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## From Youth Participation to Social Innovation and Policy Change

An Observational Study of Stakeholder Management Strategies  
in Youth Citizen Social Science



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## FORMALITIES

This thesis follows the 2021/2022 year of study. It is 54 pages long excluding the front page, foreword, abstract, table of contents, bibliography, appendices, and lists of abbreviations, figures, maps, tables, and key definitions.

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## KEY DEFINITIONS

These terms are part of the professional terminology I will use to understand and analyse the work of the researchers I have met during this project.

**Citizen Science** engages the public as co-researchers or citizen scientists in collecting and disseminating data and results. It democratizes the processes of knowledge production by accepting the skills of non-specialists to research (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014).

**Citizen Social Science** brings together social science researchers conducting citizen science projects and researchers with a background in citizen science focusing on social issues. Thus, they apply and integrate social science methodologies and theories in their research (Thomas et al., 2021).

**Co-creation** in social research is understood as participatory multi-stakeholder innovation processes. Despite a consensus on the participative, cross-sectoral character of co-creation, comprehensive definitions are still not established in research (Klimczuk et al., 2022).

**Living Labs** are physical or virtual spaces in which to solve societal challenges, especially in urban areas, by bringing together various stakeholders for collaboration and collective innovation. It should enable users to participate actively in the research, development, and innovation processes (European Commission, 2009; Hossain et al., 2019).

A **stakeholder** is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization's purpose (Freeman, 1984, p. 53).

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EU: European Union

CS: Citizen Science

CSS: Citizen Social Science

DoA: Description of Actions

Y-CSS: Youth Citizen Social Science

YCS: Young Citizen Scientists

## FOREWORD

My interest in youth participation arose when working as an activist in a children's rights NGO. I cooperated with welfare services leaders to develop social innovations and policy changes to ensure youths' opportunities to participate in decisions affecting their own lives. Without this collaboration with individuals holding power to change the lives of children and young people – the stakeholders – we risk falling short when trying to create real change.

I brought with me my experiences with stakeholder management when I got the opportunity to do my master's project as part of the EU research project YouCount, where young people are included as co-researchers to develop social innovations and policy change to tackle social exclusion. I wanted to explore how researchers in a vast European youth citizen social science project strategize and cooperate with stakeholders.

I would like to thank the YouCount researchers who have courageously and openly let me observe their work and shared their thoughts, considerations and choices, and reflected on the challenges in realizing this project. I admire your engagement towards affecting change for youths at risk of exclusion and blazing new trails in youth citizen social science. Developing and shaping a new research field is a daunting challenge. Real research is always more chaotic than visionary funding proposals. Without your openness and goodwill, my research would not have been possible.

Thank you to the young citizen scientists in the district of Gamle Oslo for your courage and desire to make a difference.

Thank you to my supervisor Kjetil Wathne at Oslo Metropolitan University and the Work Research Institute (AFI) team Reidun Norvoll, Aina Landsverk Hagen, Ingar Brattbakk, Sara Berge Lorenzen, Sara Noémie Plassnig, Sveinung Legard, and Silje Brekkhus, for all help and support throughout the project period. Thanks also to my friends and family who have given feedback, proofread, and supported me.

## ABSTRACT

Participatory democracy has increasingly influenced contemporary western political development, research, and innovation in the last decades. Citizen Social Science is seen as a tool for incorporating the ideals of participatory democracy into co-creative knowledge production. While international Citizen Social Science studies suggest that stakeholder involvement is imperative for effective implementation and significant impacts, there are few empirical studies on how to conduct stakeholder management in practice.

The primary motivation of this thesis was to contribute to increased knowledge about concrete stakeholder management strategies by investigating the characteristics of the strategical work in YouCount, a trans-European, EU-funded research program which is at the forefront of the development of Youth Citizen Social Science.

The thesis project used a multifaceted qualitative data collection approach including participatory observations, semi-structured elite interviews with researchers, and internal document analyses. It was carried out in the three Scandinavian case studies of YouCount's early project phases, from January to, and including, April 2022.

The study shows that the YouCount case studies, affected by prior contextual district knowledge, have taken advantage of built-in project flexibility, and chosen different stakeholder recruitment strategies. This has affected who, when, and how stakeholders are involved in the project and even the interpretation of the project's main stakeholder management concepts. The empirical data identifies social tasks for securing safe and efficient environments as important aspects of participation.

The thesis indicates that future citizen social science projects which aim to contribute to participatory democracy could benefit from a clearer developed strategic framework for contextual navigation and recruitment of relevant stakeholders, for the implementation of central stakeholder management concepts, for utilising internal and external stakeholders, and for ensuring socially safe research environments for young citizen scientists.

Keywords: Citizen Science, Citizen Social Science, Youth Citizen Social Science, Stakeholder Management, Co-Creation, Social Innovation, Youth Participation, Policymaking.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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Participatory democracy has become an imperative of our time, the subject of countless international conferences, government projects, and policy reforms, and is at the centre of much recent contemporary political thinking (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017, p. 2).

Participation has a long history in modern democratic theories tracing back to the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville amongst others (Dacombe & Parvin, 2021). The idea that citizens should participate in the development of the society in which they live is today omnipresent after a “participatory revolution” over the last decades, or what former U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton has described as “the participation age” (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017).

The European Union (EU) has also lived through the participation revolution. Mariya Gabriel, the EU Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth has stated that “interaction between citizens, scientists and policymakers is essential to enrich research and innovation and reinforce the society’s trust in science” (Arias R. et al., 2022, p. 4). And when the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declared 2022 as “The Year of European Youth”, she stated that “young people are at the heart of our policymaking and political priorities. We vow to listen to them (...), and we want to work together to shape the future of the European Union” (European Commission, October 14, 2021). These are examples of the increased political will to strengthen public participation in innovation and research and recognize ordinary citizens as science knowledge producers (Arias R. et al., 2022; Kasperowski & Kullenberg, 2018; Klimczuk et al., 2022).

The concept of participatory democracy is changing how young people are seen as democratic actors. It has been operationalized by the EU through, amongst others, increased funding of participatory democracy programmes (e.g., Horizon 2020 and Science with and For Society, SwafS), and citizen science (CS) programmes. In CS, citizens and scientists collaborate to produce new knowledge (Arias R. et al., 2022; Vohland et al., 2021). CS has traditionally been dominated by the natural sciences where lay people gather data about the nature around them, while projects in the humanities and social sciences have been less common (Göbel et al., 2022; Tauginienė et al., 2020). However, citizen *social* science (CSS), which arose from a desire to meet societal challenges and include underrepresented groups as a way to strengthen participatory democracy, has increased significantly in recent years (Irwin, 1995; Thomas et al., 2021). CSS has been promoted



actively by the EU as a scientific approach to support inclusion and citizen participation in the generation of knowledge, policymaking and social innovations (Arias R. et al., 2022).

The growing number of participatory democracy programmes like CSS programs generally promote the importance of involvement and collaboration with stakeholders. Stakeholder involvement influences success through more effective implementation, and a more significant impact. While the theory and rationale of stakeholder collaboration have been well developed, it can be hard to know how to conduct it in practice (Klimczuk et al., 2022; Serrano Sanz F. et al., 2015; Skarlatidou et al., 2019). This is also my personal experience in policy innovation processes from my earlier work in a children's rights NGO.

My review of the literature in this field shows that there is a limited number of CSS studies presenting knowledge about how to do local stakeholder collaboration in practice (Eslerod & Jepsen, 2016; Freeman, 1984; Hagen et al., 2021; Manzoni et al., 2021; Skarlatidou et al., 2019; Tiago, 2017; Vohland et al., 2021) and that further research is needed on co-creation processes in CS and their impact on stakeholders (Klimczuk et al., 2022). Most studies address stakeholder involvement more implicitly, see e.g. Ballard et al. (2016), and related to engagement, see e.g. Ceccaroni and Latham (2022). There is therefore a need to increase explicit empirical and theoretical knowledge of effective and impact-oriented stakeholder management and how to strategize in a good way, especially in projects including youths. This knowledge can be used to understand how to increase youths' opportunities for active citizenship and civic engagement.

Ambitions to increase social inclusion for young people and strengthen participatory democracy through co-creation and stakeholder involvement are vital parts of the ongoing SwafS- and Horizon 2020-funded YouCount Project (2021-2023). Being one of the first large-scale youth citizen social science (Y-CSS) programs, YouCount's idea is that professional researchers and youths, particularly those at risk of exclusion, called young citizen scientists (YCS), work together to develop new knowledge about positive drivers for health and social welfare innovation and policy change.

Research programs like YouCount often reflect political goals and priorities, what happens within research can often say something about what happens in the policy area. This makes YouCount especially interesting for investigating to what extent CSS can contribute to support impactful participatory democracy processes and social innovations co-created with stakeholders and is therefore also of interest in a policymaking perspective more broadly.

### 1.1 Research Objectives

This thesis aims to increase knowledge about efficient stakeholder management strategies to achieve social innovation and policy change through co-creative CSS projects, in the hope of

strengthening participatory democracy. In the study, I will explore how the above-mentioned Y-CSS YouCount project works specifically on local stakeholder involvement in practice and assess how characteristics of its stakeholder management strategies can contribute to achieving social impact and policy change.

YouCount is a suitable project to study to reach my aim and contribute to closing the mentioned knowledge gap because it has clear ambitions for co-creation with youths and local stakeholders and provides a sound empirical basis for studying stakeholder involvement. This thesis explores how YouCount's researchers translate ambitions outlined in the project's Descriptions of Action, DoA (2020) about stakeholder involvement and co-creation into practice through a qualitative study of three Scandinavian cases. The actual research practices will then be compared with theoretical knowledge on stakeholder management in social innovation, and in policy development more generally.

The study was carried out with a multifaceted qualitative data collection and analysis approach in the three Scandinavian case studies, in Copenhagen, Oslo, and Stockholm, of YouCount's early project phases, from January to April 2022.

To address the research objectives outlined in this thesis, five research questions were created:

- Which strategies for stakeholder recruitment does YouCount use?
- What types of actors are recruited as stakeholders?
- Which stakeholder management strategies are used to reach YouCount's impact objectives?
- How are stakeholder management strategies interpreted in practice by YouCount?
- What are YouCount's strategic considerations when youths are involved as YCS?

To investigate and evaluate YouCount's stakeholder management, I will apply a theoretical perspective that combines theories about stakeholder management, innovation studies, and a theory of policy change.

Although the study operates in YouCount's early project phases, it can provide insights into how stakeholder management strategies are done in practice. In addition, the study can provide increased knowledge and insights about the design of stakeholder-involved social innovation and policy development more broadly to support participatory democracy, hopefully, useful for the field of (Y-)CSS.

Before presenting and discussing the findings, I will introduce YouCount, my theoretical framework and the study's methodological design.

## 2. BACKGROUND

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YouCount is a co-creative Y-CSS project that focuses on social inclusion. The project idea came from the Work Research Institute (AFI) at Oslo Metropolitan University which wanted to explore the potential of Y-CSS in social science and action research. The project aims to provide increased knowledge of positive drivers for social inclusion, defined as equal opportunities for youth participation in society. This is done by involving young people aged 14-30 years in ten case studies in nine European countries: Austria, Denmark, Hungary (two cases), Italy, Lithuania, Norway, United Kingdom, Spain, and Sweden.

The local case studies have chosen one of three main domains of social inclusion, these are (1) social participation, e.g., work, education, and social life (chosen by the Oslo case study), (2) connectedness and social belonging, and (3) citizenship and rights through civic engagement (chosen by the Copenhagen and Stockholm case studies) (YouCount Project, 2021-2023).

The main research questions YouCount addresses are: (1) What are young people's own views on what the critical issues are for social inclusion? (2) What are young people's experiences with opportunities for social inclusion in their daily life (social participation, social belonging, and citizenship)? (3) What new means and policies for social inclusion are needed? To answer these questions, researchers and young co-researchers are gathering data from youth in the project districts through a flexible mixed-methods design including a YouCount app created to gather and share experiences of inclusion and exclusion. The goal is that approximately ten YCS in each case study collect data from ten local youths each so that each case study ends up with data from one hundred youths. The collected data will be the foundation of social innovation and policy change proposals developed together with young people and local stakeholders. The DoA (2020) exemplifies relevant stakeholders as policymakers, public authorities, youth organisations, universities, research institutions, the private sector, NGOs, etc.

The main tool or activity for including stakeholders in developing social innovation and policy change is the concept of "Living Labs" which can be defined as "a physical or virtual space in which to solve societal challenges, especially for urban areas, by bringing together various stakeholders for collaboration and collective ideation" (Hossain et al., 2019). It should enable users to participate actively in the research, development, and innovation process (European Commission, 2009).

Each European YouCount case study will in addition develop "dialogue forums" and organise local and national workshops (YouCount Project, 2021-2023). The activities have been designed to be specific to each local context.

## 2.1 The Context of YouCount

The following section outlines the three Scandinavian case studies and how YouCount in its DoA (2020) describes the districts they are operating in, to stake out measures and means to develop social innovation and policy change, all tied to the social inclusion of youths.

### The Oslo Case Study

The Oslo case study is conducted by five researchers at the Work Research Institute at Oslo Metropolitan University. The social inclusion focus is social participation through employment and entrepreneurship. The district of the Oslo case study is Gamle Oslo, a centrally located and densely populated part of the city (DoA, 2020). It has high levels of economic inequality with both luxury apartments and world-renown art museums on one side of the train tracks with high levels of poverty, unemployment, and a large immigrant population on the other side.

Map 1: District of Gamle Oslo (within red lines)

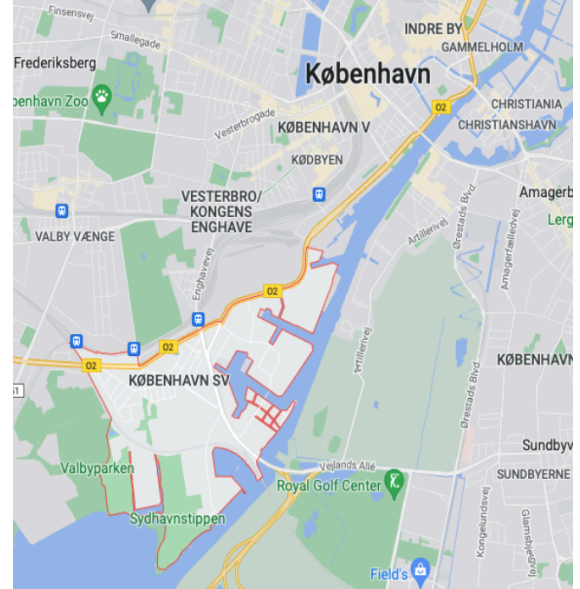


Job opportunities for local youths are scarce due to a lack of network possibilities and exclusion. Local youths have stated that finding their first job is a key issue (DoA, 2020). The case study gathers and analyses data about existing job opportunities for youth in the area, initiatives to increase these opportunities, and the extent to which these local initiatives succeed.

### The Copenhagen Case Study

The Copenhagen case study is conducted by two researchers at Aalborg University Copenhagen. It targets the district of Sydhavn. The social inclusion focus is civic engagement through entrepreneurship in the circular economy. Sydhavn, four kilometres south of Copenhagen central station, is described in the DoA (2020) as divided by expensive new buildings in the waterfront area mainly inhabited by upper-middle-class residents, while the older part of the district inland by the railroad tracks is an area that has been and still is populated primarily by

Map 2: District of Sydhavn (within red lines)



working-class inhabitants and is described by the municipalities as one of the six vulnerable urban areas in Copenhagen. In recent decades, this neighbourhood has been having a negative development relative to basic social parameters such as education and unemployment. Ten times more of the 18-29-year-olds in the district receive social support compared to Copenhagen's average (DoA, 2020).

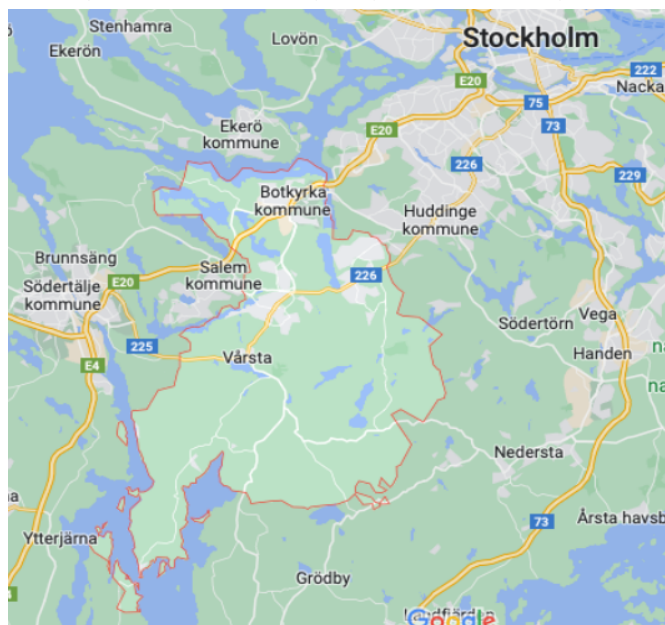
YouCount's objective is to increase the social inclusion of youth through civic engagement in cooperation with actors in the local circular economy network, including a repair café, a waste recycling centre, a business association, a public library, a culture centre, and the university campus (DoA, 2020).

### [The Stockholm Case Study](#)

The Stockholm case study is conducted by six researchers at Södertörn University and VA (Public & Science) and targets the district of Botkyrka. The social inclusion focus is civic engagement through civil-society engagement. Botkyrka lies 20 kilometres southwest of the city centre and is described in the DoA (2020) as a highly culturally diverse municipality. The population is young and unemployment rates are high with an above-average rate of people receiving social benefits. The almost 200 square kilometre large municipality has not one centre but five urban areas, making it a challenge to familiarize with the municipality.

The three Scandinavian local case studies share certain specifics. They are all based in what Esping-Andersen calls advanced social-democratic welfare states (Fitzpatrick & Kwön, 2006), they are all working from the same DoA, and they are all working in disadvantaged urban districts with significant internal socio-economic differences and large populations of minority backgrounds. The goal is to develop new knowledge through the data gathered by local YCS that the researchers would not be able to reach with other research methodologies. Although the three case studies have commonalities, this study shows varied approaches to reducing local youths' social exclusion, stakeholder involvement, and how to conduct Living Labs.

Map 3: District of Botkyrka (within red lines)



### 3. THEORY

There are limited studies on concrete stakeholder management in CS and CSS. As a measure to get a better picture of YouCount’s strategical work towards social innovation and policy change, I will combine theories from the research strands of stakeholder management, innovation studies, policy change and CS into one model.

Particularly influential in the field of stakeholder management theory is the work of R. Edward Freeman (1984). His work is still enjoying support from a wide community of researchers (Littau et al., 2010, p. 17). The theory has been applied in the Scandinavian setting (Strand & Freeman, 2015), and is extensively used in CS literature (Skarlatidou et al., 2019).

Theoretical frameworks on social innovation and policy change include Carayannis, Gonzales and Wetter’s framework for analysis of innovations (2003) and Walt and Gilson’s theory of policy change (1994) which include their widely used policy triangle framework.

I will also use essential CS literature, especially in the aforementioned *The Science of Citizen Science* (2021), Göbel et al.’s report about stakeholder analysis in CS (2016), and Manzoni, Vohland and Schade’s EU report on CS strategies and initiatives in Europe. Together, these approaches will constitute a framework for an appropriate analysis of YouCount as a Y-CSS project.

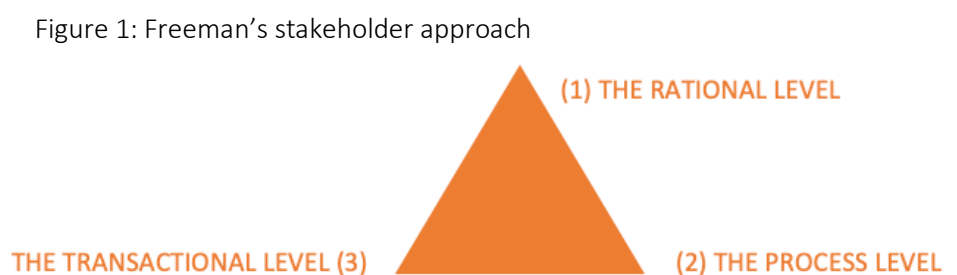
The following section presents elements of Freeman, Carayannis et al., and Walt and Gilson as well as relevant CS literature, and describes the model used in this thesis for analysing YouCount’s strategical work on stakeholder management.

#### 3.1 A Stakeholder Approach by Freeman

R. Edward Freeman wrote his book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (1984) for U.S. companies. The book also included generic strategies for stakeholder management which makes it relevant across a multitude of fields of study, including CS and CSS. Freeman defines a stakeholder as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organisation’s purpose” (Freeman, 1984, p. 53).

Freeman lists three levels of understanding stakeholder management processes (1984, p. 53)

which can be used to understand YouCount’s process toward social innovation and policy change. Freeman starts with (1) The Rational Level: stakeholder mapping, then (2)





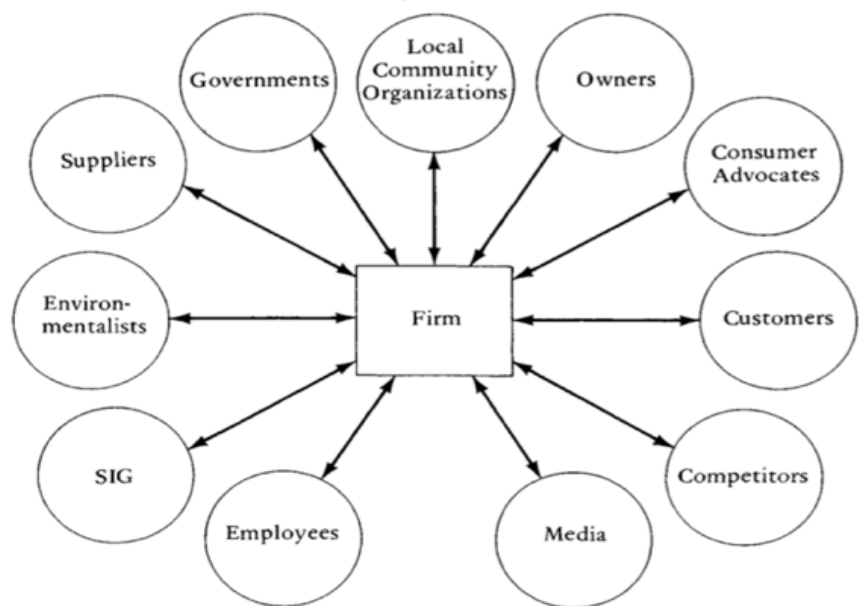
The Process Level: environmental scanning, and (3) The Transactional Level: stakeholder interaction. These levels are illustrated in figure 1 (above), inspired by Walt and Gilson's (1994) triangle-shaped model (further below).

#### The Rational Level: Stakeholder Mapping

Freeman (1984) argues that an organisation must have an understanding of who current and possible stakeholders are, including their stakes in the organisation's possible achievements. He proposes to develop a stakeholder map based either on a historical analysis of the environment or the organisation's objectives,

with specific stakeholder groups to understand the power structures of the organization's environment. In Freeman's example stakeholder map from 1984 (figure 2), (1984, p. 25), 'firm' is placed in the centre and stakeholder groups circles around it. These may be adjusted to fit specific contexts, such as CSS.

Figure 2: Freeman's example of a business stakeholder map



#### The Process Level: Environmental Scanning

At the process level, Freeman argues that an organisation needs to understand the project's internal processes to manage stakeholders and whether these 'fit' with the stakeholder map. Freeman proposes doing an 'environmental scanning', which he explains using a metaphor of radar technology. Stakeholder managers "put up their antennae" (1984, p. 67) to scan for key events, trends, etc., which may affect the project. He also includes an analysis of each stakeholder's power in its local community and interest in the project.

#### The Transactional Level: Interacting with Stakeholders

At the transactional level, Freeman argues that an organisation must understand what kind of transactions or bargains between the project and the stakeholders are needed for the desired outcome. Freeman's three levels of analysis are widely used to understand how an organisation is (or should be) working with stakeholder management (Strand & Freeman, 2015). This thesis deploys it

to analyse YouCount’s process toward social innovation and policy change through stakeholder cooperation.

### 3.2 Carayannis et al.’s Analytical Framework

Carayannis et al. (2003) are business and stakeholder management theorists, like Freeman, but they focus more on innovations, the impact, and the social aspect of it. They argue that “innovation is a social process since it is only through the intervention and management of people that an organisation can realize the benefits” (Carayannis et al., 2003, p. 116). This makes their work relevant to studies of Y-CCS in general, and YouCount in particular, with its focus on interaction, co-

creation, and dialogue, which are essential in facilitating policy change and improved outcomes. Carayannis et al. define four dimensions (figure 3) for analysing innovations: (I) Context, (II) Process, (III) Content, and (IV) Impact.

Figure 3: Carayannis et al.’s analytical framework



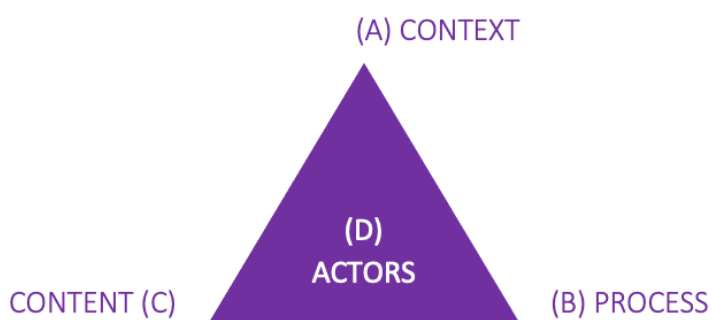
The inclusion of impact, described as “the social and technological change which results from the completion of the innovation process” (Carayannis et al., 2003, p. 118), differs from Freeman. They do not describe actors’ roles in innovations, but state that it’s the most interesting topic for further research (Carayannis et al., 2003, p. 135).

### 3.3 Policy Change Framework by Walt & Gilson

Walt and Gilson’s theory of change (1994) is about policy, which is an essential part of YouCount. Their framework centres on four dimensions (A) Context, including situational, structural, cultural, and global factors; (B) Process, including agenda-setting, policy formulation, policy implementation and policy change; (C) Content, including objectives and aims, assumptions, values, and distributional impact; and in the centre, (D) Actors, including the state and the civil society.

Walt and Gilson argue that too much attention is given to the content of policy reforms and that too little is typically given to the actors involved because it “diverts attention from understanding the processes which can explain why desired policy fails to emerge” (Walt & Gilson, 1994, p. 353).

Figure 4: Walt & Gilson’s policy change framework





What they call actors (the state, the market, and the civil society) overlaps with Freeman’s definition of stakeholders (groups and individuals who can affect or are affected by the purpose of the project). Their actor-oriented and policy-focused theory made me want to include it in my framework.

Internal actors like the researchers and YCS are included in this definition of stakeholders, but I will for the sake of simplicity divide these groups from the external stakeholders in this thesis.

### 3.4 Including Citizen Science Perspectives

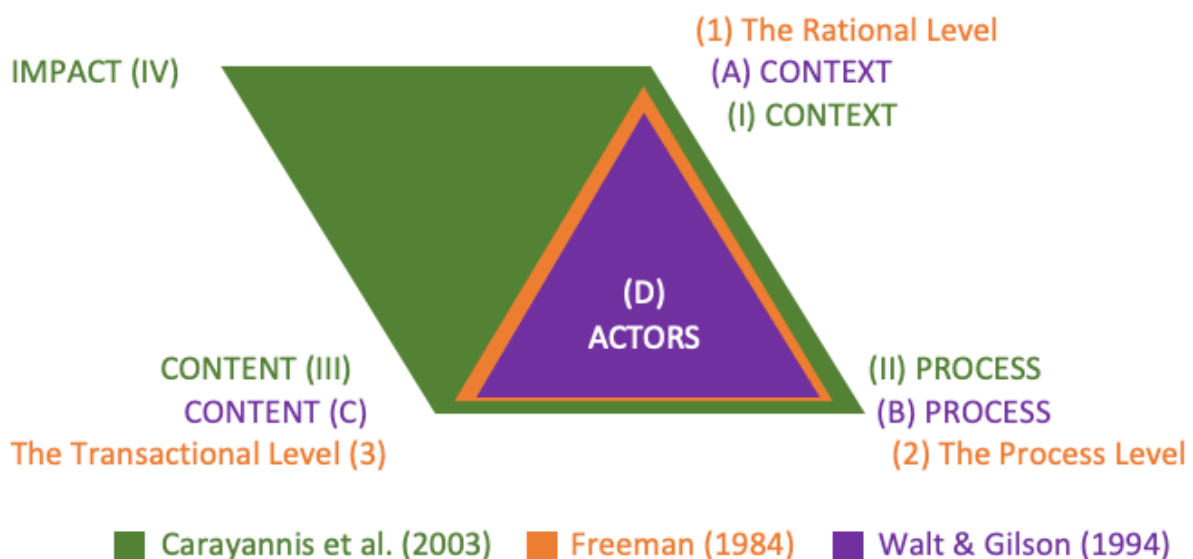
In *The Science of Citizen Science*, Vohland et al. (2021, p. 310) use similar dimensions of analysis: content, process, and empowerment (parts of impact). They also describe the concept of co-creation, which is an important part of CSS, and include a framework for analysis which I will use to discuss YouCount’s case studies’ level of co-creation in part 6.3.

I will also use Göbel et al.’s (2016) work on groups of stakeholders that are relevant for many CS projects. These are presented below.

### 3.5 Model for Citizen Social Science Stakeholder Management Analysis

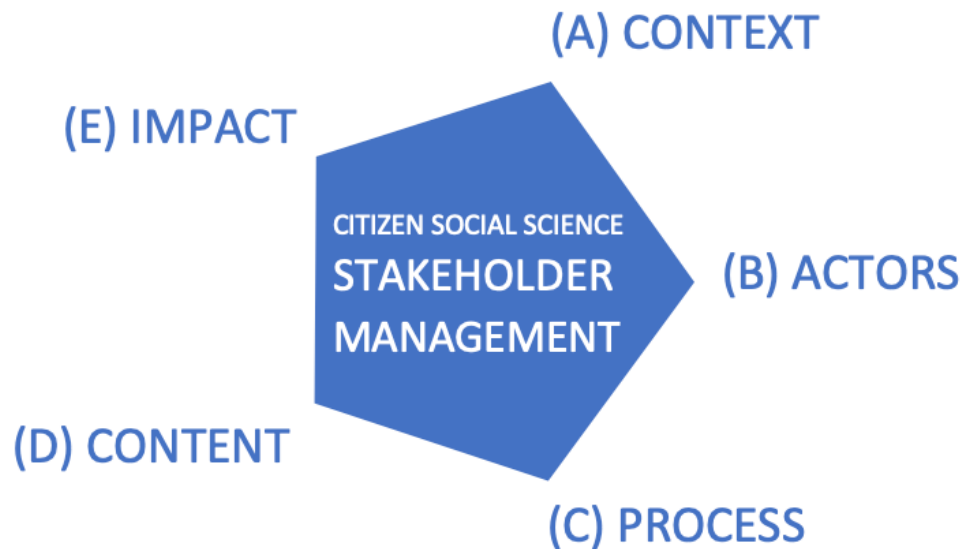
To analyse stakeholder management strategies in YouCount, and its work towards social innovation and policy change, I will draw on the theories presented above to generate an appropriate model to analyse stakeholder management in the YouCount case studies. I have visualized how and where the models of Freeman, Carayannis et al., and Walt and Gilson overlap and diverge (figure 5), and how their models have been combined to fit the specific context of this thesis.

Figure 5: The models of Carayannis et al., Freeman, and Walt & Gilson combined



Above is a visualisation of the three theories combined. This is the foundation for my model to analyse YouCount’s strategical work on stakeholder management as a CSS project. Below is a visualisation of my model (figure 6) which include the analytical levels of (a) context, (b) actors, (c) process, (d) content, and (e) impact. The model shape tries to visualise the recursiveness rather than linearity of the analysis approach.

Figure 6: CSS Stakeholder Management Analysis Model



Inspired by Walt and Gilson’s (1994) explanations of their model, the model above is a highly simplified illustration of a complex set of interrelationships. Each area may be described separately, however, analysing, and understanding to what extent the levels are interconnected and the effect each level has on one another gives better value and understanding, rather than analysing each level as a silo. (B) Actors are for example influenced by the (A) Context within which they live and work, this is in YouCount’s case the researchers, the YCS, and the stakeholders. The (C) Process is in turn affected by the (B) Actors, their position in power structures, interest in the project, and their values and expectations. (D) Content is decided by the competencies of (B) Actors, the (A) Context in which they interact and so forth. This in turn will influence (E) Impact, which in turn becomes the (A) Context for subsequent interventions.

Table 1 (below) gathers the most important aspects from Freeman (1984), Carayannis et al. (2003) and Walt and Gilson (1994) which are included in the theoretical framework and stakeholder analysis model.

Table 1: Theoretical Foundation of the CSS Stakeholder Management Analysis Model

My theoretical framework	Freeman	Carayannis et al.	Walt & Gilson
<b>(A) Context</b> Tool: Stakeholder mapping	The environment of current and possible stakeholders including stakeholder mapping.	The environment in which the innovation emerges, and the effect of that environment on the innovation.	Situational, structural, cultural, and global factors. Stakeholder mapping of the state, the market and the civil society.
<b>(B) Actors</b>			Citizens, scientists, stakeholders, the government, the market and the civil society
<b>(C) Process</b>	‘Environmental scanning’ for key events, trends, etc. which may affect the project. Power-interest analysis.	The way in which the innovation is developed, diffused, and adopted.	Agenda-setting, policy formulation, policy implementation and policy change.
<b>(D) Content</b>	The interaction and bargaining with stakeholders.	The specific technical or social nature of the innovation itself.	Objectives, aims, assumptions and values.
<b>(E) Impact</b>		The social change which results from the completion of the innovation process.	Influencing public discourse is important impact for policy change.

I will now describe each of the model’s five analytical levels (A-E), include the CS perspectives, and connect them to the analyses of YouCount.

**(A) Context**

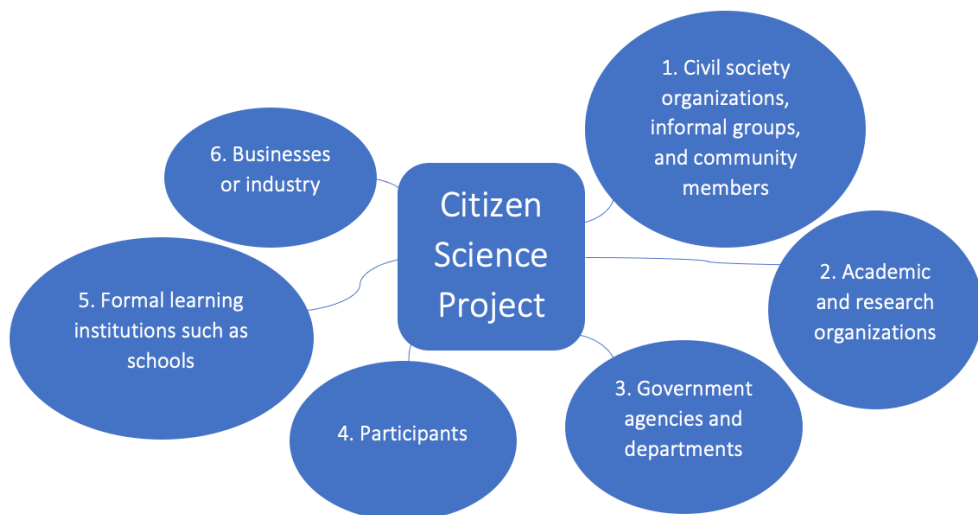
I will use this analytical level to explore how YouCount works to understand the historical and present environment it navigates in, including situational, structural, and cultural factors and how those affect the project. Relevant questions for the researchers could be: What characterises the districts of Gamle Oslo, Sydhavn and Botkyrka? Which demographics are represented? What type of actors are already working in the area, and should some of them be asked to collaborate with YouCount? What is the best way to recruit local YCS?

Freeman argues that ideally, the starting point is a historical analysis of the environment combined with an analysis of the present-day situation of the surroundings of the project. Such

analysis can also function as a base for mapping possible stakeholders and getting a better understanding of “who exactly are the groups and individuals that can affect or are affected by the achievement of an organisation's purpose” (1984, p. 91).

Göbel et al.’s research on stakeholder analysis in CS (2016) lists six regular stakeholder groups for CS projects based on empirical research from the field. These are (1) Civil society organisations, informal groups, and community members, (2) Academic and research organisations, (3) Government agencies and departments, (4) Participants, (5) Formal learning institutions such as schools, and (6) Businesses or industry.

Figure 7: CS Stakeholder Group Map



Stakeholders from different groups contribute differently to CS projects, e.g., time, funding, expertise, and equipment (Skarlatidou et al., 2019).

By merging Freeman’s stakeholder map (figure 2, page 14) and Göbel et al.’s stakeholder groups in CS, I made the ‘CS Stakeholder Map’ (figure 7, below) that I include in my model for analysing YouCount’s stakeholder management. More on how I use this map as an integral part of my interviews is presented in the methods chapter.

### (B) Actors

This level describes how YouCount works to make use of the skills of different actors. Walt and Gilson (1994) argue that Actors can be more important than the Content to reach impact objectives on policy change. Both internal actors or stakeholders namely the YCS, the researchers, and also external actors like project-affiliated stakeholders from the different stakeholder groups defined by Göbel et al. (2016) are important for YouCount on agenda-setting, formulation of project objectives and lastly on proposals and implementation of social innovation and policy change.

### (C) Process

I will use this analytical level to explore how YouCount navigates in its environment. It includes the process of recruiting youths and stakeholders, agenda-setting, collaborations, implementation, and political influence. Relevant topics for the researchers to explore could be which trends, meeting places, synergies, etc., to be aware of, as positive drivers or project barriers.

#### (D) Content

I will use this analytical level to explore how YouCount works to analyse topics and objectives developed, discussed, and bargained on between the project and its stakeholders. Relevant topics for the researchers to investigate are the specific technical or social nature of the project, its objectives, aims and values. Important questions are: Which choices are the YouCount researchers making to adapt the project's content for its stakeholders for later outcome and impact? Are bargains made to make participation as project stakeholders more attractive? Does co-creating from the beginning to the end with the YCS and stakeholders affect the possible outcome?

#### (E) Impact

I will use this analytical level to explore how YouCount is working in the early stages to later reach its impact objectives. These include technological or social results from the project's work. These are the achieved combined results from the other dimensions in the model.

### 3.6 Using the Model for Analysing YouCount's Stakeholder Management Strategies

The model will be my main theoretical framework for analysing and assessing the three Scandinavian cases of YouCount's work on stakeholder management. It does not assume a Weberian 'ideal type' of stakeholder management strategies in CSS, as described by Swedberg (2012, p. 11). In a Weberian scenario, assumptions would be made that researchers have full knowledge, always acting rational, and are fully conscious of the effects of their choices, then comparing the assumptions with the empirical reality from my study. I will instead explore if the model can be used to understand why certain strategic choices were taken, and then make suggestions for YouCount.

As mentioned, the model should not be perceived linear, but rather as a tool for making recursive and cyclical analyses of the different levels, how, and to what extent they are interconnected.

The possible future Impact of CSS projects is an important part of studying YouCount, however, as this thesis deals with the initial phases of the YouCount project, the analyses of Impact will naturally be limited.

## 4. METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

To answer my research questions, I have built my research design consisting of different types of data collection (visualised in table 2, below) and a thematic data analysis approach. My main data sources are participatory observations in Oslo and semi-structured elite interviews with one researcher in each local case study. My supportive data has been participatory observations in Copenhagen and Stockholm in the same period and document analyses. By combining different data sources and methods different aspects of the same strategic choices may be illuminated through the process of triangulation. This is to gain a more complete picture through verifications and cross-checking of my findings (Bryman, 2012). The data was collected in the winter of 2022.

Table 2: Data collection

Data Source	Level of Analysis	Function	Details
Participatory observations	Systematic and non-systematic field notes, coded	Main data source	Participation as co-researcher in Oslo from 1. Jan to 27. Apr
Semi-structured elite interviews	Systematic notes and recording, coded	Main data source	Interviews with researchers in Oslo, Copenhagen, and Stockholm
Participatory observations	Systematic field notes, coded	Supportive data source	Participatory observations in Copenhagen and Stockholm
Document analyses	Not coded	Supportive data source	YouCount's Description of Action (DoA)
Participatory observations	Not coded	Supportive data source	Participatory observations in online European YouCount meetings

I was connected to the Oslo case as a co-researcher and member of the team with a desk at the Work Research Institute (AFI) on daily basis. In my field research, somewhat inspired by organisational ethnography (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004), I have attempted to understand the researchers' customary ways of doing things and their organisational strategic decisions regarding stakeholder management.

I chose participatory observations to do what Tjora (2021) describes as observing what people do, and not just what they say they do. Becoming a member of the team and at the same time doing observations with an "outsider" perspective has been challenging. I will address potential issues regarding bias and reflexivity below.

### 4.1 Participatory Observation

When conducting participatory observations, I mostly took on the role of what Merriam and Tisdell (2015) call "participant as observer" where my observer activities were known in the research team, including among the YCS and stakeholders I met. The other roles they list are

“complete participant” (not used), “observer as participant” (sometimes used), and “complete observer” (not used).

In Oslo, I wanted to understand more about how YouCount was working with stakeholder management strategies. I did observations on an everyday basis, including in internal research team meetings, YCS training and workshops, individual stakeholder meetings, Living Lab, lunches, coffee breaks and more. After most meetings and workshops, I attended debriefs, sometimes with the youths, and sometimes with the researchers. The totality is a rich insight into the research team’s discussion of strategic choices. My roles shifted between “participant as observer” and “observer as participant”. Sometimes I was performing concrete tasks as a researcher, and other times I was mostly doing observations which could be combined with writing minutes available to the team afterwards.

I met with Copenhagen and Stockholm researchers several times, both online and on-site taking part in workshops with YCS (Stockholm) and a stakeholder meeting (Copenhagen). In these observations, I was more “observer as participant” where my observer activities were known to the group, and the participation in the group was secondary to the role of information gatherer (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The observations in Copenhagen were at a meeting between two researchers and a key stakeholder, a local high school teacher. They were developing a workshop programme for her class. This meeting displayed how the researchers were working hands-on to merge the objectives of YouCount with the school plan and the teacher’s requirements for the upcoming class examination.

My observations in Stockholm were workshops with the Swedish research team, including YCS, a key stakeholder, and the researchers. The first I attended was held at the Södertörn University campus outside Stockholm in November 2021, the others were online in the winter of 2022.

#### 4.2 Elite Interviews

To complement my observations, I interviewed one of the main researchers in each of the three case studies. Access was arranged through the European project manager. The interviews could be called both expert or elite interviews due to the role of the researchers when describing the strategic work of their respective research teams (Kvale, 1996). Elite, however, is appropriate as there are many experts in my study, the youths, the stakeholders, and the adult researchers. The elite interviews were semi-structured to allow for variation of question-wording, -order and spontaneous follow-up questions (Bryman, 2012). Semi-structured interviews fit if research questions can

be answered by understanding how interviewees interpret relevant issues (Bryman, 2012), in my case, stakeholder strategies. I intended to let interviewees lead the conversation to a certain degree because of their experience in the research topic.

An important aspect of planning and executing interviews to gain the wanted insights is to be aware of what Seidman in Gubrium and Koro-Ljungberg (2005) refer to as “borders” like control, agenda, language and discipline and roles and socialisation. I wanted an informal tone in the interviews as I met the researchers as colleagues and with my agenda. I also tried to not give the impression that I was evaluating their work and limiting what they would share. At the same time, I wanted to use my theoretical framework as a part of my interviews. Therefore, I incorporated my model and tools in the interview guide to discuss how the researchers understood the framework for analysis and their use of strategies for achieving their impact objectives. This form of interviewing was inspired by the confronting type of interviews described by Kvale (1996), which is an active meaning-seeking practice where I asked questions to ‘check’ what the researchers had been thinking about the topics in my study. This enabled me to get guidance on whether my theoretical framework at all could work to analyse YouCount, and secondly to make implicit thought processes more explicit to see patterns in the strategical work across the three case studies.

The Oslo researcher and I had gotten to know each other quite well by the time of the interview, being part of the same research team, and had developed an informal and friendly tone. To get to know the Copenhagen and Stockholm research teams somewhat more, I visited them both to introduce myself and my project in the fall of 2021, a few months before my thesis project started. I did several unstructured ad-hoc interviews with the Oslo researcher, and I conducted the primary semi-structured interview on March 11, 2022. I call the Oslo researcher Stine in the thesis.

I interviewed the Copenhagen researcher three times. Initially, in October 2021 on the campus of Aalborg University Copenhagen, then again in an online meeting in March 2022, both interviews were relatively informal and semi-structured. The primary interview which also was semi-structured was executed online on March 21, 2022. For the latter, I had prepared an online presentation of my theoretical framework and tools so we could discuss it interactively. I call the Copenhagen researcher Pernille in the thesis.

I conducted two semi-structured interviews with two of the Stockholm researchers. Initially, an informal online interview at the beginning of March 2022 with one of the researchers (this data is mainly used for background information). The primary interview was done on March 25, 2022, at a café in Stockholm city centre with the researcher used in the thesis. I call him Carl.



It would be interesting to conduct interviews with some of the YCS to hear more about their views on stakeholder management, and from some of the stakeholders on how they experience being part of YouCount. I have chosen not to do this mostly due to the scope of the thesis project.

#### 4.3 Document Analysis

Being a co-researcher in Oslo and having the European project manager as my employer gave me full access and permission to use all research teams and documents available for all YouCount researchers in this thesis. The most important document has been the Descriptions of Action/DoA (2020), a 200+ pages long grant agreement that is created based on YouCount's funding proposal for EU Horizon 2020. It describes the project, its design, methodologies, and strategies, and is a useful document that can be used analytically as a comparative instrument to shed light on the translation work the local cases have done regarding stakeholder management and more.

#### 4.4 Reflexivity

In all empirical research, the interpretation of data must be followed by a form of reflection on how this interpretation occurs (Tjora, 2021). This is because my values and interests are influencing my research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1996). When drawing conclusions, I considered my biases and personal interpretations along the way

Throughout the work on this thesis, I have appreciated my previous job experiences as a former children's rights activist working with youths, youth participation, and stakeholder management. However, this may also present issues. For example, I can feel impatient to achieve concrete short-term impact objectives, as they used to be a central target as an activist. I have also been used to participating and contributing, which has made it somehow difficult for me to focus enough on observations and field notes, as there often were more concrete tasks to be done.

Through this study, I have learned a lot about the many other time-consuming and essential parts of research and alternative views on what impact can be.

As a member of the Oslo research team, I gained insights into the other team members' way of reasoning and could end up reporting and interpreting too much from what I assume is their perspective (Kvale, 1996). Also, I had to be aware that I could adopt an "insider" perspective where one forgets to make analyses because of the joy of contributing to the project and make biased analyses because of a too-close involvement (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1996). I have also tried to be aware of the possibility of getting an Oslo bias, as I have spent so much more time in that case study than in the Copenhagen and Stockholm case studies.

#### 4.5 Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) (no. 464581, see Appendix A). All stakeholders included in the thesis have signed a consent form developed and stored according to the rules approved by NSD.

As the interviewed researchers easily can be recognised by others close to the YouCount project, I have been attentive to the danger of misrepresenting the participants. Therefore, they were sent the thesis before the deadline. This was important for me as I have been allowed to conduct descriptions and analyses of internal conditions and make them public. I am grateful for all feedback that provides input and factual corrections.

These descriptions and the outside view are nevertheless desired by the project as part of its reflective work on its own research. YouCount has a responsible research and innovation design (RRI), which includes aiming to conduct scientific practices that are diverse, inclusive, flexible, and reflexive (DoA, 2020). It describes it as envisioning and reflecting on underlying assumptions, values, and purposes to understand better the implications and impact of the research undertaken. Research more generally will also always benefit from such an approach.

#### 4.6 Data Analysis

I chose a thematic analysis approach to analyse my data, which is one of the most common ways of doing qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman, 2012). It consists of grouping the data from interviews and observation according to themes to identify new contexts and patterns. I used Braun and Clarke's six phases: (1) familiarising yourself with your data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report.

Initially, I chose what Braun and Clarke (2006) would call a deductive, theoretical, or top-down approach. I was driven by my theoretical framework when analysing and coding my data. After transcribing my interviews, I placed pieces of text in one or more concepts from my theoretical framework: context, actors, process, content, and process. I then generated sub-themes based on my interview guide. Next, I searched for themes, patterns, and contrasts between the three case studies. I used secondary data, like document analysis and observations in other case studies, to illuminate the primary data.

I started preparing for the deductive analysis together with my interviewees by including my theoretical framework and tools in my interview guide. This made me more familiar with my data

from the beginning. Tjora (2021) argues that analysing together can be a strategy for dealing with confusion and strengthening the quality of the analysis work.

The deductive/theoretical/top-down thematic analysis tends to provide less a rich description of the data overall and a more detailed analysis of certain aspects of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This contrasts with an inductive approach where the empirical data drives the coding and analyses. Thus, there is a risk that I have lost nuances along the way. Still, at the same time, I would argue that it helped me navigate the process of understanding stakeholder management in the context of the vast YouCount project. The combination of theory-driven analysis with empirical studies can be valuable for CSS because it helps to conceptualize the ground-breaking work in the field concerning stakeholder management.

Thematic analysis is a recursive, not a linear, approach (Bryman, 2012), so in the end, I went many rounds with my material, using both inductive and deductive approaches, to lift my analyses to a higher level. I believe that if I had tried an inductive approach from the beginning, it might have made me freer to discover alternative themes and patterns earlier, but it would be harder to navigate.

I will now continue with presenting my findings. I then make more in-depth interpretations and theoretical discussions in the final chapter of the thesis.

## 5. FINDINGS

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Differences in disciplinary traditions and organisational settings are normal in CSS projects (Arias R. et al., 2022; Göbel et al., 2022), and YouCount is no different. YouCount spans nine countries, and local adjustments are both possible and required, which means that a lot is not described and must be interpreted locally during the project. This requires flexibility. The funding proposition does not include strategies for example for when and how to recruit stakeholders and when and how to conduct living labs. This study shows that the three cases have made quite different organisational choices and leaned on different disciplinary traditions and methodologies for developing knowledge about the social inclusion of youths.

When analysing my data, five main findings with implications for understanding my research questions emerged. These are as follows: Stakeholder management strategies change interpretations of essential concepts (5.1); YCS recruitment strategies affect work on inclusion (5.2); non-specific strategies lead to ad-hoc decisions (5.3); co-creation complicates impact-oriented efficiency (5.4); all the interviewed researchers are more focused on long-term rather than short- and medium-term impact (5.5). I will now present these five main findings.

### 5.1 Early Strategic Decisions Affect Later Choices on Essential Project Concepts

The first main finding is that early strategic decisions affect later choices on essential project concepts. As described in the theory chapter, according to Freeman (1984), strategic stakeholder management consists of stakeholder mapping, environmental scanning, and stakeholder interaction.

This study reveals that the local case studies have taken advantage of the project flexibility and chosen different stakeholder recruitment strategies regarding who, when, and how stakeholders were invited into the project, affecting stakeholder involvement to a high degree, specifically in the example of Living Lab, which I discuss here as a central organisational tool in YouCount terminology.

*Who* were considered essential stakeholders in the case studies? By March 2022, the Oslo and Copenhagen cases had between 14 and 17 associated stakeholders each, which fit into Göbel et al.'s types: (1) Civil society organisations, informal groups, and community members, (2) Academic and research organisations, (3) Government agencies and departments, (4) Participants, (5) Formal learning institutions such as schools, and (6) Businesses or industry. In addition, both Stine and Pernille proposed a seventh category, (7) cultural institutions. All case studies' stakeholders are listed in appendix C.

From my material, it is clear that they had made a different strategic choice, being singularly connected to the municipality through a “development manager” who helped them recruit the youth council as YCS. This person would turn out important in several ways for the Stockholm case, which I will elaborate on below.

*When* stakeholders are recruited, is also affected by stakeholder strategies. My data shows that the local case studies have chosen two different strategies. One approach is to invite several stakeholders from different stakeholder groups early on, not knowing the final topics of the co-creational processes with participants and other stakeholders (chosen by Oslo and Copenhagen). The other approach is to wait and see which stakeholders turn out to be relevant to recruit further in the co-creative process (chosen by Stockholm). Flexibility versus efficiency is a central point in the study and will be used as a framework in the discussion.

Carl, the Stockholm researcher, explained that they planned to wait with inviting more stakeholders until they had the YouCount app ready and data results to give guidance on which relevant stakeholders to invite. I asked him if they were in contact with stakeholders to invite to a Living Lab.

No, we are dependent on the development manager's network. But I think we should start soon, and we will have to combine two processes. It should be the young who decides, but I still think we must give guidance.

This indicates that Carl and the rest of the Stockholm team prioritized following the ideals of co-creation with the YCS and a focus on being inclusive, flexible, and adaptive, from the project start (Vohland et al., 2021). This points to a central argument in my thesis, namely the tension between co-creation and impact-oriented efficiency, as I will elaborate on below. Pernille described her thoughts on the matter in the interview.

I think it makes so much sense to include the stakeholders from the beginning. The thought behind the participatory design is to include actors from beginning to end.

I take this to indicate that she is professionally grounded on participatory democracy traditions of research. According to the DoA (2020), YouCount plans to undertake an “active collaboration” with stakeholders at the national and EU levels to “co-create policymaking and innovations in terms of new ideas, products or methods as a way to create social change”. When the stakeholders should be recruited, however, is not described in the proposition. “Researchers [will] meaningfully interact with various stakeholders over *any or all stages* of a research process, from issue

formulation, the production or co-creation of new knowledge, to knowledge evaluation and dissemination” (2020, p. 7, my emphasis). This allows for flexibility in the different local case studies to decide when it is suitable for them to include stakeholders in the project. However, Freeman (1984) argues that an early focus on environmental scanning and stakeholder mapping always will be beneficial for the project, no matter prior contextual knowledge.

*How* stakeholders are involved in the project after being recruited, or stakeholder interaction as Freeman (1984) would call it, is affected by the chosen strategy as well, according to my data. A couple of weeks after joining the Oslo research team, I noticed that none of my colleagues was talking about the need for preparations for the initial Living Lab planned to be held around Easter, which at the time was two and a half months away. There was no set date for the Living Lab, nor did I hear talk about how to make sure that stakeholders would attend.

My NGO experiences in collaborating with societal actors as stakeholders in workshops to move forward on social matters included extensive planning and individual meetings with the most important stakeholders to map their potential power and interest. One day, over coffee in the office, I asked the research team about my concern and explained some of my previous experiences. This ended up in changed plans to include individual stakeholder meetings in the following weeks. It was to be combined with an opportunity for the YCS to practice executing interviews. This swift change of plans indicates flexibility in the research team. This would turn out to be a pattern, which I will discuss below.

Seven individual stakeholder meetings were carried out within the following few weeks. The meetings familiarised the stakeholders with the project and its topics of social inclusion through employment and social entrepreneurship. The research team understood more about the stakeholders’ interest in and possible contributions to YouCount. And the YCS conducted the interviews as they had practised and got to test their interview guide.

Pernille described Copenhagen’s stakeholder recruitment strategy as involving schools and activity centres as stakeholders to help recruit YCS. They then used the stakeholders’ contextual district knowledge and, from that, built a broader stakeholder portfolio with representatives of all stakeholder groups relevant to CSS.

We have seen that the case studies chose different strategical choices on stakeholder involvement in the early phases. I will now move on to argue that this was dependent on previous local knowledge in the research teams on the project districts. After that, I will argue that these early

choices affected how the case studies adapted the important stakeholder management concept of Living Labs.

#### 5.1.1 Previous Knowledge of Project District Influence Stakeholder Management Strategies

My data suggests that considerations of appropriate and potential local stakeholder strategies were linked to the research teams' previous local knowledge about the project district, its environment and context.

During my participatory observations in Oslo, it became clear to me that the researchers in the team had much knowledge about the Gamle Oslo district. Two of them had previously made two site analysis reports of the district. In Copenhagen, it became clear that the research team had a lot of knowledge about Sydhavn. The university campus is located centrally in the district, and the research team had a significant amount of local district knowledge.

In Stockholm, Carl explained that Södertörn University had collaborated with Botkyrka municipality in earlier projects, but none of the YouCount researchers had taken part in these previous collaborations. When they started collaborating with the youth council and understood that they had access to an extensive network in the district through the development manager, they did not prioritise undertaking an environmental analysis and mapping of possible stakeholders. I asked Carl if the strategy of waiting with mapping potential stakeholders was something they had discussed with the team. He answered no, but added:

This is part of the learning processes we've had internally along the way. We have slowly been learning how Botkyrka is working. Few of us knew the area when we started. It's been a big task to get to know Botkyrka. This part of Stockholm is large, widespread, and diverse. We should absolutely already have interviewed the development manager to get to know more about her network in the district. I will do that soon.

This signifies the importance of contextual district knowledge. When coming into a project district without prior local knowledge, which the Stockholm research team did, one can be forced to prioritise spending time scanning the environment and mapping stakeholders. If one already holds a strong contextual overview of the project district's environment, one will need less time for these processes. This was the case for Oslo and Copenhagen which moved quite swiftly past these time-consuming processes. This shows the importance of contextual district knowledge.

#### 5.1.2 Project Flexibility Leads to Fundamentally Different Interpretations of Living Lab

Living Lab is a central concept for YouCount and a feature in each of the national case studies. The DoA (2020) does not describe in detail how it should be done, which allows for flexibility. This

makes it interesting to analyse the empirical examples of how they are conducted to understand more about how strategic decisions early on lead to different interpretations of central project components, and how it leads to different project timelines.

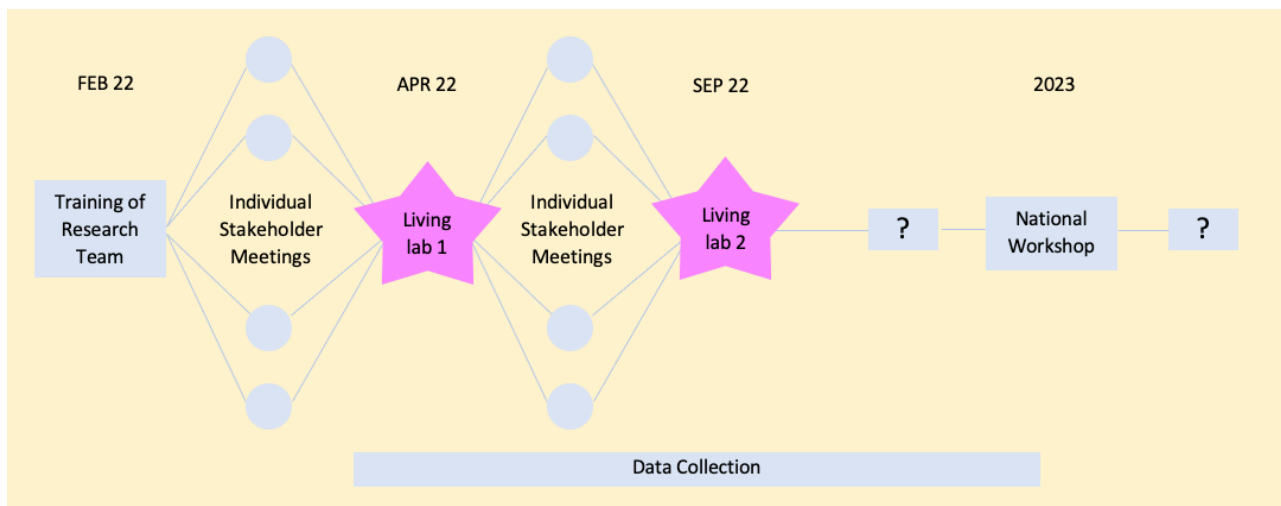
The study shows that three case studies ended up planning three distinctly different ways of conducting the Living Labs. I call these (1) workshop Living Labs, (2) external events as Living Labs, and (3) topic-specific Living Labs, and are all presented below.

### 1: Workshop Living Labs

The Oslo case had planned their initial Living Lab to be held in April 2022, the second in September 2022 and the national workshop in the first half of 2023. All of them were being planned as workshops, to be hosted and conducted by the YouCount research team together with the YCS. The Oslo case leader stated that “this was a pragmatic choice, as workshops is a method we know well and feel that we master.”

As mentioned, Oslo carried out a series of individual stakeholder meetings before Living Lab 1, and it was planned to conduct a second series of meetings before Living Lab 2. We will see that the three case studies ended up with three fundamentally different project timelines. My studies suggest that this is partly due to early strategic decisions made on stakeholder involvement and how to conduct Living Labs.

Figure 8: Oslo Case Study Timeline



The timeline of the scheduled Oslo activities connected to stakeholders and Living Labs is shown in figure 8 (above). It visualises the planned Living Labs and the choice to have individual stakeholder meetings before each Living Lab, that 2023 activities are not planned in detail, and that the YCS will collect data from spring 2022 to spring 2023.



The topic of the initial Oslo Living Lab, which I observed, was to share perspectives, more specifically to share perceptions of the reality of youth's situation in the district and discuss potential topics for data collection. This approach toes the line with the essential first steps for a co-creative CSS project according to Vohland et al. (2021). There was little focus on how to move forward to specific social innovations or policy changes, but that was not the plan for this meeting and had to wait until Living Lab 2, after the summer. This is an example of the tension between co-creative ideals and impact-oriented efficiency (elaborated further below).

The YCS worked as co-hosts. In the debrief they described becoming engaged in the discussions because they were on topics close to their own lives. Research training and internal workshops about social inclusion gave them an additional understanding and vocabulary to contribute when meeting the stakeholders, in addition to a feeling that their voice and opinions are essential to the project.

According to a focus group report (elaborated on further below), the YCS feel quite equal to the adult researchers, but the researchers did not manage to facilitate them as equal actors. This became clear after the slightly chaotic beginning of the Living Lab. One of them stated in the debrief meeting that they should have gotten more information on the program from the adult researchers.

It was awkward to sit in the group and not know more about the program than the stakeholders, as I was one of the hosts of the Living Lab.

I interpret this as the YCS feeling included and equally important to the project as the adults, but without the same briefing. After the Living Lab, several stakeholders expressed that they were impressed by the YCS' contribution. One of them wrote in the feedback form: "the youths are completely insane resources! Professional, calm, motivated!".

The stakeholders were also engaged and contributed enthusiastically to the discussions. They seemed to understand why they were there and had thoughts about the topic. The individual meetings most of them had participated in before the workshop, might explain this. What might also be affecting this, is that they were all working in this district, many meeting youths and seeing some of the challenges for employment and social exclusion. Then, when collaborating with local youths in a workshop, they become engaged and focused. This points to an advantage of workshop Living Labs where stakeholders and YCS cooperate on concrete tasks.

Workshop Living Labs can play a central role in working towards high quality "stakeholder interaction" as described by where the YCS, the stakeholders, and the researchers collaborate

concretely. The stakeholder’s feedback about the important role the youths took in the workshop, indicates the importance of Actors in social innovation and policy change. This is backed by Walt and Gilson’s (1994) argumentation, embedded in my theoretical model.

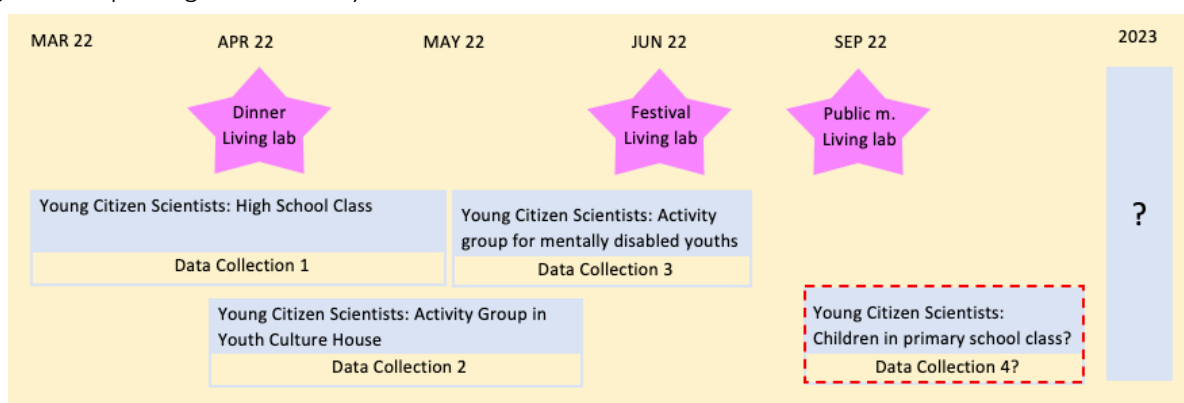
## 2: External Events as Living Labs

Pernille, the Copenhagen researcher, planned to use local external events as Living Labs. This means that the first Living Lab was connected to a dinner where local actors were meant to socialise with local youths at the youth culture house to discuss topics important to them. The second lab was planned to be incorporated in a municipal festival in June 2022, and the third at a municipal public meeting in September 2022. The plan for the Living Labs was to present what had been done as part of YouCount together with some of the YCS. In the interview, Pernille explained how she had thought it to be.

I'm infiltrating existing activities, you know. It has been my way of working alone, I need to do things together with someone. And it will be the stakeholders driving it further after the project period.

Her reasons for using external events were mostly pragmatic and chosen because of few people in the research team, we see that Pernille reaches out to other actors when there are limited human resources in the research team. The strategy to overcome the challenges of Pernille doing a lot on her own was to not spend time hosting workshops but rather use external already existing events.

Figure 9: Copenhagen Case Study Timeline



The timeline of Copenhagen activities connected to stakeholders and Living Labs is shown in figure 9 above. It visualises the choice to use existing events as Living Labs and the three-to-four groups of YCS and their data collection periods. These external groups of YCS are the school classes and activity groups, and the data collection periods are adjusted to fit into the school year or plan of the activity centre – not YouCount. This can hypothetically represent a challenge if the schedule of the external actor and the project do not fit.

External living labs seem to be a way to deal with low research team capacity and at the same time carry out what Freeman (1984) calls stakeholder mapping and environmental scanning to reach potential stakeholders. On the other hand, which additional activities are needed to create concrete collaborations for social innovations and policy change, after presenting the project at these external events, would be an interesting topic for further research.

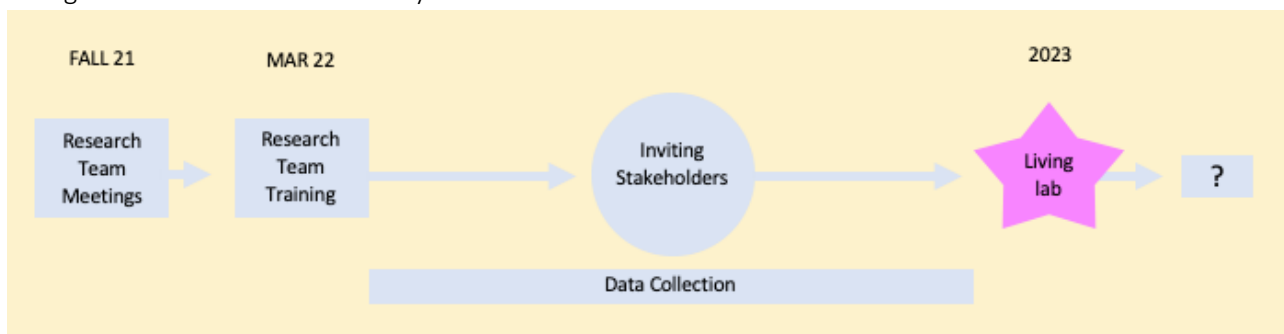
### 3: Topic-Specific Living Labs

As mentioned, the Stockholm researchers chose to wait and look at what the data would show before inviting stakeholders to the project and then plan topic-specific Living Labs. Carl anticipated executing the initial Living Lab in 2023. I asked if they already were in contact with actors that they want to invite to a Living Lab. He stated no, elaborating that he perceives them as too dependent on the network of the development manager.

I see a Living Lab as a physical space where we test something over time and discuss our goals with the stakeholders. I see it as closer to being part of the outcome or impact. So, once we have the content defined with data from the youths, then we can start working with the stakeholders.

He told me that he sees the Living Lab as happening over time and that it is more connected to impact than process. This can be interpreted as a third way of looking at Living Labs, not as concrete workshops, not as utilizing external events as an arena to present project results, but rather as an ongoing dialogue or conversation with stakeholders over time on the way to future impact.

Figure 10: Stockholm Case Study Timeline



The timeline of the scheduled Stockholm activities connected to stakeholders and Living Labs is shown in figure 10, above. It visualises the choice to have a more extensive YCS training and co-creation period before inviting stakeholders, and that the YCS will collect data from spring 2022 to spring 2023. The model also visualizes the uncertain future connected to how and when to invite stakeholders into the project.

Whether the Stockholm strategy, to wait with more impact-oriented activities until more data is available, will lead to more efficient processes at a later stage or not, would be interesting to follow as a topic in further research.

I have now presented the findings on who, when and how stakeholders are included in the local case studies. Central to my findings is that the three cases have chosen different approaches with different directions on the further processes, all within the (flexible) framework set out by YouCount. Based on the findings, one can argue that it is affected by previous contextual project district knowledge in the research teams and is affecting the very concept of Living Labs.

## 5.2 Enabling YCS as Confident Project Actors

The first main finding is that all three case studies are working to enable the YCS as confident project actors. As described earlier, YouCount aims to increase the social inclusion of youth through youths as citizen scientists. The YCS are essential actors, and thus, as supported by Walt and Gilson (1994), vital for the outcome and impact of the project on social innovation development and policy change. So how are the local case studies recruiting and including the YCS?

YouCount also aims to include gender-balanced groups of youths (15–29 years) at risk of marginalisation in terms of poverty, migration, disability, low education, unemployment, and disenfranchisement (DoA, 2020). I will now suggest, based on my data, that the most important work to achieve inclusion is done when choosing the project district, and that no matter which YCS recruitment strategy is used, unsafe environments can occur, and thus social tasks are imperative for securing safe and efficient environments in the research teams as democratic participation processes.

### 5.2.1 YCS Recruitment Strategies Affect Work on Inclusion

This study shows that the three Scandinavian case studies all have cooperated with stakeholders to recruit YCS. However, they have chosen two distinctly different strategies. One is to establish new groups of YCS, another is to cooperate with external actors like school classes, activity groups, or youth councils.

The YCS in YouCount are both part of the data sets and in addition gather data from others, which means that it's not a necessity with full representation within the group as each YCS will recruit others than themselves. However, one can suppose it to be easier for a diverse group of YCS to achieve diversity in their data sets. My data suggests that recruitment strategies affect how and when researchers have the possibility of working toward more inclusive groups of YCS.

Establishing a new group of YC was chosen as a strategy in Oslo, and the recruiting was done in collaboration with a key stakeholder: the neighbourhood incubator. This made it possible for the researchers to focus on inclusivity from the beginning. The Oslo group ended up with a balanced mix of gender. All have minority ethnic backgrounds, which is not representative of the district where 65 per cent of the youth inhabitants have ethnic minority backgrounds (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2021). It nonetheless reflects the members of the neighbourhood incubator, which helped with YCS recruitment, and has predominately minority background members.

Cooperating with external actors was chosen as a strategy in Copenhagen. Pernille in Copenhagen told me they had “planned for two to three groups of YCS, one high school class, one institution for youths with cognitive disabilities and possibly a third group being a primary school class”. The fact that one of the YCS groups is youths with cognitive disabilities adds broader inclusivity, even though it is not mentioned in the DoA (2020). Still, they could not work on recruitment inclusion after the groups had been chosen as they were recruited as whole classes and activity groups, not as individuals. This visualizes a need for thorough strategical work in the initial phases of involving youths as scientists.

Cooperating with external actors was chosen as a strategy by the Stockholm research team which made an agreement with a youth council run by the municipality as their young citizen scientist team. Botkyrka district is the municipality in Sweden with the highest number of ethnic minority backgrounds, at 61 per cent (Statistikmyndigheten, 2022). When I did my participatory observations in Stockholm, the youth council seemed to have a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds. Still, Carl said he had been thinking about how representative the youth council really is regarding another criterion. He elaborated:

The youths are elected to the council. Most of them are very bright and capable to speak for themselves and others. They might not be that representative of the whole youth population in Botkyrka though. They can be elected from sports clubs, youth clubs, schools etc. because of their engagement and social abilities.

His point is that elected youths with high social abilities may not include the hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups YouCount wants to include as YCS. But as we saw, all YouCount districts are inhabited by larger than country average levels of family poverty and youth unemployment.

My data suggests that different YCS recruitment strategies have affected the case studies' possibilities to work on inclusion and that YouCount's most efficient effort to secure YCS inclusivity has been when choosing the project district.

### 5.2.2 Including Young Citizens as Scientists Demands a Safe Research Environment

My data shows that all three case studies have persons functioning as a liaison between the researchers and the youths. Someone who is part of the project and has gained the trust of the youths. These “safe persons” focus, as I observed it, on the social and relational aspects of contributing to the project, and they assume responsibility for communicating questions and voicing opinions between the adult and young scientists. This role was not included topically in the interviews, but, as a thematic scope, emerged from my observations. My data that the social aspect is essential when including young citizens in science.

A positive result of recruiting existing groups of youths as YCS, as Pernille and Carl both elaborated on in the interviews, is that the youths already know each other and are used to functioning as a team. On the other hand, they can have existing structures potentially making it socially unsafe for some youths to participate.

In the Oslo case, one of the older YCS with much experience in working closely with adults in participatory work was hired through the neighbourhood incubator as one of the YCS, and to help recruit youths from her and their network, leading to several of them being friends and relatives.

According to an as-of-yet unpublished YouCount internal focus group report about the Oslo youths’ thoughts about participating as citizen scientists, it is reported that the participants feel safe to say what they think, and that it is well received by the adult researchers who listen to them, and that it makes them comfortable in sharing their thoughts.

In the Copenhagen case, the high school teacher and activity group leaders fill the same role. While doing my participatory observations in Copenhagen, unfortunately, I did not meet any of the youths. I did meet the high school teacher though, who talked enthusiastically and warmly about her class.

In the Stockholm case, the municipal development manager, usually facilitating the youth council, had this role. Doing my participatory observations, I got a grasp of the importance of the development manager for the project. She seemed to have a trusting relationship with the youths, who seemed relaxed around her. She was also in direct contact with each of the youths, knowing who couldn’t attend that day and the reason for it.

No matter which strategy you choose for recruiting YCS, socially safe environments can be difficult to achieve – being in newly established groups (Oslo), in existing structures in school classes and activity groups (Copenhagen), or in a youth council (Stockholm). Thus, social responsibility is imperative for securing safe and efficient environments in the research teams. A personal approach, where each individual YCS feel seen, seems to be common in all the case studies. My

empirical data, supported by my theoretical framework, suggest thus that the social aspects to ensure safe research environments are vital to empowering (young) citizens as science actors.

### 5.3 Non-Specific Strategies Lead to Ad-Hoc Decisions

The third main finding is that non-specific strategies lead to ad-hoc decisions. The DoA (2020) lists relevant types of potential stakeholders (policymakers, public authorities, youth organisations, universities, research institutions, private sector, and NGOs), and stakeholder activities (Living Labs, dialogue forums, and national workshops). However, the document says nothing about concrete stakeholder management strategies to ensure later impact. I asked Stine in Oslo if they were using any jointly European project-developed material on stakeholder management. She told me this has not been developed, “but there may be some informal exchange of experiences between the case studies”.

As mentioned, YouCount contains the possibility and requirement for local adjustments. It seems possible that the lack of specific strategies can lead to ad-hoc decisions rooted in previous experiences of the individual researcher taking them, not in jointly developed strategies. I will now present two examples of this from the Oslo case study.

#### 5.3.1 Example 1: Individual Stakeholder Meetings

The first example of an ad-hoc decision is when the earlier mentioned idea of conducting individual stakeholder meetings came up a few weeks before the initial Living Lab in Oslo. The plans were abruptly changed, and seven new interview meetings were undertaken in a couple of weeks, with a positive outcome for the Living Lab and the stakeholder interaction, in co-creation with the YCS (described in-depth below).

#### 5.3.2 Example 2: Workshop Living Lab Content

Oslo held its first Living Lab at the end of April 2022. The plan was to share descriptions of reality regarding youth’s situation in the Gamle Oslo district and to give the project a basis of relevant topics for data collection.

In a planning meeting the week before, the Oslo case leader proposed to use a participation method called “The Propeller” (figure 11). It had been used in another project about site development. The case leader drew

Figure 11: The Propeller participation method

<p>What’s the crisis?</p> <p>How can they be included through employment or social innovations?</p> <p>Youths are socially excluded today</p>	<p>What’s at stake?</p> <p>For whom?</p>	<p>What do we know?</p>
<p>Who/what can surprise us?</p>	<p>What do we <i>not</i> know?</p>	<p>What’s the solutions?</p> <p>Carried out by whom?</p>

and explained the method on a whiteboard for the team to discuss. It was a table with six boxes and one question in each.

The answer to the first question (what's the crisis?) was formulated based on YouCount's research topics: Youths are socially excluded in the district today, how can they be included through employment or social innovations? Then, the Living Lab was meant to discuss the other questions.

The ideas from the planning meeting were later developed by the YCS, who chose between different proposed methods, decided on the physical setup in the room, and added activities like a quiz about the different stakeholders. The adult researchers put together the final program and made sure to include the youths' proposals.

The Living Lab itself started somewhat chaotic. The planned preparation time was clearly not enough, but the whole research team contributed as best they could. Notes from the debrief among the adult researchers describe it as follows: "The youths came one and one and asked how they could help. We were chaotically busy but put everyone to work. A little confusing for the youths and there were given many counter-messages, but they really did contribute."

When the stakeholders arrived, they were placed in groups with stakeholders, YCS and researchers. After some introduction, a quiz and getting to know each other, the propeller task was introduced, and the groups started discussing what was at stake due to the social exclusion of local youths. I listened in on different tables and could hear that the conversations were quite dissimilar. One of the adult researchers says in the debrief notes that "we had not planned in detail how to get good conversations around the propeller". There was nevertheless much engagement in the discussions. One of the stakeholders argued that "in the end, the whole society is losing when youths are socially excluded". This was similar to discussions in the other groups. After working on the propeller in the groups, the plan was to lift the group discussions into a plenary session. I quickly realised that this part of the programme was spent very little time planning. The Oslo case leader led the session, inviting one group after another to the front to present their discussion and transfer their post-its to large wall posters. It became a bit chaotic with everybody now standing spread out in the room. The debrief notes read: "we had not thought through how we wanted to do it". But the participants did not seem to mind. By this time, the energy in the room was high. The stakeholders, YCS and the researchers all contributed and cooperated to present their group's work.

At some point during the plenary session, the Oslo case leader approached me asking if we had decided on a topic for the planned "check-out question" to round off the Living Lab. I admitted I



wasn't sure, and she went back to facilitating the ongoing presentations. In the internal debrief minutes, what happened is described as "the check-out question came spontaneously: what was your first job?". It turned into a conversation with smiles and laughter about the diverse job experiences represented in the room. The Living Lab could easily have ended in chaos, but ad-hoc decisions based on earlier experiences in the research team made it work well. During the debrief it became clear to me that the need for these ad-hoc decisions came as no surprise for the case leader, it was rather an undramatic and pragmatic decision to improvise based on extensive experience in co-creative workshops.

We might say that the lack of specific strategies leads to ad-hoc decisions and improvisation, rooted in previous experiences of the individual researcher taking them and not in jointly developed strategies. This might indicate an argument for more guidance and less flexibility in CSS strategies.

#### 5.4 Co-Creation Complicates Impact-Orientated Efficiency

The fourth main finding is that co-creation complicates impact-orientated efficiency. YouCount's objective is to co-create social innovations and policy change. The project is described as using co-creation in all project phases and levels.

Based on my data, I will now present indications that the case studies work differently with co-creation, that there is a tension between co-creation and impact-oriented efficiency and that co-creation is given priority. There are indications that the case studies choose to focus on high co-creation with either the YCS or stakeholders, but not both simultaneously.

After that, I will elaborate on four examples based on my data indicating that co-creation is the project fundament (example 1), and that bargaining is used to conduct co-creation in practice (example 2). I've also found examples of co-creation being less efficient (example 3), and co-creation enabling YCS as essential Actors (example 4).

This study indicates that all Scandinavian case studies are highly co-creative, only in different ways. Oslo is highly co-creative with the YCS and, to some extent, with its stakeholders. Copenhagen is highly co-creative with its youth-recruiting stakeholders and less with its YCS. Stockholm is highly co-creative with its YCS and the one recruiting stakeholder, but no other stakeholders have been invited into the project.

A high level of co-creation in CSS is, according to Brounéus (2022) and Vohland et al. (2021), when a project is based on citizens' questions and perspectives, and the researchers act as facilitators to ensure funding and scientific quality. Citizens themselves have formulated the issue and

can use the results to make their voices heard and influence societal development. A low level of co-creation is in contributory CS where a project is top-down driven, and the researchers dictate the conditions for citizens' participation based on the rules and needs of research. The citizens are here merely data gatherers as the researcher decides the issue. The results are here used for scientific publications and discussions, conducted in a different sphere than where the citizens move.

Brounéus (2022, my translation) argues that “a hierarchy has emerged among CS research projects and how they are viewed by researchers in the field” with co-creative projects on top of the hierarchy and traditional top-down projects on the bottom. YouCount is (maybe implicitly) aiming for the top of the hierarchy. An indication is the project title “YouCount – Empowering Youth and Co-Creating Social Innovations and Policymaking Through Youth-Focused CSS”.

My questions were then: How much co-creation was the YouCount researchers doing, did they co-create more with YCS or stakeholders, and did it change the project design? I used Vohland et al.'s (2021) questions to analyse the YouCount case studies. These questions are: (1) is the project starting with citizens' real-world problems? (2) Are the researchers functioning as co-designers and facilitators? And (3) is the research process shared, open and reflexive? I analysed each case study and labelled them as *low*, *medium*, or *high* in co-creation, and quickly understood that I had to split it in two: YCS co-creation and stakeholder co-creation (table 12, below).

Table 3: Level of Co-Creation (Low-Medium-High)

	YCS co-creation	Stakeholder co-creation
Oslo case study	High	Medium
Copenhagen case study	Medium	High
Stockholm case study	High	Low

We can see in the table that my analyses (elaborated below) suggest that none of the case studies has the same degree of co-creation with both YCS and stakeholders at the (limited) time of my study.

The Oslo researchers started the project based on answers from youths in the district from earlier projects about needing a place to spend time with friends and getting their first job. The Oslo researchers were functioning as co-designers and facilitators as they included the YCS from the start, in close to all decisions I could observe. My data indicates that the research process, to a large extent, was shared and open to the YCS which reported in the focus group report that they were happy with their level of involvement and described it as high. In the report we can read:

One participant says that the youth has more or less the same influence over decisions taken in the project as the project managers and other researchers. Another participant says that the youth are supposed to generate the ideas in the project, and the adult researchers are supposed to execute them.

The stakeholders were somewhat co-creating through the individual meetings and the initial Living Lab, where they got to describe their views on social exclusion and its effect on local youths, the district, and society. In the next round of Living Lab, there is planned more concrete work on developing social innovations, which would possibly result in a higher classification on co-creation.

The Copenhagen researchers started with the topic of “circular economy” but have changed it more towards sustainability. My data suggests that this shift was done to make a better fit with the high school teacher’s school plan for her natural geography class. Sustainability is very much what Vohland et al. (2021) would call a real-world problem, and the topic was initiated by one of the stakeholders, but not by local youths. To a high degree, the researchers were functioning as co-designers and (co-)facilitators with the youth recruiting stakeholders. Still, the YCS seemed to be data gatherers closer to what’s normal in contributory CS and, to a lesser degree, co-creators. I do not have data to discuss whether the research process is shared, open and reflexive. But having three-to-four individual teams of YCS gathering data in as many separate processes throughout the first year (and then maybe establishing new groups the next year) will possibly make it harder to secure inclusion and transparency of the research process.

When I started my observations, the Stockholm researchers had not yet decided on a topic of focus. They had spent a considerable amount of time with the YCS on research training and discussing the project, the app, and different issues related to social exclusion. Thus, one can argue that they had a high degree of co-creation with the YCS and the one key stakeholder. However, the plan to invite additional stakeholders after collecting data will exclude stakeholders from taking part as co-creators in the project’s early phase.

We have seen that the case studies work differently with co-creation, that there is a tension between co-creation and impact-oriented efficiency and that co-creation is given priority. There are indications that the case studies choose to focus on high co-creation with either the YCS or stakeholders, but not both simultaneously. I will now present the four examples regarding co-creation.

#### [Example 1: Co-Creation as a Project Fundament](#)

The first example is that my data suggests the Oslo case study to have co-creation as a project fundament. During the interview, I asked Stine to take me back to the beginning of the project and describe how they had started working with identifying relevant stakeholders. She began her story

in 2014, several years before YouCount was even an idea. Stine was working with a colleague in the district of Gamle Oslo. The youths they met talked about the need for having a place to spend spare time, many described living in crowded apartments, they spoke about problems getting their first job, and many expressed frustrations with meeting exclusion in the labour market.

When we were working on the projects in the streets of Gamle Oslo, the main message from the youths was that they needed a place to hang out with their friends, and they needed their first job. This was one of the reasons for YouCount in Norway ending up with inclusion through employment as the main topic.

Stine relayed that wandering the streets in the area and talking to people had made the research team realise how many actors were already working to improve the youths' lives. The idea of what later became YouCount was developed in this area. This suggests that the Oslo case has had co-creation as a fundament even before the start of the project.

#### Example 2: Bargaining as Co-Creation

The second example indicates that bargaining with stakeholders is an essential part of co-creation in the Copenhagen case study and that Stockholm is bargaining with the YCS.

In the interview with Pernille, she explained that they had shifted from focusing on circular economy to "a bit more towards sustainability". This shift happened during the process the Copenhagen researchers were in with developing an extensive programme with 17 workshops for a natural geography high school class together with the teacher. It was one of the planning meetings about the workshops I observed in February 2022. One of my observations was a dialogue between the two researchers and the high school teacher. The researchers were responsible for executing YouCount, and the teacher was responsible for following the school plan and preparing for the examination. Concrete bargaining was done in the meeting to ensure the program had the right content, including both the teacher's school plan topics and YouCount's social inclusion topics.

Teacher: I'm constantly thinking about which questions I can make for their exam.

Pernille: And I constantly think that the workshops must include enough on social inclusion to fit into YouCount (laughter).

Teacher: We'll connect it to sustainability!

In addition to the bargaining, it was clear that they felt they needed each other for the best possible outcome. Having her first working year, the teacher seemed happy to be included in YouCount

as she got help with parts of the school plan, and the researchers seemed glad to have the teacher's pedagogic knowledge when developing the research program.

Teacher: I would not have made this program about sustainable cities this year if it wasn't for you and YouCount, but I'm very glad because I must do it according to the school plan (laughter).

Pernille: It's so good to have you with us when making the program, we would definitely include too much if we did it on our own, since we have way less pedagogic experience.

The energy and knowledge of this key stakeholder appear important for the Copenhagen case study, both for recruiting YCS, developing the workshop program for collecting data and contributing to the social aspect as a safe person. Seeing the importance of this collaboration for YouCount, I wondered what was "in it" for the school and the teacher. I asked the teacher after the meeting why she wanted to participate.

The students get to participate in something bigger than themselves and our school, and it'll be more interesting for them than just something in a book, it will be closer to reality. I just hope this will not be a one-off, and that the collaboration will continue. The plan is to include the social studies teachers next year.

Freeman's (1984) description of his *transactional level* includes transactions, bargains and adaptations that can be done towards stakeholders to achieve the wanted outcome. This is part of the content segment of my theoretical model. My participatory observations in Copenhagen indicate that bargaining is essential to their co-creation. It was clear to me that both the research team and the high school teacher saw the benefits of co-creation.

In Stockholm, Carl described that they were making adaptations in collaboration with the YCS. He said they had workshops with the youth council discussing different topics of social inclusion and how to use the mentioned YouCount app that was being developed for collecting data. Many of the issues the youth raised related to social inclusion turned out to be quite far from YouCount's focus. Many ideas of what the app could become had been far from what's relevant as part of the project, "but I think we can make adaptations to make it fit". He described starting a process of bargaining with the YCS to choose an overarching topic for this study.

What area of concern is it that we should focus on? If the youths think school issues are the most important, then we will go for that and invite school management as stakeholders. But I think we will end up cooperating with local actors in youths' leisure time like activity centres and sports clubs.

Carl made an example saying it can be challenging for youths to combine different activities because they may have activities happening at the same time or in other parts of the municipality. “What can be done about that? Maybe create a Living Lab with different activity actors in the district to discuss it?”

One of the topics the youths raised were school issues, for example, homework or school meals. “This would mean that we should focus on the school situation”. But there were topics raised regarding activities and leisure time issues as well. He connected these latter topics to the social inclusion focus of the Stockholm case being civic engagement through civil-society engagement. “I think we’ll end up focusing on this. It would mean that we will have a sufficiently wide scope from sports, culture, political engagement, homework, and work”.

I told Carl that the Copenhagen case cooperates closely with a school co-creating a programme and having a class as YCS. He replied that he considers it impossible to do in Sweden.

I understand that it is a possibility in Denmark, but it wouldn't be an option in Sweden.

The school system is too strict here. I know that Denmark has a more flexible school system than Sweden. It would be super interesting to do, though.

This exemplifies the need for local adjustments according to different possibilities. Carl expressed that their experience with working with schools is difficult because they are pressed on time, and the governance of schools is so strict. “I think it will be much easier to mobilise sports clubs etc. to the project, but we will see what we figure out with the youth council, and based on the YouCount app data, what will be the most important topic to follow”.

We have seen that bargaining with the school stakeholder is an important part of the Copenhagen case study’s work and that Carl describes bargaining with the YCS. This could indicate that this can be seen as an important part of the co-creation in YouCount.

### Example 3: Co-Creation Being Less Efficient

The third example indicates that following the co-creation ideals of inclusivity, flexibility, and adaptivity, as described by Vohland et al. (2021), can create less efficient processes.

In the first days of 2022, before I joined the research team in Oslo, I participated in an online meeting about stakeholder management with two of the researchers and a representative from the youth recruiting stakeholder. At that time, it was still unclear how many stakeholders would be invited and how they could contribute to the project was unclear. This was partly because of the co-creation with the YCS, who were recruited at the time of the meeting, but had not started the work. They were to be included in deciding both the subtopics of the project and in choosing

relevant stakeholders. The meeting ended with a somewhat shared responsibility in the group for managing the stakeholders, but not right now. Now it was more pressing to recruit the last youths and prepare for the research training. Later, the YCS contributed with ideas of which stakeholders to invite. This may have affected the earlier described situation where the Oslo Living Lab planning had a slow start and maybe even contributed to the situation of ad-hoc decisions because of non-specific plans.

The Copenhagen case has prioritised co-creation with the youth-recruiting stakeholders over co-creation with the YCS. This has led to a faster and more impact-oriented process of choosing topics and developing a workshop programme for the youths. How the involvement of several groups of YCS will affect the process would be an interesting topic for further CSS research.

This example indicated that following co-creation ideals can create less efficient processes.

#### Example 4: Co-Creation Enabling YCS as Essential Actors

The fourth example from my observational data suggests that co-creation can enable youths to grow into their role as the significant actors they are in Y-CSS.

After the initial training, the Oslo YCS attended workshops on different topics, including social inclusion, trials of the YouCount app, and authoring an interview guide for individual stakeholder meetings. I did participatory observation on most of these workshops, and they seem to have given the youths an understanding of the topics and tools for contributing to project-relevant discussions. I would also argue that the youths contributed with different perspectives than the researchers. This became clear during the two individual stakeholder meetings I observed. Before the individual stakeholder meetings, the YCS developed an interview guide. One question was: “Which social barriers did you meet as a young person?”. Another question was: “What would you think if a young person near you were excluded from society?” And a third was: “How can you, through your work, show the way for the next generation?” Their questions, combined with the fact that they are young people from the neighbourhood, set the tone of the interview. It somehow changed the power dynamics, maybe because the youths asked different questions than adult researchers would. In the meetings I observed, the stakeholders seemed to “put away” their title and social position and attempted to meet the YCS less as a representative of their working place, but rather more as individuals. One of the stakeholders responded to the YCS by saying:

It is important for us to create real participation for and with young people in the local community. We want to contribute by offering a place to be and facilitating conversations. I think we have a lot to learn, and I want us to contribute to the project.

One youth said in a debrief after that meeting that:

We came behind the facade with more personal questions. Her body language loosened when she got them. It would have been a good idea to ask some of those questions earlier to get to the important point of the interview more quickly.

The Oslo case leader expressed that these meetings had been more valuable than she had expected. In a debrief meeting after all seven meetings had been conducted, she said:

After each of the meetings, I was thinking that it was much more relevant than I expected. It's fun that you (the YCS) enjoyed conducting the interviews, and fun that the stakeholders were so engaged and committed to contributing to the project.

This shows that even though it was not initially planned, the Oslo case leader seemed pleased with having had the possibility of flexibility and improvisations. Here including the YCS in conducting more tasks possibly contributed to better the stakeholder's affiliation to the project.

In Stockholm, Carl emphasized that he felt privileged that they found the youth council so early in the process. Having a core group who has been able to define the issues more clearly with the adult researchers.

The YCS has developed research and survey questions. And we have tried them out, which gave us some preliminary results on what kind of topics concern the youths in Botkyrka before the YCS are going out to gather data.

These latter examples indicate that co-creation may result in better results. I have not researched what the YCS think about the co-creative process, but in the previously mentioned focus group report, they express that the adult researchers are easy to talk to and provide understandable information.

Participants feel that they can say what they think, which is well received by the adults in the project. The adults listen to the youth, which makes them comfortable in sharing their thoughts.

These examples suggest that the YCS are enabled into becoming essential Actors for achieving impact, as argued by Walt and Gilson (1994) sometimes even more important than the content.

I have presented indications from my study that the case studies work differently with co-creation, that there is a tension between co-creation and impact-oriented efficiency and that co-creation is given priority. There are also indications that the case studies choose to focus on high co-



creation with either the YCS or stakeholders, but not both simultaneously. I presented four examples suggesting that co-creation is the project fundament, that bargaining is used to conduct co-creation in practice, that co-creation can be less efficient, and co-creation can enable YCS as essential actors.

### 5.5 Researchers Focus on Impact-Objectives Beyond the Project Period

The last of the five main findings that emerged when analysing my data, is that although the DoA (2020) includes a broad range of impact objectives, all the interviewed researchers focus on more diffuse long-term impact, rather than the more concrete short-term impact objectives.

My data collection period took place about halfway through the YouCount project period. The resultant material leaves me unable to analyse the case studies' future outcomes and impact. The DoA (2020) targets three strands of investigation including impact objectives: (1) to pursue knowledge about social inclusion, (2) to create social change through the involvement of YCS, and (3) to contribute to the scientific knowledge base for Y-CSS. One-third of these are short-term objectives (within the project lifespan), another third are medium-term objectives (within five to ten years from project start), and the last third are long-term objectives (after more than ten years).

My data suggests that co-creation is more in focus in YouCount than short- and medium-term impact and that the researchers (when asked) mainly focus on long-term impact objectives (elaborated below). During my observations, I did not hear much talk among the researchers about YouCount's future impact. This was surprising to me with my activist NGO background. When I asked the researchers in the interviews about their dream outcomes, they expressed more or less concrete objectives. Still, I noticed that they were all mainly focusing on the long-term impact objectives beyond the project period and that they all expressed hoping for parts of the project to outlive YouCount. Stine listed several topics within her dream impact: She was hoping for the YCS to make connections between the countries, that the youths start something independent from the adult researchers, that YouCount research will become the fundament for new funding to develop new knowledge, and that high power stakeholders will get high interest in social inclusion innovations. But she spent the most time explaining that she was hoping innovations started in the project will develop into something bigger that could contribute to lasting structural changes.

I want something to continue after we "leave the scene". I've been thinking about this project for eight years now, and research projects are continuous, so maybe we will hear about some outcome of YouCount when doing a future project.

In Copenhagen, Pernille hoped the participation workshops they had been developing with the high school and the institution for youths with cognitive disabilities would spread to more schools across Copenhagen.

I just hope that the work that I do together with the youth and stakeholders will provide communities that can stand alone when I finish my project.

She was hoping the youth will continue with some of the things they start as part of YouCount, be it a youth council, a repair cafe, an innovation incubator, or that the local municipal council budgets an amount that youths can apply for to get the possibility to start their sustainable businesses.

In Stockholm, Carl was hoping for the different actors in the district to get to know more about each other's work and that they listen to the young inhabitant and include them in developing the district.

I hope we make something that continues to exist after YouCount pulls out.

He was hoping to learn the youth council participatory methods they can continue using after YouCount. Although the DoA (2020) targets a range of impact objectives, Stine, Pernille, and Carl were all focused on more diffuse long-term impact, rather than the more concrete short-term impact objectives of the project.

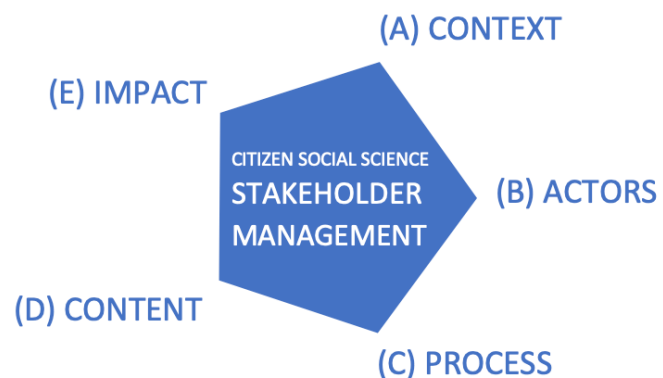
I have now presented my main findings. We have seen that stakeholder management strategies are changing the case studies' interpretations of Living Lab as a central organisational tool, that YCS recruitment strategies are affecting the possibility to work on inclusion, that non-specific strategies lead to ad-hoc decisions and improvisation, co-creation complicates impact-oriented efficiency, and that all the interviewed researchers are more focused on long-term rather than short- and medium-term impact. I will now discuss these findings concerning my research questions, my theoretical framework, and relevant CS literature.

## 6. DISCUSSION

This study aims to contribute with increased knowledge about efficient stakeholder management in the field of co-creative CSS projects, through a diverse qualitative methodological approach consisting of participatory observations, semi-structured elite interviews, and document analyses. My review of literature in this field exposed knowledge gaps on how to conduct stakeholder management in CSS projects in practice. Following this, I have studied the characteristics of YouCount's stakeholder management strategies through my analysis model (figure 6).

The model has five analytical levels. In (A) Context, I have analysed how YouCount works to understand the environment it navigates in and how they work with stakeholder mapping and recruitment. In (B) Actors, I have analysed how YouCount are enabling and empowering internal and external actors like the YCS and stake-

Figure 6: CSS Stakeholder Management Analysis Model



holders. In (C) Process, I have analysed how YouCount navigates in its environment e.g., with meeting places like Living Lab, a central tool for YouCount's stakeholder management. (D) Content relates to how YouCount has developed project topics and objectives in cooperation or bargaining with YCS and stakeholders. Lastly, in (E) Impact, I have analysed how YouCount was working in its early stages to later reach its impact objectives. As previously mentioned, each level cannot be analysed separately. One example is that Living Lab is an important part of the Process of developing Content, and thus the Impact. Another example is that both YCS and stakeholders are central actors in YouCount, and how they are included is crucial for a fruitful Process, Content development, and most likely for reaching Impact.

Regardless of a complex set of interrelationships between the analytical levels, three main topics have emerged from the data, all of which can be discussed considering the above analysis. These topics are (6.1) different interpretations of stakeholder management strategies in practice, (6.2) strategic considerations when including youths as scientists, and (6.3) strategies for Impact. I will now present these topics before I discuss, in the concluding part of the thesis, the strengths and limitations of this approach in terms of strategies for stakeholder management, involvement of young people and achieving impact. Finally, I will give a brief evaluation of how Y-CSS reflects and contribute to strengthening participatory democracy in policymaking.

## 6.1 Dissimilar Interpretations of Stakeholder Management Strategies

The first topic is that YouCount does not provide specific joint strategies for stakeholder involvement and management, which results in fundamentally different strategies being implemented in the three case studies. The most detectable stakeholder management strategy is the (somewhat loose) concept of Living Labs described in the DoA (2020) as including:

Living Labs with multiple stakeholders in the wider community, which will use the data provided by the participating young citizen scientists to cocreate policymaking and innovations in terms of new ideas, products, or methods as a way to create social change

The lack of concrete descriptions e.g., whether it should be physical meetings and when in the project period it should be done, is according to the European project manager done deliberately due to the co-creational ambitions and the fact that the different case studies wanted the freedom to adapt to local conditions. Nevertheless, the rather vague strategical descriptions of the Living Lab concept seem to be causing profoundly different interpretations and solutions rather than minor local adjustments.

I will now discuss some characteristics of YouCount's stakeholder management strategies and what they can lead to regarding YouCount's contextual navigation and stakeholder recruitment strategies. How different interpretations are affecting YouCount's most important stakeholder management concept of Living Lab. How actors' resources are utilised by the case studies, and how to avoid person-dependant improvisations and spontaneous (ad-hoc) decisions.

Does it matter *when* stakeholders are mapped and recruited? My observations suggest that it does. The local case studies that have invited stakeholders in the early stages have come further than the one who has not, in the process of co-creation of content with local actors that are to contribute to Living Labs and stake out concrete ways toward the impact objectives of social innovation and policy change. A strategy where stakeholder involvement comes later and more gradually from a co-creation perspective may make sense because of the need for local contextual knowledge to analyse stakeholders' power and interest.

However, this is not what the literature recommends for CSS projects. Freeman (1984) advocates early focus on environmental scanning and stakeholder mapping, since this is always beneficial for projects, notwithstanding levels of prior contextual knowledge. CS literature also suggests that it does matter when stakeholders are mapped and recruited. Wiggins and Crowston (2011) argue that early identification can allow for more involvement over time. This is important as there is evidence that including all relevant stakeholders is essential for CSS initiatives to have a

more substantial impact. This argues for an early mapping of stakeholders in CSS projects. Skarlatidou et al. (2019) argue that projects can benefit hugely from harnessing the complex and comprehensive local contextual knowledge that stakeholders potentially possess. Göbel et al. (2016, p. 4) recommend that “CS project managers should invest the time at the outset of projects to identify stakeholders who could use, and potentially reuse data and knowledge”. Ceccaroni and Latham (2022) argue that early recruitment allows for stakeholders to contribute to project objectives and strategies, which again strengthen their attachment to a project. The gradual co-creative contextual approach is also in tension with the limited project period. YouCount would thus benefit from a joint European strategy including environmental scanning and stakeholder identification in the early phases.

One of the research questions in this thesis is about which types of stakeholders YouCount recruits. We have seen that the Scandinavian case studies in total recruit stakeholders from all of Göbel et al.’s (2016) stakeholder type groups, but that different recruitment strategies affect the possible strategic options. We have also seen that cultural institutions should be added to the stakeholder group map for it to be more relevant for CSS projects. Stakeholders have different capacities for contributing to CSS projects like YouCount because they have different priorities, values, responsibilities, and are affected differently by an issue (Scheller, 2020). These differences seem beneficial to map, thus making Oslo’s individual stakeholder meetings an advantageous strategic move in my opinion.

Living Lab is the most crucial concept in YouCount’s stakeholder management strategies, it’s described as somewhere stakeholders and YCS can meet, exchange worldviews, and develop social innovations or policy change. It’s open for the local case studies to adjust after their will (DoA, 2020). Using my theoretical model as an analytical framework, I argue that the concept of Living Lab is YouCount’s most important stakeholder management tool as it is an important part of the local case studies’ process for developing project content and its outcome will become a central part of the outcome and impact of the project.

However, when, and how Living Labs should be conducted is barely mentioned in the DoA (2020), which simply states that co-creation with stakeholders to create social change should happen at “any or all stages” of the research processes. The lack of strategy for Living Labs has given way to three fundamentally different ways of interpreting the Living Lab concept. From workshops, participation in external events, and topic-specific meetings. The Stockholm case study interprets Living Lab as happening over time and more connected to Impact than Process. This is within the flexibility of the Living Lab concept in the project. The term was changed in the initial

phase of the project, from thought of as a physical model, with a group meeting over time, to a broader understanding describing it as “not a single physical space, but a network in which researchers collaborate through continuous discussion with end-users and other relevant actors engaged” (Czeglédi & Pataki, 2022, p. 6).

YouCount’s stakeholder management strategies are characterised by not being specified and are thus interpreted differently, as workshop Living Labs, external events as Living Labs, and topic-specific Living Labs. This is leading to fundamentally different processes and possible outcomes. We have seen that the reasons for expanding the original concept of Living Lab have been, among other things, lack of human capacity and local knowledge in the research teams. YouCount is doing pioneer work and is explorative at its core. Knowledge from cross-case studies about the outcome of the different Living Lab processes will be important for future Y-CSS projects.

YouCount aspires to contribute to strengthening participatory democracy in policymaking. A crucial aspect of participatory democracy and CSS, common for all YouCount case studies, is the inclusion of YCS. Tiago (2017) argues that any research skill can be acquired by non-experts when they are appropriately trained. Skarlatidou et al. (2019) argue that when participants themselves define the aims, there are better conditions for productive discussions. This is in line with Walt and Gilson’s (1994) argumentation, that Actors are strategically central, sometimes even more important than the Content.

The Oslo YCS was well prepared for the Living Lab after having had research training and workshops on social inclusion, all had met at least one of the stakeholders in the individual meetings. The training seemed to have made them secure about their role in the Living Lab, and they contributed confidently as co-hosts in meetings with the stakeholders, who reported to be satisfied with the initial Living Lab and seemingly ready for developing social innovations in the next Living Lab. This is an example of the importance of utilising the different actors in stakeholder management strategies to contribute to participatory democracy.

We have seen that lacking strategies has led to person-dependant improvisation. This can indicate that stakeholder management in YouCount, to some extent, is dealt with implicitly by the researchers and not articulated openly in the research teams.

My data thus suggests, supported by my theoretical framework, that YouCount researchers could benefit from joint strategies on contextual navigation and stakeholder recruitment, on how to conduct central stakeholder management concepts like Living Labs; on utilising actors like the

YCS and stakeholders based on their strengths and attributes, and on avoiding too much improvisation.

## 6.2 Social Aspects are Essential When Including Youths as Scientists

The second topic that emerged from my data, is the strategic considerations regarding including youths as scientists. This study suggests that the social aspect is essential in including youths as scientists and that recruitment strategies affect when and how researchers can work with inclusion.

My observations signify the importance of securing enough time for creating a safe space for the participants and for building trusting relationships between researchers and participants, both critical success factors in co-creating knowledge and innovations (DoA, 2020; Hagen et al., 2021). This is in line with Thomas et al.'s (2021, p. 5) description of *research forums*, a process not dissimilar from co-creation with youths, where they argue that “the first task of the research forum is to organise a knowledge coalition to open up a *safe space* for collaborative research in which a relationship of trust can be developed among all participants” (my emphasis).

As social aspects were not a topic during my interviews, but rather appeared as a topic from my observations, I do not know the strategic considerations of the Scandinavian researchers. What became clear to me, is that all case studies have ended up with a person conducting social tasks, which emphasizes the importance of social aspects of stakeholder involvement and participatory democracy, cf. my model. We have seen examples of the importance of the YCS as essential actors in YouCount, especially with the example from Oslo where they conducted stakeholder interviews which impressed both the researchers and the stakeholders. It might later turn out as an important part of the process of strengthening the stakeholder's connection to the project. This is backed by Walt and Gilson's (1994) argumentation about Actors being more important than the Content in policy change.

The need for social tasks to enable YCS in becoming essential actors is also visible in YouCount's emerging findings on the social inclusion of YCS in all the European case studies. This is feedback from a European YCS after taking part in an online meeting.

As a young participant in this project, I might sometimes feel like I'm not qualified, or competent enough to speak and share my thoughts, especially during Zoom meetings with many people that are older and probably have a degree in this field. When it comes to social inclusion, YouCount should create a safe space for the youth to feel confident to contribute and share their opinions (Göbel, 2022, p. 25)

This young scientist argues for YouCount to create safe spaces to avoid creating barriers to participation. Based on my collected data, supported by the theoretical framework, I would argue that these are crucial factors for sound processes, content development, and possibly for reaching the impact objectives of the project.

I thus argue that the social aspect is an important consideration when involving youths as citizen scientists and we have seen that even though it's not mentioned in any strategy, all case studies have prioritised it. YouCount has set a relatively high bar for itself in age and gender representation and has an objective to recruit youths "further away" from science contribution for achieving a more democratic inclusion in social innovation and policy change. The three Scandinavian case studies have chosen different strategies regarding YCS recruitment. We have seen that collaborating with existing groups makes it a more significant task to secure age representation objectives as the participants in the classes and activity groups are (about) the same age and one might therefore have to include more groups to achieve diverse age objectives. We have also seen that the recruitment strategies have affected when and how researchers can work with inclusion and that the most crucial measure for reaching "youths at risk of marginalisation" is done in the initial phase when choosing the project district.

An interesting perspective is that the three project districts all have high levels of minority background populations, while all the adult researchers have ethnic majority backgrounds. CSS can be a way to gather different data than if the YouCount researchers collected data like in traditional research. It might make a difference in recruiting minority youths into a research career. On the other hand, CSS is volunteer-based, and not all can spend time volunteering in research (they have to work and earn money), so the "class stratification of volunteerism" must be considered (Vohland et al., 2021), although a discussion about it is not visible in the DoA (2020), this is also true for YouCount's project districts.

The social aspect and inclusion are both essential for strengthening participatory democracy through Y-CSS. My observations show that ethical discussions about how to include YCS in safe ways are very much present within and between the local case studies. However, I argue that future Y-CSS projects would benefit from more explicit YCS recruitment strategies.

### 6.3 YouCount's Main Strategy for Strengthening Participatory Democracy is Co-Creation

The third topic that emerged from my data, is that co-creation can be an essential tool for reaching impact objectives and, in the end, strengthening participatory democracy. YouCount has a strategic choice to increase public engagement in social science by co-creating new knowledge (DoA,



2020). In the YouCount deliverable report D1.2, Butkevičienė et al. (2021) lift a social constructionist perspective and argue that co-creation should be understood as the ongoing shaping of scientific ideas and beliefs in interaction with the representations, identities, discourses, and institutions that give impact and meaning to the ideas and objects.

It is essential for CSS projects that quality relates not only to the data or scientific method but also to how participation is enacted and decision-making is done (Scheller, 2020). A way to achieve this is co-creation, where “projects are designed by scientists and members of the public working together and for which at least some of the public participants are actively involved in most or all aspects of the research process” (Shirk et al., 2012, p. 4).

My study shows that co-creation is an essential strategy for the Scandinavian YouCount researchers. At the same time, the co-creation ideals of inclusivity, flexibility, and adaptivity by (Vohland et al., 2021) are in tension with an impact-oriented efficiency. If we look at the analysis model (figure 6, page 51), it takes time to include the views and perspectives of stakeholders and YCS at all analytical levels, from contextual stakeholder mapping, enabling, and benefiting project actors, processes like environmental scanning and agenda setting, and content development on the way to reach impact objectives.

Co-creation is a growing trend in CSS (Vohland et al., 2021). Brounéus (2022) argues that it has developed a hierarchy between co-creative (more valued) and contributory CSS research (less valued). I have argued that the Scandinavian case studies have a high co-creational focus in all project phases, influencing the strategic choices in different ways. From being a fundament of the whole project (Oslo) to a solution to capacity issues in the research teams (Copenhagen), to be made in the form of bargaining (Stockholm). I base the argument on Vohland et al.’s parameters for analysis which describes co-creative design processes as inclusive, flexible, and adaptive in all stages, from research question formulation to evidence-based collective results (2021, p. 199). At the same time, I have argued that my study suggests that the case studies score differently on co-creation with YCS and stakeholders (visualised in table 12, page 41). Achieving high co-creation on both at the same time seems to be difficult, YouCount does at least not solve it. Finding solutions for solving this could be key to strengthening participatory democracy. It might have to do with capacity and priorities. Whether it is possible to achieve high co-creation with both YCS and stakeholders at the same time, and if so, how to do it, would be an interesting topic for further research.

As presented under the findings, this thesis' data indicate that co-creation is much more in focus in the YouCount case studies than short- and medium-term impact objectives, and that the researchers (when asked) mainly focus on long-term impact objectives. The discussions I was expecting about (short-term) impact objectives, can illuminate my bias. As a former activist, I envisaged frequent strategic talk about how to develop concrete social innovations and proposals for policy change; I was surprised when my expectations were not met. I see this now more as my expectations were connected to my background rather than anchored in research reality. I also see the lesser focus on short-term impact in the form of concrete social innovation and policy change as a sign that there are no tight bulkheads between the five dimensions of analysis in my theoretical model.

We remember (Carayannis et al., 2003, p. 118) in my theoretical framework describing Impact as "the social and technological change which results from the completion of the innovation process", which I interpret as utilizing the potential within Context, Actor, Process, and Content. I also see it as an explanation of "Process" being such a central part of YouCount's impact objectives regarding a contribution to the scientific knowledge base for Y-CSS, rather than short-term social innovation and policy change measures. The DoA (2020) lists ten more concrete target groups for impact. In the text about short-term objectives connected to these, the most frequent start of sentences is "increased knowledge". Others are "increased awareness", "increased social capacity", "increased evidence", and a more solid and actionable knowledge base for policymaking. These objectives are connected to developing knowledge in one way or another, making it only natural for the researchers to focus more on the co-creational research process, rather than the concrete development of social innovations and policy change.

The researchers are concerned with the long-term impact that will outlive the project period. I see the objectives about seeds sown during YouCount creating lasting effects in Gamle Oslo, Sydhavn, and Botkyrka, as pushing a domino. One hopes it will set other processes in motion and push more and more dominoes. Carayannis et al. (2003, p. 116) describe something similar as "innovation, through the continuous incremental effects of knowledge acquisition, [that] has an effect of cumulative impact on future innovations". This is particularly visible when Stine argues that she sees her research projects as continuous and that she expects to hear about the outcomes of YouCount in a future research project.

According to Vohland et al. (2021), the co-creation ideals of inclusivity, flexibility, and adaptivity, are essential for achieving participatory democracy. However, combining it with short-term impact-oriented efficiency is challenging. It is a difficult balance, as you need to ensure purposeful

project activities simultaneously as you will be in danger of missing the goal because all actors are not involved along the way. My study suggests that a total focus on co-creation and a complete focus on impact-oriented efficiency are mutually exclusive.

The findings of this study suggest that co-creation intentionally or intuitively has been given priority in YouCount. It can be a hazard to give too much priority to co-creation over impact-oriented effort, partly due to the short time scope of the project. A regular focus on short- and medium-term impact deliverables will thus be a probable advantage for CSS projects.

Impacts of CS projects can be broad, affecting the environment, society, the economy, science, and governance (Hecker et al., 2018). However, CSS projects will, according to my data, informed by my theoretical framework, benefit from a wide definition of impact as society is complex and societal change is impacted by a wide range of factors, from concrete social innovations to altered public discourses, for example about social inclusion of youth. YouCount is in large an impact-oriented project with an extensive list of objectives, along many dimensions and throughout and beyond the project lifespan. The impact objectives which are in focus, will possibly depend on the individual researchers' academic background and certainly along the project timeline as new objectives become relevant.

There is a lot more to say, and knowledge to produce, about CSS impact, but due to the limited scope of this thesis, it must be saved for future studies. However, my findings may visualize a distinction between research- and policy programs as far as participatory democracy is concerned. Research programs will naturally emphasize knowledge production purposes. YouCount as a Y-CSS program is concerned with social change, but perhaps in more indirect ways than a policy program would be. The role of social research is under debate and there seem to be tensions and different opinions in CSS as to whether to focus on knowledge production or more concrete social change (a more activist orientation). The EU is advocating CSS as a means to achieve more participatory democracy through its research funding programs; it will be interesting to see what signals will come about this debate in the future.

## 7. CONCLUSION

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This study has aimed to contribute to increased knowledge about efficient stakeholder management strategies in the field of co-creation and citizen social science (CSS). The example I have used is YouCount, a pioneering EU project with youths as citizen scientists. Can Y-CSS projects contribute to strengthening participatory democracy? My main data sources have been participatory observations, semi-structured elite interviews, and document analyses. I have developed a theoretical framework and an analysis model based on Freeman (1984), Carayannis et al. (2003), Walt and Gilson (1994), and CS literature by Göbel et al. (2016) and Skarlatidou et al. (2019). I have used it to analyse YouCount's stakeholder management strategies and explored how a CSS project can contribute to achieving social impact and policy change. The model is inevitably more fluid and interconnected than it might appear but was intended as a starting point for empirical analyses.

The study shows that the Scandinavian YouCount case studies, affected by prior contextual district knowledge, have taken advantage of built-in project flexibility to choose different stakeholder recruitment strategies. This affected *who*, *when*, and *how* stakeholders were invited into the project and even the interpretation of the central stakeholder management concept of Living Lab. YouCount is recruiting stakeholders from all relevant stakeholder groups and has a wide inclusion of youths at risk of marginalisation. Both are important aspects to strengthen participatory democracy. So are the selections of relevant project districts made in the initial project phases. I also found that social tasks for securing safe and efficient environments are important aspects of participation and are thoroughly taken care of in all case studies, even though it is not described in any project strategies.

YouCount is an impact-oriented project with an extensive list of concrete impact objectives. CSS projects will benefit from a wide definition of impact, as societal change is dependent on a wide range of factors. The objectives which are in focus at any given time can depend on the individual researchers' academic background and will also change throughout the project timeline. At the same time, YouCount is balancing between co-creation and impact-oriented efficiency. Both are important considerations, but the findings of this study suggest that co-creation intentionally or intuitively has been given priority. To increase impact-oriented efficiency, the project could benefit from a clearer developed strategic framework for contextual navigation and stakeholder recruitment, the implementation of central stakeholder management concepts, utilising internal and external stakeholders, and ensuring socially safe environments for YCS.

A successful CSS stakeholder management strategy might want to incorporate the five dimensions of the analytical model. Future CSS projects may in large have too much weight on the

Context and Process dimensions and could strengthen the foci on Actors, Content, and Impact. Having said that, it is an art to do it in a well-balanced way, and YouCount is a pioneering work at the forefront of developing Y-CSS as a field of research.

The vast knowledge production included in YouCount about social inclusion of youths in the fields of social participation, connectedness and social belonging, and citizenship and rights through civic engagement, have considerable potential in contributing to strengthening participatory democracy.

#### Strengths, limitations, and further studies:

This study can offer insights for YouCount on important aspects of the Scandinavian case studies' work processes to succeed with its aims and objectives. I also hope the study can be a literary contribution to filling the knowledge gap about stakeholder management strategies in CSS. At the same time, YouCount is a large and complex project where much happens outside the three cases and in a longer time perspective than my study's time scope. What I can say something about, is what happened from the translation of the DoA to local processes in the research teams, in the given period I was present. I do not have an overview of how these aspects are taken care of centrally and by case studies outside Scandinavia.

I acknowledge several other limitations of my work as well. At first, eager to seize the opportunity I was given as a co-researcher in YouCount, I developed a too comprehensive research design which I struggled to downsize into a fitting scope. The theme and time of my research did not necessarily fit together, as I initially wanted to investigate the outcome and impact of the chosen stakeholder strategies, but this was not available data as the project was in its middle phases. My project would benefit from a more equal amount of time spent on participatory observation in each of the three case studies for a more comparative study; this was not possible within the time- and money scope of the project. As I was living in Stockholm in the fall of 2021, it made it easier for me to make observations there, but I also had to use online meeting tools there. The YCS and stakeholders have a far too small presence in the thesis; including more of their perspectives would strengthen the data material.

This study shows that to strengthen participatory democracy, further research is welcome on especially four topics; (1) how to create safe research environments where YCS and stakeholders can cooperate in developing social innovations and policy change, (2) which social tasks are needed to maximize the contribution of youths as scientists, (3) how to achieve high co-creation with both YCS and local stakeholders simultaneously, and (4) how to combine high co-creation with an impact-oriented efficiency.

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## APPENDICES

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### Appendix A: Ethics Approval

This project was approved by Norsk senter for forskningsdata, NSD.

**Referansenummer:** 464581

**Prosjektittel:** YouCount - Empowering youth and cocreating social innovations and policymaking through youth-focused citizen social science

**Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon:** OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet / Senter for velferds- og arbeidslivsforskning / Arbeidsforskningsinstituttet

**Prosjektansvarlig:** Reidun Norvoll

**Student:** Frederick A. Reiersen

**Prosjektperiode:** 01.01.2022 - 31.05.2022

**Kommentar:** Personverntjenester har en avtale med den institusjonen du forsker eller studerer ved. Denne avtalen innebærer at vi skal gi deg råd slik at behandling av personopplysninger i prosjektet ditt er lovlig etter personvernregelverket. Personverntjenester har nå vurdert den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at behandlingen er lovlig, hvis den gjennomføres slik den er beskrevet i meldeskjemaet den 17.02.2022 med dialog og vedlegg.

## Appendix B: Interview guide

### **PREPARATIONS:**

- Bring stakeholder map (Freeman-Göbel et al. combination)
- Bring power-interest grid
- Bring YouCount EU proposal document

### **INTRO:**

- My focus is more about which choices and thought processes you've done, more than exactly what has been done.
- Topics I would like to talk about:
  - o The process of identifying and mobilising stakeholders
  - o Thoughts about the stakeholder's power and interest in the project
  - o Thoughts on wanted outcome of stakeholder cooperation
  - o Goals for YouCount and barriers we meet getting there
- The stakeholders will be anonymised in my thesis.

### **INTRODUCE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Explain that my thesis is about stakeholder management.

### **INITIAL QUESTION**

- Can you begin with just explaining how and why you ended up in YouCount?

### **THE PROCESS OF IDENTIFYING AND MOBILISING STAKEHOLDERS (CONTEXT):**

- Can you start by describing how you started working from the very beginning with identifying and mobilizing project stakeholders?

(Use Stakeholder list & stakeholder map)

- Who are the stakeholders now?
- Who are possible stakeholders?
- Which groups are missing?
- Place them in groups (1-6)

(Use YouCount Proposal)

- In the description of the case study in the EU prop, it says the following about stakeholders. Are there any missing?
- Is there any YC developed material about stakeholder management that you are using?
- Living Labs are thought differently in YC cases. How do you picture your Living Lab and which part do you anticipate it to play for the stakeholder cooperation?

(Use power-interest grid)

- Which power or influence do you see your stakeholders inhabiting?
- What resources have your stakeholders mobilized to take part in YC? Or what resources do you anticipate them to mobilize?
- How impactful do you think your stakeholder are likely to be?

### **BARRIERS (CONTEXT)**

(Use list of CS barriers)

- Let's talk about barriers potentially influencing future impact. In YC EU proposal there are listed five types of barriers. I would like to hear your thoughts about how each barriers are affecting your work.

### **OUTCOME OBJECTIVES (CONTENT/IMPACT):**

- What are your dreams for impact in Gamle Oslo/Sydhavn/Botkyrka?
- What are your (more realistic) expectations for YCs outcome and impact?
- Do you often discuss objectives and how you to reach them in the group?
- How do you work with differing objectives to different types of stakeholders?

### **IN THE END**

- Co-creation is in the core of YouCount, and I see it as important for both the projects PROCESS of including young people, and I believe it will lead to different knowledge and different OUTCOME & IMPACT in the end. At the same time, it seems like it causes longer processes, between the European researchers for example. What are your thoughts about this, and the balance between co-creation and efficiently moving towards YouCount's objectives for impact?
- Have you learned something new regarding stakeholder management so far?
- Did I forget something I should have asked you?
- Thank you so much for the interview!

**Do you want to take part in the master thesis  
research project "YouCount's early strategic work for future  
breakthrough on political impact and policy outcome"**

This is an inquiry about participation in Frederick A. Reiersen's master research project. The main purpose is to see how YouCount researchers in Oslo, Copenhagen, and Stockholm work with stakeholders in an early stage for later political impact and policy outcome. This letter will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

**Purpose of the project**

My aim is to see similarities and differences between the three Scandinavian cases of YouCount and their work with project stakeholders.

How and why are stakeholders chosen? To what extent are stakeholder analysis a foundation for strategic choices? How does the Scandinavian cases relate to joint European strategies?

My methods will be participatory observation in meetings local researchers have with stakeholders, interviews with YouCount researchers and analysis of internal YouCount documents.

**Who is responsible for the research project?**

Oslo Metropolitan University is the responsible institution for the project.

**Why are you being asked to participate? And what does it involve for you?**

You are asked to participate as representing a stakeholder in the research project. If you choose to take part in the project, this will involve that I observe meetings you have with YouCount researchers. I will make notes from the meetings.

**Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason.

**Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data**

I will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. I will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (GDPR - the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). Contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data.

None other than student Frederick A. Reiersen and project leader of YouCount Reidun Norvoll will be able to access the anonymised data.

### **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The master thesis project is scheduled to end in May 2022. Personal data will be kept for up to three years after ended project (May 2025) for my possible new student projects as part of YouCount.

### **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

### **What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with Oslo Metropolitan University, Data Protection Services has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

### **How can I find out more?**

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Master student Frederick A. Reiersen, by email: [s350025@oslomet.no](mailto:s350025@oslomet.no) or by telephone +47 99260575
- Project leader at Oslo Metropolitan University (AFI) Reidun Norvoll, by email: [nore@oslomet.no](mailto:nore@oslomet.no), or by telephone +47 98245145
- Project supervisor at Oslo Metropolitan University Kjetil Wathne, by email: [kjetwa@oslomet.no](mailto:kjetwa@oslomet.no) or by telephone +47 67238124
- Our Data Protection Officer Ingrid Jacobsen, by email: [personvernombud@oslomet.no](mailto:personvernombud@oslomet.no)
- Data Protection Services, by email: [personverntjenester@sikt.no](mailto:personverntjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +4753211500

Yours sincerely,

Project Supervisor

Student

Kjetil Wathne

Frederick A. Reiersen

(sign)

(sign)

### **Consent form**

I have received and understood information about the project "YouCount's early strategic work for future breakthrough on political impact and policy outcome" and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- for my statements expressed in meetings to be used as data in the student project. Statements can be published in a way where I can be recognised.
- for my personal data to be stored maximum three years after the end of the project for possible new student projects as part of YouCount.

I give consent for my personal data to be processed for a maximum of three years after the end of the project, no later than May 2025.

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(Signed by participant, date)

## Appendix D: Stakeholder Group Lists

### **Current and possible stakeholders of YouCount Denmark:**

\* = hoping to include at a later stage

#### Group 1: Civil society organizations, informal groups, and community members

- Municipal festival
- Municipal public meeting
- Local civil society NGO
- Allotment gardening organization
- Local environmental NGO

#### Group 2: Academic and research organizations

- Aalborg University Copenhagen

#### Group 3: Government agencies and departments

- Copenhagen City Municipality
- Social housing planning office
- Local community council\*

#### Group 4: Participants

- Youths in high school class
- Youths in activity group at Youth Culture House
- Youths in activity group for mentally disabled youths
- Children in primary school class\*

#### Group 5: Formal learning institutions such as schools

- High school
- Primary school
- Primary school\*
- Primary school\*

#### Group 6: Businesses or industry

- Recycling shop\*

In addition, they suggested two new categories: cultural institutions and municipal offers.

- (new category suggestion: cultural institutions) Theatre
- (new category suggestion: cultural institutions) Children culture centre
- (new category suggestion: municipal offers) Youth Activity Centre

### **Current and possible stakeholders of YouCount Norway:**



\* = hoping to include at a later stage

Group 1: Civil society organizations, informal groups, and community members

- Youth Work Training Program
- Sports Club
- Urban farming organization
- Neighbourhood incubator

Group 2: Academic and research organizations

- Work Research Institute

Group 3: Government agencies and departments

- Municipal district development program
- Municipal Youth Job Program

Group 4: Participants

- YouCount's Young Citizen Scientists

Group 5: Formal learning institutions such as schools

- University College\*

Group 6: Businesses or industry

- Local business association
- Social Youth Recruitment Agency

In addition, they suggested two new categories: cultural institutions and municipal offers.

- (New category: cultural institutions) City Library
- (New category: cultural institutions) Local Library
- (New category: cultural institutions) City Museum
- (New category: cultural institutions) Art Museum

**Current stakeholders of YouCount Sweden:**

Possible future stakeholders not mapped (March 2022).

Group 2: Academic and research organizations

- Södertörn University
- VA (Public & Science)

Group 3: Government agencies and departments

- Municipal Development Manager

Group 4: Participants

- Botkyrka Youth Council



**OSLOMET**