perspective, and they have a new way to look at problems. So that is why I think dialogues are extremely important.”

There is potential for youth dialogues to influence young people positively on a personal level through fostering hope. As stated by **Interviewee 2**:

“It was appreciated to have discussions with policymakers who were willing to listen, who could provide the perspective that there are people in power who want to listen. This is creating some hope for young people that what they're doing matters and they're not just fighting a system that will never change.”

Despite the potential of youth dialogues, interviewees shared a scepticism about whether these dialogues are held with the purpose of letting young people influence policy. **Interviewee 4** reflected on their own experiences by bringing up the following worry:

“I hope dialogues are held because people want to listen to young voices, because at the end of the day, young people will inherit this planet, which is not in the best shape at the moment. At the same time, I’m scared that dialogues are about boosting the egos of decision makers so they can tell themselves that they’ve heard youth and use that in the next election.”

This worry was shared by **Interviewee 1**, who reflected critically on the purpose of youth dialogues.

“In most of the cases, I felt dialogues are held to give the youth false hope or this false sense of being heard, where at the end of the day, the message is not actually going through”.

Interviewee 1 also illustrated this by recalling the following experience:

“I remember that we met with some people from the municipality at the end. One of the activists asked them, ‘How do we know that you are going to take

action based on these points?' And the answer was something like 'Oh, you wouldn't know because we are not sure we are going to do something about it. The point of this discussion was more that young people feel heard.' On one hand, I would applaud them for being direct with us, but at the same time, I felt like this is such a waste of time. Why would you fly us here and keep us in a nice hotel and waste so much money and energy just to give these young people a sense of false hope that they are being heard, which is not the case."

These statements show that though there can be value in youth dialogues, there is a real risk for dialogues to feel like a waste of time for participants because of their perceived lack of influence. This highlights the observation that access, standing, and influence are interconnected (Senecah, 2004: 2024). The majority of interviewees linked this to the possibility of dialogues being performative, exemplified by the following quote from **Interview 6**:

"I would say quite a lot of people are happy to talk to youth. They sometimes see the talk as a chance to take a picture after to show that they have interacted with youth, not because they really want to understand our perspective."

3.3 Powercube

3.3.1 Forms of power

The interviewees identified multiple scenarios in which power relations were present. In the context of the forms of power, all three levels were discussed in connection with the dialogues.

Visible power

As discussed in the previous section, visible power constitutes explicit exercises of power in decision-making spaces. In climate-related dialogues, visible power can be found when policymakers use their position and perceived authority to undermine the engagement of young participants. Multiple interviews provided examples of this.

Firstly, **Interviewee 2** explained that when dialogues were knowledge-centered, some policymakers approached dialogues as debate-like situations, where young people could not "win":

> *"Because that's the thing with politicians as well, not everyone, but especially those who don't want to have a conversation. If you're talking to them about facts and you haven't prepared an entire report before with all of the information, so that whatever they say, you have an answer, they will always win this interaction."*

Having dialogues based on facts and not experiences can be difficult for young participants. As recognized by **Interviewee 2,** dialogues run the risk of shifting in focus from sharing experiences to what is true. This is evident in their description of fact-based discussions as winnable "knowledge exchanges" rather than dialogues. If dialogues are designed to include knowledge exchange based on objective knowledge rather than experiences between policymakers and youth who may have less expertise, it seems plausible that visible power could be easier to exercise.

Secondly, in the aforementioned quote by **Interviewee 1**, the policymaker exercised visible power by directly stating that it was possible that they would not do anything with the suggestions of the young participants:

> *"I remember at the end we met with some people from the municipality, and one of the activists asked them, 'How do we know that you are going to take action based on these points?' And the answer was,' Oh, you wouldn't know because we are not sure we are going to do something about it. The point of the dialogue was more so that young people feel heard."*

However, such direct statements seem counterintuitive. Can young people be heard if they are told that their input will not be listened to? This rings especially true in the context, where these expectations have not been laid out in the open

until the end of the discussion. This highlights the applicability of TOV as it can be clearly linked back to civic standing and influence, as none of them have been reached in the scenario above. Such an observation is only further proof of the link that exists between power and the TOV.

Climate-related dialogues between youth and policymakers as they exist show some uses of visible power, yet most power is exercised implicitly. The majority of the dialogues discussed lacked clear uses of visible power, making such overt power exercises seem like exceptions rather than the norm. Despite this, young participants continue to suspect that there is more to power than overt exercises of it. This is present mainly in suspicions that dialogues aim to either give youth false hope or boost decision-makers' egos (see 3.1.3). Consequently, interviewees identified what scholars have been claiming for decades: power shows up in implicit ways.

Hidden power

Hidden power is focused on how institutions and influential individuals "maintain their influence by controlling who gets to the decision-making table and what gets on the agenda" (Gaventa, 2006). Through the interviews, it was clear that hidden forms of power were present in the analyzed youth dialogues.

A number of interviewees discussed the selection of participants, both in terms of who gets to participate and how they are chosen. Most interviewees mentioned diversity and the lack thereof when it came to their experiences in dialogues. It seems to be a common notion that only a certain group of young people tend to participate in climate dialogues. These participants were described in **Interview 5** as:

> *"I think a lot of the people involved in youth dialogues are people who have gone through high school, who are in university, or at least in the University of Applied Sciences. Generally, more middle-class or upper-middle-class people."*

This statement is echoed not only on a municipal level of dialogue discussed by **Interviewee 5**, but also on national and global levels. Even if youth dialogue participants already showcase specific people with better access to participate and understand dialogues, challenges remain.

Discussed in part 3.1.1 on access, inaccessible language used in situations where youth are being consulted could be considered a textbook example of hidden power, as it limits participation to the select few that understand the jargon associated with decision making. The unequal allocation of financial resources between decision makers and youth representatives, along with the social networks of decision makers, are also aspects that create a power imbalance between youth and decision-makers. Not paying young participants for their time in dialogues limits the access of those who get to participate.

Further reflecting on what type of young people participate in youth dialogues, it was noted that participants are often already active in climate organisations. The situation at hand was summarized by **Interviewee 1**:

> *"I believe that I was granted access because I was already a part of an organisation."*

This was also discussed in previous literature, which recognized that unorganized youth are largely excluded from events, such as the European Youth Dialogue (Pušnik & Banjac, 2023). The lack of unorganized youth was seen as a largely negative attribute by **Interviewee 1,** as the lack of diversity resulted in fewer perspectives being represented:

> *"When you are picking people who are already involved in so much, then conversations become monochromatic because they're always had with the same people or at least very like-minded people. So then everyone is suggesting the same thing, which is not really how you want to include the voice of the youth, because you need the diversity to have different perspectives."*

It can be reflected on how such dialogues could be connected to hidden power. For example, a question that should be considered is: which organisations are invited, included, and thus represented? It can be noted that all participants were active in organisations, which are most likely not seen as radical. For example, the participants, who came to the dialogues through the organization, did not mention being part of any organizations practicing civil disobedience, such as Extinction Rebellion (XR). No one was an elected representative of an organization, which poses a bigger conflict or threat to the current systems of governance.

In some cases, youth had to go through an application process to be part of inclusion initiatives, such as in the case of **Interviewee 4**. The only case where it was relatively easy to participate in the dialogue was the dialogue in the Baltic Sea region, which was organized by youth. This showcases that all spaces for youth, where youth were invited, included a pre-selection. Gatekeeping certain youth from certain discussions may not be bad because certain conversations require higher levels of knowledge to participate. However, providing training to gain that knowledge could be possible in some cases, rendering this an invalid argument for only including certain youth.

Finally, a common theme was found when considering the agenda of dialogues discussed by interviewees: dialogues were often held without a direct connection to a specific policy. Instead, dialogues were often used as separate events with a general focus, not in the setting of a public hearing. By not giving particular input to specific policies, it is difficult to add the input of youth to concrete policies. Thus, by creating a vague agenda, hidden power remains unaddressed. Despite this observation, sharing experiences between youth and policymakers is helpful for a better understanding of each other. It is the naming of events as adequate

spaces to make a difference that makes vague agendas problematic in the context of climate-related dialogues.

Invisible power

Invisible power has to do with norms, values, and unconscious internalisations of power, which allow people to accept current circumstances (Gaventa, 2006). The representative democracies of today's society are often not operating on the norm of participatory governance. That is, to participate in decision-making as a non-decision maker is relatively rare. The participation of youth as an interest group is included in this, which sheds light on why most youth representation attended by participants happens as a supplement to policymaking arenas rather than being built into decision-making. For example, **Interviewee 5** reflected on this in relation to the position of youth in the work of the municipal council:

> *"We only have the right to be there and speak. We don't have the right to vote or engage in any other activities. Our job is to comment, make statements, and give our opinion as youth and represent the youth council."*

This was even seen as a problem by **Interviewee 5**, who questioned whether the current structures and rules of municipal decision-making enable the youth council to have adequate influence on policy:

> *"The problem is that because we don't have a permanent representative spot in the city government, we can only attend the extended meeting, which is once a month. We are not that involved in the pre-decision process. Sometimes I feel like some decision makers think it's enough to hear from youth when things are finalized. I think we need a seat at the table when things are being prepared so the city and the decision makers can get our opinion before they start the process, because it is usually the most fruitful time to influence the decision is before it has been made."*

This exemplifies that the norm of non-participatory decision-making impacts whether youth are able to influence decisions, a topic that was reflected on by all interviewees. Namely, the ambiguity of what happens after youth participate in decision-making, which was discussed in section 3.1.3.

All interviews contained an exploration of the level of influence that youth can have on climate policy. Perceptions of the youth's ability to influence climate policy varied widely between participants, offering a range of opinions on the effectiveness and purpose of alternatives to youth dialogues. A few of the interviewees mentioned protesting as an alternative to dialogue. This was explored by **Interviewee 1**:

> *"Well, I would say the alternative is to protest. Honestly, nothing else is coming to my mind. I really want to follow the peaceful path because I'm not the type of person who likes confrontation but sometimes it's just inevitable. Sometimes there's no peaceful way or no communication channel open at all."*

In the quote above, protests, specifically civil disobedience, were often discussed as a last resort when there is no other way to get one's voice heard. **Interviewee 3** even questioned the efficacy of protesting altogether and described protests as destructive, which cannot lead to real policy change. Because of this, most participants preferred constructive processes, such as dialogues or forums.

What these descriptions of protesting imply can be questioned. Namely, is protesting, even when it is non-violent, seen as a violent or negative act overall, or is the quote more about personal preference in how one wants to impact policy? If the quotes refer to the former, it could be seen as an internalization of protesting as an undesirable way to make a difference. Why else would protests, of which the vast majority are peaceful, be seen as destructive and lacking peace? To hold this assumption as true is beneficial for those in power, helping uphold current power structures. If only certain, institutionalized ways of making a difference in policy are accepted, society's potential for instilling transformation is lowered. There are countless examples in history, such as the civil rights movement, where protesting has altered the course of society for the better (Satell & Popovic, 2017). Therefore, to transform society to become radically altered in its level of sustainability, it may be necessary to take action beyond dialogues. This is because 'dutiful' ways of making a difference, which work within existing power structures, are at risk of perpetuating the status quo (O'Brien et al., 2018).

When taking the perspective of **Interviewee 1**, who explained that the purpose of dialogues is to create false hope that young people can influence decisions, youth-climate dialogues can be seen as an instrument in themselves to uphold invisible power structures. Could it be that youth dialogues themselves are a tool to limit more radical ways of making a difference, which could challenge the status quo more? If youth dialogues are seen as the only civil or acceptable way to make a difference in climate policy by youth, it is a clear sign of youth internalizing the values that uphold power structures, an example of invisible power.

Two interviewees (**Interviewees 4** and **5**) mentioned the possibility of young people becoming decision-makers themselves to influence climate policy when asked about alternatives to youth dialogues. It remains a question why other interviewees did not consider this a possibility. One potential explanation could be internalized assumptions that it is too difficult for young people to become decision-makers. This assumption, however, is grounded in a realistic expectation that young people rarely make it to powerful positions, as only a very small percentage of decision-makers are under 30.

3.3.2 Levels of power

The interviewees attended dialogues on various levels of decision-making, ranging from municipal to global. Some interviewees had even engaged in dialogues on multiple levels themselves. On a global level, representing youth was described as requiring a lot of expertise because of the complexity of

international environmental policy, as reflected by **Interviewee 6** (section 3.1.1). Expertise and knowledge were also discussed by **Interviewee 4**, who took part in a national-level decision-making process as a youth consultant. However, there was less emphasis on needing expertise in this case, as participants were provided training and peer support in case they struggled to understand something. Other dialogue events had a more general focus on learning about the opinions of young people, with less direct interaction with complex policy documents thus requiring little to no expertise to participate.

In certain dialogues, expertise is more crucial to understand and give input (as recognized in 3.1.1). This level of expertise could also be dependent on the level of the dialogue. Specifically, municipal-level dialogues were often described as ones where sharing personal experience was the goal (e.g., in the case of **Interviewee 5**). These dialogues could therefore be suitable for youth with less expertise in policymaking compared to, e.g., youth representation at UNFCCC.

Interviewee 2 recognised that it could be helpful for different levels of dialogue to act as a progression. Young people could start in some of the less expertise-heavy dialogues and progress into dialogues requiring more expertise:

> *"I think the most impact could be made by including young people in every step of the way on different levels. You might start getting involved at the municipal level and then be sent to the regional level, then the national level and so on. Which means that then you get in input from the all the different levels."*

Thus, **Interviewee 2** also recognises the interdependence between the levels in the quote above. There is an overlap between policymaking on the different levels. Policies on the EU level influence national policy, and policies on the national level influence regional and municipal policies. Therefore, if youth have influence on the lower levels, it could be overruled by top-down decisions, which do not involve youth on a higher level. If a group is to be represented in policy, it could therefore be essential to include them on more than one level, especially if these interactions are happening in a continuous manner.

3.3.3 Spaces of power

To be able to include youth in a dialogue, a space needs to be open, as closed spaces of power are not participatory. This means that all dialogues discussed occurred in either invited or claimed spaces. The dialogues that were interwoven with decision-making processes took place in invited spaces, as young people were invited to consult mostly on pre-determined topics in pre-determined ways. In fact, only the Baltic Sea region youth dialogue discussed could be considered a claimed space, as it is organized by youth for youth. The impact of a claimed space was discussed by **Interviewee 2,** who reflected on the importance of the dialogue being a safe space for participants:

”You don't arrive as a single individual. You don't know the ‘adults’ who are there, but you know the other young people. You might not have talked with everyone, but you have at least talked with some people and seen everyone else's faces.

There is nothing that limits this quote from applying to both invited and claimed spaces in theory. The number of youth and the recurrence of interactions between dialogue participants can help young participants feel more comfortable even in invited spaces. For example, **Interviewee 4** alluded to the fact that situations where decision-makers outnumber youth in invited spaces can feel intimidating. This is especially the case with national-level decision-makers, who are perceived to have a specific level of authority. However, it is not the fact that the space is invited that creates this situation; rather, it is the conditions of the invited space.

This indicates that the spaces of power fail to tell the full story when it comes to whether the spaces of dialogue are held to facilitate interactions between youth and policymakers. Interviewees stated they had good and bad experiences regardless of whether the space was claimed or invited. This is a strong indicator that the spaces of power cannot be separated from forms of power, as the Powercube is intended to be used holistically and not as ’checkboxes’ to fill one by one (Gaventa, 2019). Likewise, claimed and invited spaces fail to result in trusting interactions as they do not meet what Senecah (2004) argues is required to achieve effective collaborative processes.

4. Discussion

4.1 Youth dialogues – a reflection on findings and literature

The findings discussed suggest that youth dialogue processes did not sufficiently address power relations and foster trust between youth and decision makers. There are many barriers for youth to be involved in dialogues, and even if such barriers are mitigated, it remains uncertain whether dialogues lead to action. As recognized before, these experiences were limited to the experiences of six young participants, making it impossible to generalize these insights. Hence, it is useful to turn to the literature to investigate what studies on other (non-climate-related) processes have found.

4.1.1 Are dialogues always useful?

Some literature questions the usefulness of dialogues between youth and policymakers as a whole. For example, Kirtzel & Lorenz (2023:118) note that the involvement of policymakers is "not always possible or useful". This is especially relevant in cases where there is already a lack of trust in the government, leading to difficulties in being able to meet policymakers without skepticism. As a result, it may be more useful for young participants to voice opinions about climate issues without policymakers present when aiming to understand young people's opinions (ibid., 2023). Another example is the German case discussed in Kirtzel & Lorenz (2023:118), which highlighted that young participants did not feel heard by policymakers because policymakers "tended to answer valid questions vaguely and evasively". Such interactions increased distrust among young participants, which means that effective collaboration is not possible (Senecah, 2024). Similar situations were echoed by some interviewees, who mentioned that certain politicians have a tendency to try to 'win' interactions or be vague in their wording. Following this line of argumentation, the overall usefulness of youth dialogues can be questioned.

This raises the following question: can distrust be addressed through a lack of interaction? According to Senecah (2024), this is not possible as trust is built through dialogue in sustained interactions. Reflecting on this, it is clear that singular dialogues are not able to address the challenges of distrust between youth and policymakers. Therefore, it can be useful to focus on who is interacting with whom and in what contexts. As noted in the interviews, some policymakers show genuine interest in their interactions with youth. Interacting with these specific policymakers as a young person could have a positive impact on building trust. This was recognized as a large pro of mutually respectful dialogues by **Interviewee 2**, who recognized that seeing examples of positive interactions

between youth and policymakers allows youth to rebuild hope towards the system.

Therefore, though Kirtzel & Lorenz (2023) recognize that distrust in the government can make dialogues obsolete in some contexts, dialogues can also be used as a tool to rebuild trust in the same context. For example, having youth interact with willing decision-makers from other countries can increase trust in policymaking in general. At the same time, it is difficult to believe that trust wouldn't be eroded if policymakers in the youth's home country continue to behave in ways that do not instill trust in youth. To build trust does not mean that it is sustained, which is why efforts to ensure trust in decision making are continuous work (Senecah, 2004: 2024).

4.1.2 Lack of transparency

In civic standing and influence in the TOV (Senecah, 2004), there is a level of transparency needed in collaborative processes, where participants can be aware of what happens to their input afterward. This was a problem discussed both by the interviewees (see 3.1) and the literature. Treimer & Lorenz (2023), note that there was a hesitance by policymakers to be open to youth inclusion when discussing binding policy and recommendations. In the six projects investigated by the same authors, only one project included a concrete plan for actions after the dialogues. This project prepared a declaration, which was said to impress policymakers when presented in Brussels. However, whether or not the demands were implemented was not made public, leaving little space for holding decision-makers accountable after the process finished (ibid., 2023).

This outlines a major limitation of current climate dialogues. As reflected earlier, providing little transparency on what happens with the input limits trust in the dialogue process (Senecah, 2024). This could potentially lead to notions such as considering the idea that the purpose of dialogues is to instill false hope (as described earlier by **Interviewee 1)**. Other studies, such as Nesrallah et al. (2023), have also recognized the importance of post-dialogue actions and transparency. In the paper, the authors outlined accountability as one of the key principles that should be present in youth dialogues to enable safe, meaningful, and participatory discussions between youth and other generations. To ensure this, the authors suggest practical follow-up actions, such as giving the participants the opportunity to give feedback through an evaluation survey and encouraging participants to follow and/or participate in the next steps in creating the policy (ibid., 2023).

Addressing the lack of transparency can also address hidden power in dialogues. Transparency requires a clear agenda outlining the purpose of dialogues and how they will be used to influence policy. Demanding this makes it more challenging to keep the dialogues, which have been communicated as arenas for influence, vague. To transparently communicate what a dialogue is about and the expectations that participants can have for the dialogue directly addresses agendas. By directly addressing the agenda, the existence of unspoken or hidden

agendas is minimized. To reach this level of transparency could be difficult because there are no standards for how this should be done publicly. Therefore, transparency also requires that communication surrounding dialogues is not vague and instead explicitly states the goals of the dialogue. Such goals need to be specific, easily understandable, and publicly available for youth to scrutinize them.

4.1.3 Expertise: Should youth be included in high-level policymaking?

A common problem in youth dialogues is that it is difficult to formulate demands or suggestions for policy in concrete ways that can be implemented. This observation could be interlinked with some of the comments made by interviewees. For example, **Interviewee 6** brought up that the level of expertise needed for participation in international-level policymaking tends to be out of reach for young people. Specifically, to make feasible suggestions for policy requires in-depth knowledge in specific topics and skills to formulate thoughts into accepted language.

To address this, it has been suggested that participation should be prioritized on municipal and national levels instead (Threimer & Lorenz, 2023). **Interviewee 2** reflected on the fact that municipal and national spaces could be more suited for youth participation compared to global and international spaces. Following this reasoning, the suggestion to include young voices in municipal and national-level decision-making instead of international-level decision-making makes sense. Such inclusion even has the potential to reach global-level decision-making due to the interconnectedness of the levels of power.

I argue that youth should still be included in international or European-level decision-making even if they require expertise. To me, the question is not *if* youth should be included in climate-related decision-making, but rather *which youth* and *where*. It is clear that there are youth who are already experts in international-level decision-making compared to the majority of society (for example, **Interviewee 6**). Such youth could be accommodated in international policymaking, e.g., by including youth in national climate delegations. This is already happening in some cases, where UNFCCC participants have been chosen to represent countries as youth delegates, working together with their country delegations. The youth delegates have been described as having more opportunities to sit in on discussions compared to youth who have observer status and are not cooperating with their country's government (Marquartdt et al., 2024). However, this does not erase other previously explored factors, such as the inability to have decades of experience at a young age. A good start could be to provide funding for youth who put in the time and effort to develop and maintain the expertise needed to attend UNFCCC conferences.

4.1.4 How to create a safe, participatory and meaningful dialogue?

Though I have mainly focused on critiques of youth dialogues, I find it necessary to address how they could be improved. Such discussions were the focus in Nesrallah et al. (2023), which focused on youth participation in a health policy context. Despite the differences in context, their insights and summaries for what creates effective participatory processes involving youth are transferable to this context. The study suggested that power imbalances between generations create barriers to meaningful participation (ibid, 2023). To address these power imbalances, the article identified seven key principles (see Appendix 3), which could help design safe and meaningful intergenerational participatory processes. These principles were presented together with practical suggestions on what could be done to reach them.

Some of these seven principles, which were especially relevant in the context of this thesis, are outlined below (see Table 2). While giving practical tips on how to reach inclusivity, Nesrallah et al. (2023) suggested that dialogues should be brought to youth instead of youth having to seek out dialogues. They describe that this could reduce barriers to participation. This could be useful to create spaces that feel safe, similar to the reflections of **Interviewee 6** in section 3.3.3. The reasoning for why dialogues should be open and transparent was already discussed. The aspect of communicating the purpose, process, and anticipated outcomes as a practice echoes the conclusions I came to in 4.1.2, thus providing further evidence of their importance. The principle of accountability can uphold this transparency even when the process is over. All the tips for practical implementation outlined in Table 2 are useful. Finally, empowerment is crucial and often communicated as a dialogue goal. It is essential to recognise that empowerment without influence falls flat, questioning if it could then even be considered empowerment. It is strongly linked to two out of three points of Senecah (2004: 2024), which calls the progress triangle: taking into account the process, content, and relationships. However, the principles do not highlight the importance of building and maintaining relationships between generations. To do so is difficult, yet tips for how to do this with youth as a group, which has a high turnover rate, could be useful.

It is also important to keep experimenting with these principles in practice to further enhance the knowledge on how they could be implemented. Certain principles may be emphasised more in some contexts compared to other principles, depending on the type of dialogue. Therefore, the guidelines remain somewhat general. Creating, e.g., a youth-specific dialogue handbook, as a result of real-world experimentation, could be incredibly useful for dialogue organisers to ensure that such principles are honored.

Table 2. Summary of four out of seven principles of engagement in youth dialogues by Nesrallah et al. (2023)

Principle	Definition	Practical implementation
Inclusive	Participation must be inclusive, avoid existing patterns of discrimination, and encourage all relevant stakeholders to be involved. Efforts should be made to include marginalized groups. Consider that youth are not a homogeneous group, and their contributions and insights will vary based on their lived experiences.	Meet young people where they are to reduce barriers to participation. Work with grassroots organizations that represent young people from various communities to engage said youth.
Open and Transparent	The Dialogue Forum is a space to share, listen, and learn. To promote a participatory and productive dialogue, all participants should have an equal opportunity to voice their opinions and views. Stakeholders should also be transparent about their interests and motivation to participate in the dialogue forum.	Share clear roles, responsibilities, and expectations with all participants ahead of the dialogue. Provide youth with information about their right to express their views freely and will be encouraged to share their perspectives. Require all stakeholders to sign a consent form which outlines that by agreeing to participate, they consent to putting the primary climate interest of the initiative ahead of any conflicting financial, academic, or personal interests. Communicate the purpose, process, and anticipated outcomes of the dialogue to all participants involved to increase transparency. Organizers must however be cautious and mitigate unrealistic expectations of the outcomes and impact of the forum.
Accountable	A commitment to follow-up and evaluation is essential from both the organizers and participants. All participants are entitled to be provided with clear feedback on how their participation has influenced outcomes.	Share outcomes of the dialogue with all participants through a summary report. Encourage participants to follow-up on actions and commitments, published online Give participants the opportunity to provide clear feedback on the process through an evaluation survey. Wherever possible, give youth the opportunity to participate in follow-up processes or activities, specifically related to advancing their policy ideas.
Empowered	All participants should feel that their participation was meaningful and that they could affect the structure, process, and outcomes of a dialogue. Participants should feel empowered to take action as a result of the forum.	Provide youth with the opportunity and capacity building training to act as moderators of the discussion. Encourage participants to take action and collaborate after the Dialogue Forum.

4.2 What are the wider democratic implications of creating effective climate-related youth dialogues?

Despite the fact that most dialogues are not examples of effective collaboration, it needs to be noted that youth are given more opportunities to engage in dialogues compared to many other groups. Youth over the age of 18 essentially have the same opportunities to influence decisions as any other citizen. Research has also shown that there are not many differences between youth political participation and non-youth political participation (Weiss, 2020). Yet, there are few dialogues with other groups in society based on their attributes.

In the context of the climate, it is intriguing to consider the moral obligations related to hearing societal groups, which will be impacted concretely by climate issues. This follows the argumentation that hearing youth is especially crucial because young people and future generations will live with the consequences of climate change without having a say in creating the climate crisis. If arguing that there should be better systems in place for youth to participate meaningfully in climate policy because of intergenerational justice claims, other groups may also need to be included. For example, policymaking including indigenous populations, such as the Sámi in the Nordics, is also struggling to get their voices heard in climate policy. In this case, climate change is already threatening the existence of Sámi (Bituin Eriksson, 2023). Therefore, if it is possible to create participatory structures that work for young participants, the same effort should be put into dialogue with other groups, who may even have a more urgent claim to effective dialogue.

It could also be questioned whether dialogue events are only for specific groups in society, who are marginalised. It is certain that there are other groups in society who are also concerned about the climate and want to voice their opinions. For example, groups sharing a concern for the climate consisting of mothers (Sengupta, 2022) or healthcare workers (Clery et al, 2022). If the voices of these groups are not being heard, should they not have the same opportunity to voice their opinions as young people through dialogue with decision-makers? It could be worth investigating whether the lack of youth participation is a symptom of a society, where influencing and participating in climate policy is difficult for everyone. If this is the case, it could provide the grounds to argue for more participatory climate policies for everyone, not only youth.

Finally, the risks and benefits of a dialogue-centered approach to influencing policy should be considered. There is a risk that dialogue-centered processes place too big an emphasis on finding consensus (Kühn, 2021). Consensus-seeking dialogues could be a difficult space to hold and keep holding on to more transformative ways of looking at the future. This can significantly impact the transformative potential of youth's involvement, as conventional or 'dutiful' ways of influencing policy run the risk of perpetuating the status quo (O'Brien, 2018). It is crucial that there is space for disagreement in environmental policymaking, as they are an inherent feature of liberal democracies (Mouffe, 2013:7).

4.3 Theoretical implications

The findings and analysis section explored how the frameworks of Senecah (2004) and Gaventa (2006) can be used to make sense of the experiences of young participants in youth dialogues. In this discussion, I want to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each framework while reflecting on their emergent properties. I argue that using these two frameworks together allows for an understanding transcending what each framework can do alone.

When analysing the results through the lens of access, the material limitations and imbalances in skills between young participants and decision makers were highlighted. This provided a useful way of categorizing the barriers that youth face when participating in climate-related dialogues. While access is almost like a practical checklist, hidden power discussed in Gaventa (2006) offers another side of the same coin. The barriers that youth face are also a textbook manifestation of hidden power. As recognized previously, understanding knowledge and jargon used in policy-making limits participation to a select few, making participation as a non-expert difficult in dialogues. Not meeting the needs for access is a result of hidden power structures that allow only those with a specific privilege into decision-making spaces. Despite the overlap, there are significant differences between access and hidden power as concepts. For example, access can be easier to address with concrete actions because of its specific and grounded description. This could be explained by the difference in origin of power and the TOV, for which the TOV is rooted in practical solutions.

While considering civic standing, it is difficult to find an equivalent in the Powercube by Gaventa (2006). Exploring civic standing, however, was found to be important when analysing the interviews. The lack of standing is a source of deep frustration towards current structures and actions that prevent youth from meaningfully participating. The TOV, thus, provides new insight, which could not be found if only the Powercube were used as a theoretical framework.

The same can be said for the TOV, as it does not enable a power-sensitive evaluation and understanding of the context of collaborative dialogues. Investigating the levels of power can create an understanding of limitations that are present in each level of decision-making. If a person participates on a local level in a well-designed process, yet the decision is overruled by a national or EU level policy, was the person effectively heard in the process? Because of this, the global interconnected context of decision making needs to be considered to truly understand whether participants are capable of true influence.

In terms of spaces of power, the TOV and the Powercube can complement each other. When it comes to invited spaces, for example, the Powercube does not specify the ‘quality’ of those spaces. Not all invited spaces are created in the same way in terms of accessibility. Participants highlighted this as they could have both pleasant and less pleasant experiences in the invited spaces. In many cases, the

factors that made an invited space pleasant honored the TOV to some extent. For example, an invited space could be one that ensures accessible language, clear explanations for how the input will be used, and following through with that space. On the other hand, an invited space could also be a space where young participants are required to spend hours trying to understand its structures and struggle to interact meaningfully with policymakers. Here, the TOV is useful to provide nuance to what an invited space can be, should be, and could be.

Finally, Gaventa's (2006) invisible power is an underlying aspect that arguably prevails in all scenarios. Similar to what Foucault (1988) states, power cannot be escaped; it exists in every interaction, in every dialogue, and thus in every scenario. Though it would be impossible to eliminate power altogether, concrete steps can be taken to mitigate power in climate-focused youth dialogues. The TOV offers some suggestions on a concrete strategy on how power could be addressed, what should be prioritized, and why.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis focused on the experiences of young participants in climate-focused youth dialogues with policymakers through the lenses of trust and power. By analysing six interviews with youth dialogue participants from various contexts, it was found that previously identified barriers continue to limit the meaningful participation of youth. It was found that dialogues largely failed to satisfy the conditions for access, civic standing, and influence, indicating that dialogues lack trust per the definition of Senecah (2004; 2024). Even when access was granted, it was unclear for young participants to know how their input would impact policy after the dialogue.

The Powercube by Gaventa (2006) provided a lens through which power was analysed. Visible, hidden, and visible power could all be identified in interviewees' responses, indicating that power imbalances remain unmitigated in dialogues. There were fewer examples of visible power in dialogues, indicating that power. often shows up in implicit ways. Levels of power provided a space to reflect on youth dialogues in a multi-level global decision-making context. Different levels included more or less complexity in decision-making, which can gatekeep meaningful participation to youth who are willing to gain expertise in higher-level decision-making. Through spaces of power, it was found that invited and claimed spaces can house positive dialogue experiences. Youth tend to feel more comfortable when they are not significantly outnumbered, and dialogues are held in spaces that are close to what they are used to.

In the discussion, relationships to literature and wider democratic implications were outlined. Past literature on youth dialogues echoes the experiences of interviewees. There are issues with accountability after dialogues, as young participants are often excluded from decision-making after their short-term participation. Best practice examples from past literature were found to be a useful resource in what should be the focus when designing intergenerational dialogues in the future. It was concluded that dialogues have potential for young people to get their voices heard, yet revisions must be made to address trust and mitigate power imbalances for dialogues to reach said potential.

There are many potential foci for future research regarding youth participation in climate policy. Firstly, research could focus on creating more generalizable understandings of young participants in youth climate dialogues. This could be especially meaningful when studying smaller initiatives, potentially investigating a specific dialogue process in more depth. Secondly, this thesis did not include a gender element in the analysis despite mentions of gender by some interviewees. Therefore, an analysis creating richer insights on the impact of gender in being heard in dialogues for policymaking could provide interesting insights into the impact of the intersection between gender and age. Finally, there is a need for more studies like Nesrallah et al (2023), which can provide more practical advice for how dialogues could be designed and facilitated better when dealing with youth as a group of interest.

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Popular science summary

In the last decade, youth have shown more interest in influencing climate policy. Because of the difficulties young people face in being elected for governmental positions, youth are turning to alternative ways to make their voice heard. One of them is youth dialogues, which aim to consult youth on their views on climate policy through discussions with decision-makers.

Emerging literature shows that youth dialogues do not have the best track record in achieving this goal. This is because of the barriers that youth face when participating in dialogues, including a lack of financial resources and experience in lobbying. Studies have identified that power relations also play a big role in creating and upholding these barriers. Despite these findings, research on the experiences of youth in climate-related dialogues remains limited. The few studies that have been done have focused on bigger events, which have not been designed for youth participation. Thus, a further understanding of youth experiences is needed, especially in the case of smaller dialogues. To investigate this, six young dialogue participants were interviewed. Their experiences were analysed using two frameworks: the Trinity of Voice and the Powercube.

Applying the Trinity of Voice created insights into the following three categories: access, standing, and influence. Through the lens of access, it was found that young participants lack resources and experience compared to older generations. Young participants are often overloaded with responsibilities and are not compensated for their time in climate-related dialogues. By analysing standing, it was found that most dialogues had a collaborative atmosphere, where decision makers treated young participants respectfully and showed gratitude for their attendance. However, it was unclear to young participants how the youth's input would be used after the dialogue, meaning that not all conditions for civic standing were met, even in the more positive dialogue experiences. In terms of influence, dialogues were seen to have the potential to create a pathway for young people to have a voice. Yet, in their current state, young participants perceived a lack of ability to influence decision-making.

Through the lens of the Powercube, it was found that power imbalances have not been addressed. Power continues to influence who gets to participate and what is discussed. Power could even impact what methods young dialogue participants deem acceptable or desired when influencing policy. Though interviewees found it hard to influence decisions through dialogue, protesting was still seen as undesired or a last resort.

Dialogues do not allow youth to influence climate policy unless barriers and power are addressed. Dialogues could be improved by following best practice examples. Research on both currently participating and non-participating youth is needed to further understand how to design effective youth dialogues that reach larger groups of youth.

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A final thank you to my grandmother for always being the writer in my life. May your words and determination live on in future generations!

Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

Hellos and present yourselves:

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, maybe just your name, age and what your relationship is with climate issues - what made you engage with climate issues?

I am doing this research as a part of my master's thesis project to understand youth dialogue in Europe

When hearing the term youth dialogue in decision making what comes to mind for you? (this is not a test or anything I just want to start off the discussion by talking about what it means to you as a participant and me as a researcher)

My definition: Youth dialogue for me is an organised dialogue-event either online or in person where young people and policymakers talk about political issues together, most probably with the goal of either explicitly or implicitly increasing youth representation in policy. This could be big or small events ranging from global and European level (COP, European Youth Dialogues) to national levels and even local discussions about creating spaces for youth.

General questions:

1. Have you been involved in youth dialogue processes? If yes, which ones?
2. Can you talk me through the process that you went through to be part of a youth dialogue? What steps did you go through?

The dialogue setting:

3. Who was present during the dialogue?
4. What was the setting like: e.g. Were you all in the same room, was it a big room with a lot of people, did you talk in smaller groups, bigger groups?

Expectations & feelings in dialogue:

6. Were the common goals for the dialogue - i.e. what was the point of the dialogue?
7. If yes, how were they decided?
8. Did you have any expectations for the dialogue and if yes, what were they?
9. Were these expectations met (personal and collective expectations)?
10. How did you feel during the dialogue? Possible follow up: did you feel heard/did you feel like your opinion mattered?

Youth dialogues as a form of advocacy:

11. Why do you think youth dialogues are held? Possible follow up if it doesn't get mentioned: Are youth dialogues important? Why?
12. In your opinion, are there any limitations to youth dialogues?
13. Are there alternatives to youth dialogues (for young people to get their voices heard)?
14. Have you been involved in these alternatives and how has that experience been (in comparison to youth dialogues)?

Context & power:

15. Do you agree with the following statement: youth is able to influence climate policy in the Baltic Sea Region/Europe? Why/why not?
16. Can you elaborate on what you think enables and/or limits youth to participate in the creation of climate policy in the Baltic Sea Region?

Cool down:

Is there anything you would like to add based on these reflections?

Appendix 2 – Consent form

[Fakultet/Institution/centrumbildning]
By Maria Johansson
Supervised by Christoffer Söderlund Kanarp

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

February 2025

When you consent to take part in the independent project Power Between Youth and Decision Makers in Youth-led Climate Advocacy and Intergroup Dialogue, you consent to the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) processing your personal data. Consenting to this is optional. However, if you do not consent, you cannot take part in the project. This form aims to give you all the information you need to decide whether you consent to participating in the project and to SLU processing your personal data.

Consent is the legal basis for processing your personal data. You can withdraw your consent at any time, and you do not have to justify this. However, withdrawing your consent will not affect the processing that has already taken place. SLU is responsible for processing your personal data. SLU's data protection officer can be contacted at dataskydd@slu.se. Your contact person for the project is the student Maria Johansson (majn0053@stud.slu.se). You can also contact the supervisor Christoffer Söderlund Kanarp (christoffer.kanarp@slu.se).

I will be collecting the following personal data: your name, age and history with climate activism or climate politics which may come up during discussion. The purpose of processing your personal data is to allow the SLU student to carry out their independent project Power Between Youth and Decision Makers in Youth-led Climate Advocacy and Intergroup Dialogue with good scientific quality. Your personal data will not be transferred to other organisations or companies. Any personal data will be stored separately from your contact information.
The interview will be recorded unless agreed otherwise. The purpose for recording is to be able to analyse and quote data from the interview during the thesis. The quotes along with the rest of your answers will be presented under pseudonym in the thesis. I will confirm your consent for recording at the beginning of the interview.

Your personal data will be stored until the independent project has been assessed and the grade registered in the SLU student registry. After that, the data will be disposed of. The data will be handled in a way that prevents unauthorised access. More information on how SLU processes personal data, and about your rights, is available at www.slu.se/personal-data. You have the right, under certain circumstances, to have your personal data erased, corrected or limited. You also have the right to access the personal data being processed, and you have the right to object to the processing of your data.

If you have any comments, contact the data protection officer at dataskydd@slu.se. If you want to make a complaint, contact the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection at imy@imy.se. Read more about the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection at www.imy.se.

☐ I hereby consent to take part in this independent project and to SLU processing my personal data in the manner explained in this text, including any sensitive data I may submit.

_____

Signature Date

_____

Name in block letters

Appendix 3 – Adapted summary of the seven principles for engagement in youth dialogues by Nesrallah et al. (2023)

Principle	Definition	How to put this into practice?
Respectful	All views must be treated with respect, and efforts should be made to promote mutual understanding. Participants will be reminded that one opinion does not take precedence over another.	Share a code of conduct with all participants ahead of the Dialogue Forum, with a particular emphasis on conduct that promotes mutual respect.
Inclusive	Participation must be inclusive, avoid existing patterns of discrimination, and encourage all relevant stakeholders to be involved. Efforts should be made to include marginalized groups. Consider that youth are not a homogeneous group, and their contributions and insights will vary based on their lived experiences.	Meet young people where they are to reduce barriers to participation. Work with grassroots organizations that represent young people from various communities to engage said youth.
Voluntary	Participation in the Dialogue Forum must be completely voluntary, and individuals can cease involvement at any stage without consequence.	Communicate the voluntary nature of the dialogue to all participants at the beginning of the session. Provide youth with guidance on how to cease participation if they wish. This includes appointing a “floater” whose role is to observe the Dialogue Forum and serve as a point of contact for youth.
Open and Transparent	The Dialogue Forum is a space to share, listen, and learn. To promote a participatory and productive dialogue, all participants should have an equal opportunity to voice their opinions and views. Stakeholders should also be transparent about their interests and motivation to participate in the dialogue forum.	Share clear roles, responsibilities, and expectations with all participants ahead of the dialogue. Provide youth with information about their right to express their views freely and will be encouraged to share their perspectives. Require all stakeholders to sign a consent form which outlines that by agreeing to participate, they consent to putting the primary climate interest of the initiative ahead of any conflicting financial, academic, or personal interests. Communicate the purpose, process, and anticipated outcomes of the dialogue to all participants involved to increase transparency. Organizers must however be cautious and mitigate unrealistic expectations of the outcomes and impact of the forum.
Accountable	A commitment to follow-up and evaluation is essential from both the organizers and participants. All	Share outcomes of the dialogue with all participants through a summary report.

	participants are entitled to be provided with clear feedback on how their participation has influenced outcomes.	Encourage participants to follow-up on actions and commitments, published online Give participants the opportunity to provide clear feedback on the process through an evaluation survey. Wherever possible, give youth the opportunity to participate in follow-up processes or activities, specifically related to advancing their policy ideas.
Safe and sensitive to risk	Adult stakeholders have a responsibility to take every precaution necessary to minimize the risk to youth of violence, exploitation, or any other negative consequence of their participation.	Inform youth of their right to be protected from harm, right to withdraw, and know where to go for help if needed. Clearly communicate safety measures that adult participants must abide by, such as not being alone with a young person in a room or closed space.
Empowered	All participants should feel that their participation was meaningful and that they could affect the structure, process, and outcomes of a dialogue. Participants should feel empowered to take action as a result of the forum.	Provide youth with the opportunity and capacity building training to act as moderators of the discussion. Encourage participants to take action and collaborate after the Dialogue Forum.

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