



# Evaluation study of the *Jongerendenktank* program

into the theoretical foundation, implementation, and perceived outcomes

## *Keywords:*

youth participation, policy-making, municipalities, empowerment, evaluation study

Name:	Caroline Kos, BSc.
Student number:	4142861
Master:	Youth, Education & Society – Utrecht University
UU supervisor:	dr. P. Baar
Second supervisor:	dr. M. Van Londen - Barentsen
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### **Samenvatting**

In Nederland gebeurt het te weinig dat MBO-jongeren participeren in gemeentelijke beleidsvorming en daar zelf ook wat aan hebben. Save the Children heeft het Jongerendenktank programma ontwikkeld om dit probleem aan te pakken, door jongeren in staat te stellen om op een effectieve manier te participeren in beleidsvorming. Er is echter nog geen onderzoek gedaan naar de mogelijke effectiviteit van dit programma. In dit onderzoek zijn daarom de effectiviteitspotentie, implementatie en ervaren uitkomsten van het programma de *Jongerendenktank* geëvalueerd. Een documentenanalyse is uitgevoerd op de beschreven documenten. Semigestructureerde interviews zijn uitgevoerd bij twee programmamakers, zeven MBO-jongeren en drie beleidsmakers die meegedaan hebben aan het programma. Uit de documentenanalyse is gebleken dat de effectiviteitspotentie van de Jongerendenktank niet hoog ingeschat wordt. Uit de kwalitatieve analyse van de interviews bleek dat de trainer een belangrijke rol speelt in de implementatie van het programma en er voor zorgt dat het programma afgestemd wordt op de specifieke jongeren en gemeente. De jongeren leerden veel over invloed uitoefenen in beleidsvorming. Beleidsmakers leerden verschillende voorwaarden voor effectieve jongerenparticipatie kennen. Alle jongeren en beleidsmakers vinden het programma belangrijk. Het programma kan een geschikt middel zijn voor gemeenten om jongeren op een effectieve manier te laten participeren. Aanbevolen wordt om de potentiële effectiviteit te verhogen door de documenten van het programma aan te passen. Een effectonderzoek is nodig om de daadwerkelijke effectiviteit van het programma te bepalen.

*Trefwoorden:* jongerenparticipatie, beleidsvorming, gemeentes, empowerment, evaluatieonderzoek

### **Abstract**

In the Netherlands, it happens to little that IVE youth participate in policy-making at municipalities and benefit from it themselves. Save the Children has developed the *Jongerendenktank* to address this problem by enabling youth to participate effectively in policy-making. However, no research has been carried out into the potential effectiveness of this program. Therefore, the potential effectiveness, implementation and perceived outcomes of the *Jongerendenktank* program were evaluated in this study. A document analysis has been carried out on the documents of the program. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two program makers, seven IVE students and three policymakers who were former participants of the program. The document analysis showed that the potential effectiveness was not considered high. The qualitative analysis of the interviews showed that the trainer

plays an important role in the implementation of the program and ensures that the program is tailored to the specific youth and municipality. The youth learned a lot about exerting influence in policy-making. Policymakers learned different conditions for effective youth participation. All youth and policymakers considered the program important. The program can be a suitable tool for municipalities to enable youth to participate in an effective way. It is recommended to increase the potential effectiveness by adjusting the documents of the program. An effect study is needed to determine the actual effectiveness of the program.

*Keywords:* youth participation, policy-making, municipalities, empowerment, evaluation study

**Evaluation study of the *Jongerendenktank* program into the theoretical foundation, implementation, and perceived outcomes**

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that every child has the right to participate. All countries that have signed the CRC are obliged to take measures to enable children to participate. This right is based on the idea that every child is capable of forming their own opinion and making it known. A child may express his or her opinion on all matters relating to the life of the child (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009).

Youth participation can have three important functions; a pedagogical, instrumental and social function. Youth participation is, in this study, defined as the expression of youths needs and opinions in order to be able to exert influence on decisions that directly or indirectly affect their living environment (Checkoway, 2011). Giving youth the opportunity to participate contributes to the personal development and the increasing capabilities of the child, this is the pedagogical function of youth participation. Youth participation also has an instrumental function because the opinions of youth can be used to increase the quality of programs and policies that concern youth (Checkoway, 2011; Mak, Gilsing & Wroblewska, 2016; Vandenbroucke et al., 2010). Thirdly, as a social function youth participation may increase democratic citizenship, in other words, the involvement of children in their community and sense of social responsibility, which is good for the future of society (De Winter, 2011; Timmerman, 2008).

In the Netherlands, youth participation is encouraged by law, but at the moment the design of youth participation is not yet ideal. The Youth Acts of 2015 determined that youth should be involved in policy-making and implementation (VWS, 2015). An evaluation survey showed that Dutch municipalities have the intention to involve youth in policy-making, but they are not satisfied with the current achievements of youth participation. For example, 60 percent of municipalities indicated that youth participation is still in its infancy (Mak et al., 2016).

To be more precise, it seems that municipalities mainly use youth participation for the instrumental function and forget the pedagogical and social function, which is problematic. Though the government has a pedagogical responsibility, a lack of pedagogical vision in youth policy was discovered (Van Lieshout, Van der Meij, & De Pree, 2007). Timmerman (2008) has examined that most municipalities link their vision for youth policy to the participation pedagogy perspective, though in most cases the pedagogical element disappears and youth participation becomes a political tool for shaping youth policy. Thus, youth

contributes to policy but does not benefit from it themselves. This problem is caused by the lack of a pedagogical interactive relationship in which youth can learn to give meaning to the world around them, meaning there is a limited possibility for individual development in the participation of youth in policy initiatives (Timmerman, 2008). Besides the lack of personal development, this is also problematic for the social function of participation. In fact, youth participation can be regarded as a testing ground for democratic functioning, if youth acquire the necessary skills and motivation in a planned and well-supervised process (De Winter, 2007).

Children's rights organization Save the Children (StC) the Netherlands observed this problem and wanted to improve the balance between the instrumental, pedagogical and social function of youth participation. To address this problem, they have developed a domestic youth participation program called 'the *Jongerendenktank*'. With this program StC aims to enable youth to participate in policy-making in an effective manner, making policy more inclusive and effective.

In the *Jongerendenktank* program, youth is challenged to give advice to the policymakers of the municipality on a topic that concerns youth to improve local policies. The target groups in this program are policymakers and youth from intermediate vocational education (IVE, 16-20 years old). This last target group has been chosen because IVE students participate relatively less often and are more difficult to reach (Weerden & Weidema, 2017). During ten weekly meetings, the youth is immersed in the policy issue of the municipality and will gather more information about this subject using the Participatory Youth Research method (Jurrius, 2012). They enter into a dialogue with policymakers, other youth, and experts on the subject. Based on the collected information, the youth formulate recommendations for the policies and present them to the policymakers. The youth are guided by a professional trainer during the whole program.

The goal of this research is to gain insight into the potential effectiveness, implementation, and the perceived outcomes of the program and to formulate implications for the improvement of the *Jongerendenktank*. This research will be conducted based on three main research questions. At first, what is the potential effectiveness of the theoretical framework of *Jongerendenktank*? Second, how is the implementation process of the *Jongerendenktank* valued by youth, policymakers, and the program makers? Third, what is the perceived outcomes of the *Jongerendenktank*, according to former participants and policymakers? Perceived outcomes will be defined as the extent to which former participants of the *Jongerendenktank* themselves have the idea that the goals of the program are achieved.

The scientific relevance of this study is that it provides insight into the active factors of this youth participation program, which contributes to the development of the program and to evidence-based knowledge. Over the past few years, there has been a growing awareness in the youth sector that effectiveness is an important requirement for further development and better justification for the sector (Van Yperen, Veerman & Bijl, 2017). StC is convinced that the program is working, and therefore wants to register the *Jongerendenktank* in Movisie's effective interventions database (2018) as 'well substantiated'. To get that label, the core elements of the intervention must be clearly defined and a credible theory must explain why the intervention achieves the stated goals (Van Yperen, et al., 2017). In this study, a combination approach of scientific research and evidence from practice will be used to gain insight into the potential effectiveness of the program.

The social relevance of this research is that implementing youth participation in a more effective way is good for the future of society. The results of the study can contribute to the implementation of youth participation in a more effective and sustainable way in the Netherlands. This also contributes to the social function of participation, namely democratic citizenship of youth, which is beneficial for the future of society (De Winter, 2011; Timmerman, 2008).

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Potential effectiveness.** To answer the first research question the theoretical foundation of the *Jongerendenktank* needs to be analyzed to indicate the potential effectiveness of the program. To evaluate the theoretical framework of the *Jongerendenktank* the model of Baar, Wubbels & Vermande (2007) will be used (Table 1). A document analysis will be carried out according to the general methodical conditions for effectiveness (Baar et al., 2007). The general methodical conditions for effectiveness can be regarded as a priori promising principles that create the context in which an intervention can succeed. The more these conditions come back in the program, the higher the potential effectiveness can be estimated. However, the potential effectiveness does not automatically guarantee success. The actual effectiveness will have to be proven through an effect study (Baar et al., 2007).

Table 1.

*General methodical conditions for effectiveness (Baar et al., 2007)*

Health Promotion Planning Model <i>Green en Kreuter (2005)</i>		Intervention Mapping Protocol <i>Bartholomew et al. (2006)</i>	
1. Social and epidemiological analysis			
2. Analysis of risk factors			
3. Identifying behavioral determinants			
(Intervention design)	→	4. Specific operational goals	
		5. Method based in theory and practical experience	
		6. Implementation protocol	
(Implementation)	←	7. Evaluation plan	
(Evaluation)			

The model (Table 1) consists of seven methodological conditions for effectiveness. The first three steps relate to the analysis and formulation of the problem that the program focuses on. Steps 4 to 7 link the problem to the approach in the program and justify how the *Jongerendenktank* addresses the problem. Step 1 is doing a social and epidemiological analysis of the problem, a lack of effective youth participation, among the trainers, IVE students, and policymakers. Step 2 is the analysis of risk factors, whereby a distinction is made between personal factors, personal behavioral factors, and environmental factors. Step 3 is determining the determinants of behavior, to investigate how effective youth participation can be made possible. Step 4 is to compose specific and operationally formulated program goals that are tailored to the personal and environmental determinants. Step 5 is testing the program among the target groups on comprehensibility and functioning and concerns the theoretical justification of the method. Step 6 is the design of a concrete implementation plan that takes the trainers into account. Step 7 is the description of an evaluation plan containing a process and an effect evaluation. The last two steps ‘implementation’ and ‘evaluation’ are not really methodical conditions, but rather deal with the programs actual execution (research question 2) and results (research question 3).

The *Jongerendenktank* has been developed in practice, therefore it is expected that the general methodical conditions for effectiveness will be limited reflected in the described documents of the program (Van Yperen, Veerman, & Bijl, 2017).

**Implementation of the program.** To answer the second research question, a process evaluation among youth, policymakers and the program makers needs to be carried out. The

effectiveness of a program depends to a great extent on its implementation (Baar et al., 2007). Implementation can be defined as a procedural and planned introduction of the program with the aim that the program is carried out as intended and that the intended outcomes are achieved (Daamen, 2015). This is the ‘implementation’ part of the model of Baar et al. (2007) (Table 1).

Implementation studies have shown that programs are often adapted to the working methods and environment of professionals. On the one hand, this is necessary to guarantee that the professionals are able to work with the intervention, on the other hand, this might mean that the intervention is not carried out as intended (Daamen, 2015). Blase and Fixsen (2013) state that it is less important that the program is carried out exactly as intended, but that it is more important that the effective factors of the program are carried out as intended.

A general important factor for an effective implementation is that the program connects with the interests and possibilities of the target groups (Baar et al., 2007; Daamen, 2015). This process evaluation aims to measure the extent to which the program fits the target groups, and how they experience and perceive the program and trainers. This will be done by questioning the degree of satisfaction of the youth and policymakers about the implementation on the basis of four implementation phases.

The implementation process of the program consists of four phases; dissemination, adoption, implementation, and continuation (Stals, 2012). In each phase various activities are carried out. In the dissemination phase, information about the *Jongerendenktank* is shared with interested municipalities and schools. In case of adoption, policymakers and youth form expectations and a positive attitude towards the program, after which they ultimately decide to use the program. In the implementation phase, the trainers actually execute the program. There is continuation when youth participation will be continued in the municipality. For this last phase, it is important that the program is regularly evaluated and adjusted when necessary (Stals, 2012).

In the implementation process many stimulating and obstructing factors play a role (Fleuren, Paulussen, Van Dommelen, & Van Buuren, 2012). The transition from one implementation phase to the next can be positively or negatively affected by various factors associated with characteristics of the program, the trainer, the organizational context and the socio-political context (Fleuren et al., 2012). This process evaluation aims also to determine the influencing factors, so that future implementations of the *Jongerendenktank* can be adjusted to this. This will be done by asking the program makers, who are also trainers, about the barriers and protective factors in each implementation phase.



Another process evaluation of the *Jongerendentank* was carried out last year, in which various implications were formulated. This evaluation investigated if the program was carried out as intended and the overall evaluations of participants (Aufderheijde & Van der Heide, 2017). However, the program has been implemented for a year more now and various adjustments have been made. So, with this new evaluation, the current process of the program will be evaluated.

Based on previous studies, it is expected that the program will be adapted by the trainer to each specific group of youth and each specific municipality, so the program will fit the expectations, interests, and possibilities of the target groups (Baar et al., 2007; Daamen, 2015). Besides, it is expected that there will be several factors that influence the effectiveness of the implementation of the program (Fleuren et al., 2014).

**Perceived outcomes.** To answer the third research question an outcome evaluation is needed. The perceived outcomes play a role in determining the effectiveness of the program. Examining the perceived outcomes is not a hard effect study, but can give an insight into the success factors and quality of the program (Van Yperen, De Wilde, & Keuzenkamp, 2014). This is the ‘evaluation’ part of the model of Baar et al. (2007).

The perceived outcomes will be measured by using program outcome indicators. An outcome indicator indicates the extent to which the goals of the program are realized. This indication is determined by three types of data. Firstly, the scope of the program is determined by the number of youth and policymakers reached. Secondly, the degree of satisfaction with the outcome is the extent to which the youth and policymakers rate the program as useful. Thirdly, the goal achievement is determined by the extent to which participants indicate that the goals of the program have been achieved. (Van Yperen, De Wilde, Keuzenkamp, 2014).

In order to investigate the goal achievement, it is important to know the goals of the program. The general aim is to enable youth to participate effectively in policy-making, making policy more inclusive and effective. Striving for a more inclusive and effective policy shows the instrumental function of participation (Vandenbroucke et al., 2010). The sub-goals of the program are aimed at empowering youth and providing the knowledge and skills to enable IVE students to participate (Weerden & Weidema, 2017). Empowerment on the individual level refers to the belief in the individual capacities and power of the individual to influence his environment and thus to shape his life (Steenssens & Van Regenmortel, 2007). Furthermore, they aim to improve the knowledge of policymakers about effective youth participation (Weerden & Weidema, 2017). These sub-goals show the pedagogical function of participation (Vandenbroucke et al., 2010). Due to these goals, it is expected that the

policymakers and youth experience both the instrumental and pedagogical function of participation. The goal achievement indicator can provide insight into the extent those two functions are experienced.

In addition to the various functions, participation can also take place in various dimensions, which are displayed on Harts participation ladder. Hart distinguishes eight different dimensions of participation, with ‘manipulation’ being no participation at the lowest step of the ladder and the initiative and implementation of youth and adults together at the highest level (Hart, 1992). The Jongerendenktank strives to let youth participate as described on the fifth and sixth rung of the participation ladder. Adults design and lead the project, but they consult youth extensively about this and work out the project together with the youth (Hart, 1992).

As described in the introduction, an evaluation was carried out among Dutch municipalities. This evaluation showed that most municipalities use youth participation just as a tool to consult youth about matters that concern them (Mak et al., 2016; Timmerman, 2008), this refers to the fourth and fifth rung of the participation ladder (Hart, 1992). Only 28 percent of the municipalities actually give youth a say in their policies. Thus, the majority of the municipalities need tools to shape youth participation in an effective way (Mak et al., 2016). Since this program aims to let youth participate in an effective way it is expected that the youth and policymakers will rate the program as useful.

## **Method**

### **Procedure**

In view of the practice-oriented exploratory character of this research, a qualitative research method was chosen. By means of different methods, an attempt was made to form a holistic view of the *Jongerendenktank*. The results of the different methods are compared with each other before formulating answers to the research questions. The use of different methods ensures methodical triangulation which contributes to increasing the reliability and validity of this research (Baarda et al. 2013).

The research started with a desk research and observations to obtain a more complete picture of the *Jongerendenktank*. An interview with one of the program makers has been carried out to understand the context of the program. Observations have been carried out to put the interviews in context (Baarda et al., 2013). Seven meetings were observed in three different projects, including one meeting with a dialogue between youth and policymakers and three final meetings in which youth presented their advice to the policymakers. Particular

attention was paid to the interaction between youth and the trainer, interaction between policymakers and youth and the way in which the trainer carried out the program.

Afterward, the document analysis was carried out. Besides, an online questionnaire was shared with all youth from the *Jongerendenktank* projects that took place between August 2017 and May 2018. This short questionnaire was used to gain general knowledge about the experiences of former participants and to invite youth for a personal interview. The results were also used to complete the topic list for the interviews.

All semi-structured interviews were carried out over a period of three weeks. The interviews were conducted in Dutch, lasted approximately 16 minutes for youth and 34 minutes for policy and program makers and were audio recorded. The interviews with youth took place at their schools. In one interview, two students were interviewed at the same time. The policymakers were interviewed by telephone. One interview with a program maker took place at the office of StC, the interview with the other program maker took place at a coffee bar in Utrecht. Afterward, all interviews were analyzed.

### **Participants**

Seven former *Jongerendenktank* participants (of which two boys and five girls) were interviewed. The age of the participants varied from 17 years to 20 years ( $M = 19,6$  years). The participants came from two different projects. Four participants came from the project in Kampen, which took place from November 2017 to January 2018. Three participants came from the project in the BUCH-municipalities (Bergen, Uitgeest, Castricum, & Heiloo), which took place from February 2018 to April 2018. A convenience sample was used to select youth for semi-structured interviews. Due to the convenience sample, the results of this study may not be generalized to the entire population of former participants, but the results can give an indication of how the results would be with other former participants (Baarda et al., 2013).

Three policymakers who have been involved in the *Jongerendenktank* were interviewed. These participants were approached via StC employees. The policymakers were from the municipalities Amstelveen, Heerlen, and Roermond. Additionally, two program developers (also trainers) from the *Jongerendenktank* were interviewed. Both worked at StC for about a year and a half.

### **Instruments**

**Document analysis.** A document analysis was used to answer the first research question. The model of Baar et al. (2007) (Table 1) with general methodical conditions for effectiveness was used as a framework for the analysis. It has been investigated to what extent the various conditions from the model were found in the documents of the *Jongerendenktank*.

The following documents have been analyzed: the handbook, manual, and surveys of the program. The documents were analyzed using an evaluation form with specific assessment criteria, per general methodical condition. The outcome of the analysis of the documents is mainly quantitative and is an estimate of the effectiveness of the program (Baar et al., 2007).

**Semi-structured interviews.** To answer the second and third research question, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted. During the interviews, pre-established questions were used to increase validity. The research questions were made operational by using corresponding topics. This qualitative method is an appropriate method to gain insight into the perception and experience of the youth and policymakers regarding the implementation and outcomes of the program (Boeije, 2010). At the beginning of the interviews, the content of the interview was briefly discussed. Additionally, anonymity was assured to increase the validity and reliability of the interviews.

The topic list for the process evaluation consisted of questions about the four implementation phases (Stals, 2012). The program makers were asked about the approach of the phases. The youth and policymakers were asked about their experiences with the dissemination, adoption, implementation, and continuation of the program. Sample questions were: “How is the *Jongerendenktank* currently being distributed?”, “What did you expect before the program started?”, and “How is the implementation of the program being monitored?”.

The topic list for the outcomes analysis consisted of questions about the three indicators; scope, satisfaction, and goal achievement (Van Yperen & Veerman, 2008). The program makers were asked about the scope of the program. The youth and policymakers were asked about their degree of satisfaction and goal achievement. Sample questions were: “Have you developed certain skills through the program?”, “What is the most important thing that you have learned?”, and “What do you think are the most important conditions for youth participation?”

## **Data Analysis**

**Document analysis.** The analysis of the documents on potential effectiveness is valued using factual criteria and is supported with citations from the documents to increase internal validity (Baarda et al., 2013). The valuation was done through a predetermined classification system (Table 2) to guarantee reliability (Baarda et al., 2013). A supervisor has been asked to check the analysis of the documents (Table 3, appendix) to promote objectivity. In case of a different opinion about the assessment of certain criteria, further consultations were held to attain a final judgment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Table 2.

*Classification system general methodical conditions*


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--	missing, unknown
-	vague, fragmentary, inconsistent
+/-	somewhat described and justified
+	described and justified, but not yet completely consistent
++	explicitly described and justified in an operationally operational manner

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**Semi-structured interviews.** All interviews have been transcribed directly after the interview to increase the reliability. The data has been analyzed according to the inductive analysis method of Baarda et al. (2013). The transcriptions were first openly coded in NVivo12. The labels were formulated according to the respondents' own words, which contributed to the internal validity. Subsequently, the labels were axially coded and categorized into core labels via analytical induction. The research questions were answered on the basis of these core labels. This method has tried to identify the topics that are most important.

## Results

In this result section, the main findings will be discussed per research question. Firstly, the results of the document analysis will be presented. Secondly, the results of the semi-structured interview with regard to the implementation will be shared, using the four phases of the implementation. Lastly, the results concerning the perceived outcomes will be presented, using the three outcome indicators. By means of a qualitative analysis, core labels have been developed, which are shown in italics in the text and supported by quotations from participants. Due to the small number of participants, nothing can be said about percentages in the result section.

### Potential Effectiveness

The document analysis answers the first research question about the potential effectiveness of the *Jongerendenktank*. An overview of the analysis of the general methodical conditions is given in Table 3, which can be found in the appendix. The results are described in more detail per methodical condition, which appears in italics in the text.

The *social and epidemiological analysis* of the participation of IVE students in municipalities is described in a fragmentary way. It is unclear to what extent StC has carried out a preliminary study into the participation of IVE students in municipalities and the needs

of these target groups. The handbook gives insight into the causes of the problems with effective participation, but the severity and extent of the problem are unclear. Nor has it been described which already existing programs focus on this specific problem.

The *analysis of the risk factors* with regard to youth participation is somewhat described and justified. Various risk factors for ineffective youth participation are described. However, the environmental factors that might influence the problem are hardly mentioned. The analysis of risk factors illustrate the problem but does not show which factors the program will focus on and why.

The *determinants of behavior* are described in a fragmentary way. The ASE model is mentioned in the theoretical foundation but has no clear operational function here. The theory of empowerment and the self-determination theory are linked to elements of the method, but the determinants are not clearly substantiated in relation to youth participation. A number of influenceable factors for policymakers and municipalities have been described, but the operational coordination of the chosen approach is lacking.

The *objectives of the program* are somewhat described and justified. The goals are based on determinants that can influence effective youth participation in the municipality. However, no goals have been formulated that focus on environmental factors. The goals in the handbook are divided into different categories and generally clear and largely SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) formulated, only the time-bound description is missing. The goals described in the manual are often not SMART formulated, and a number of them are inconsistent with the goals in the handbook. Also, in the manual, the link between the activity and the relevant goal often lacks.

The *theoretical and practical base* of the program is somewhat described and justified. In the handbook is described that a pilot of the program has been carried out, but no information is given about the function and outcome of this pilot. The handbook states that the program is tailored to the youth because they have a say during the process. However, it does not state whether the opinions of the policymakers are also included in the program. A number of theoretical starting points have been described to justify the method, but they do not apply to all elements of the method. Besides, there seems to be no operational coordination of the activities on the program goals.

The *implementation protocol* is somewhat described and justified. On the one hand, preconditions have already been described, and an extensive manual is available. In addition, young people and project staff are involved in the implementation. On the other hand, the preconditions are vague and inconsistently described and there is uncertainty about the overall

approach of the implementation. Besides, it remains unclear whether the policymakers also have a say in the implementation of the program.

The *evaluation plan* is described in a fragmentary way. Various evaluations are described, but the information about these evaluations is vague. A concrete evaluation plan that describes what, when and how the results of the program are measured is missing. In addition, the surveys are not clearly tailored to the program goals.

### **Implementation of the Program**

**Dissemination.** Program maker 1 revealed that the program is currently being distributed via the Speaking Minds project ([www.speakingminds.nl](http://www.speakingminds.nl)). This is done via *multiple media* such as the program website, conferences, personal recruitment, and through the partner organization Stimulansz. Recruitment for the program is aimed at municipalities because money is needed to carry out the project and municipalities have financial resources for this.

The policymakers and the youth had come into contact with the program in various ways. Policymaker 1 said: “*I have read about it in a Stimulansz newsletter*”. The other policymakers had come into contact with the program because a colleague had registered the municipality for the program. All participating youth were involved in the project *through their schools*. The project in the municipality of Kampen was a compulsory school assignment. The other youth was given the choice to register for the program. All youth received credits for their study as profit for participating in the project.

**Adoption.** Program maker 1 emphasized that the *demonstration of the added value of the program* was central in the dissemination and adoption. When approaching municipalities they are reminded of their responsibility to allow youth to participate and the possibility that this program offers for this. In schools, the program is also profiled as an appropriate assignment for students.

In addition, the program makers *think along with the municipality and school* to see how the program can be implemented to ensure that it meets the needs of the municipality and the school. In this, *ensuring quality* is central. Program maker 1 said about this: “*It is not really custom-made ... it does mean that we think along and if it is necessary to adjust it and that is possible without compromising the program or quality, then we want to think along with them.*” Policymaker 1 was very positive about that possibility to customize the program.

Furthermore, all policymakers had particularly *high expectations*, for example, that they could “*involve youth in policy*” with the program and expected to “*really hear the voice of the youth*” about the issue. Even though policymaker 3 was skeptical about the program

beforehand because programs often *“pop up and disappear just as quickly as they came”*, all policymakers indicated that their expectations were met.

There were *varying expectations* among the youth participants. A number of students had mainly expected that the program would consist of theoretical lessons about the policy subject without practical parts. Others expected to develop certain skills such as learning to present. The varying expectations could be explained by the fact that a number of students indicated that they *“knew little about the program”* beforehand. Program maker 1 agreed: *“we would like the teacher to show a video that we have made or tell about the project, but also in practice it appears that this does not always work or happen”*.

**Implementation.** Program maker 1 called the *familiar relationship with youth* as an important condition for the success of the program. As a trainer, she wants to motivate youth, but also give them space to give their opinion. She also described her role as a *connecting factor* in which she keeps youth and also the school and municipality involved in the program. The involvement of the school and municipality are also seen as important conditions for the implementation. Besides, she named some practical conditions that influence the implementation like *“the availability of a meeting room, time in the school schedule and required materials”*.

The trainers of the program were valued positively by both students and policymakers. The policymakers described them as *professional trainers* who *“communicated clearly”*, *“were well prepared”* and were able to implement the program in such a way that *“youth was really involved in the policy”*. The youth emphasized the *positive attitude* of the trainers. Student 4 said: *“Yes, just enthusiastic and also really showed that she believed in us ... she showed that she liked our ideas and really did her best for us. That did help”*. This is professional and positive attitude was also observed during the *Jongerendenktank* meetings.

Student 2 indicated that the program was *adjusted to the level of the group*. This is in line with the description in the manual and the observations during the *Jongerendenktank* meetings. The majority of the youth also indicated that there was *enough challenge* for them in the program. Only student 5 disagreed with this, saying: *“it was all pretty easy”*.

Monitoring the implementation is done at different levels. Program maker 1 explained that evaluations are carried out by the advisory committee, which consists of board members and former youth participants. There are also evaluation moments among trainers and colleagues that work in practice. Additionally, there are some evaluation moments after *Jongerendenktank* meetings and all youth is asked to fill in two questionnaires.



**Continuation.** However the program stops after the 11 meetings, the continuation of the program can be seen in the way the organization encourages municipalities to make youth participation sustainable. According to program maker 1: “*municipalities are almost always very enthusiastic, and say ‘we want to do this again’, or ‘we want to make this sustainable’, or ‘we want to keep in touch with the youth’*”. Besides, she mentioned several reasons that a municipality can have for making youth participation more sustainable, such as that it is financially beneficial, the local network can be deployed, and more customization can be provided because it can be about other topics that fit in well in the municipality. The program maker indicated that at the moment the continuation of the program differs in all municipalities. However, in the future they would like to train a *local trainer* who can continue the program. In this way, they also want to maintain the quality of the program.

Policymaker 3 said that they have already signed a partnership with the local IVE school and another municipality in the region to make youth participation a sustainable component in policy-making. She mentioned that they receive some help from StC in this project. Policymaker 1 also indicated that youth participation is continued within their municipality through a youth council. Policymaker 2 indicated that they wanted to involve youth participation mainly on a project basis because it would be difficult to realize a youth council, because of the time investment and capacity of the municipality.

Regarding the youth, the continuation of the program can be seen in the fact that they indicated that the *threshold to the municipality has been lowered* by the program. They would rather go to the municipality if they have an idea for improvement. A number of students said that “*they would like to do research beforehand*” and that they would like to “*go together with a group*”. After the program they also had the conviction that they can really make a change. None of the youth already went to the municipality, they explained that it is because the program has just ended. Only student 5 indicated that she would not go to the municipality when she sees something that can be improved, to the question “why not?” she answered: “*I think it’s all pretty good in the Netherlands, I think that’s what it is.*”

### **Perceived Outcomes**

**Scope.** Program maker 1 shared that in the *Jongerendenktank* was carried out in 12 municipalities in the past year. An average of 19 young people were involved per project. There was always one policymaker involved, but in some municipalities there were two policymakers involved. According to the program maker, the dropout ratio is very low, in these 12 projects less than ten students dropped out.

**Degree of satisfaction.** All policymakers were *satisfied with the outcomes of the program* and indicated that they would start working on the policy advice. Policymaker 2 said: “*some advice will be for the long term, but we have stated that we want to use the advice of the youth, we find their input very important*”. They also consider the program *important* because it allows them to “*involve the target group in the municipality’s demand*” and also because youth learn how they can exert influence.

The youth indicated that they consider the program *important* for several reasons; “*you learn so much from this program*”, and they “*immerse themselves in the lives of other young people in the municipality*” “*I have a feeling like I’ve done something for society*”, and because “*as a young person you also have a say in this subject, at municipal level*” “*I noticed that we were really taken seriously*”.

**Goal achievement.** When asked what the youth learned from the program, all youth first indicated that they had acquired *knowledge about the policy subject* during the program. Besides, there were two students who said that they had *acquired knowledge about policy*, in contrast to two others who stated that they had *learned nothing about policy* in the municipality. The students also indicated that they gained more *knowledge about influence* and the ways in which you can do that. Student 4 said about this: “*I think I now have a little more understanding of how that procedure goes ... I know better what difference an opinion can make, so I would give my opinion more quickly yes.*” Four young people said that they have *learned to do research* during the program. Two students also indicated that they have learned to think more creatively and solution-oriented.

The policymakers have learned a number of *conditions for effective youth participation*. Policymaker 1 underlined that *the involvement of the municipality* is very important: “*I always noticed that this was very much felt to be taken seriously*”. In addition, the importance of reciprocity appointed by policymaker 3: “*I mean students must also get something for the fact that they mean something socially, I believe very much in that reciprocity. So that you bring something and get something, that flow has to be there.*”

Four students have indicated that they have *developed more self-confidence* during the program. Student 2 said about this: “*The program has made me feel that I can exert more influence myself, especially at municipal level. And I also learned how I can do that.... So that has been an enrichment.*” Two others indicated that the program had *no influence on their self-confidence*. One of these, student 4, later remarked that he had gotten more out of himself than he had expected in advance.

A number of students also indicated that their image of the municipality has changed during the program. When asked what she learned from the municipality student 7 replied:

*That they do listen to us, and that we can give our advice. Just like I told about those surveys, nine of the ten times they do not listen to them. Then they say something or promise them something but they do nothing with it. But at this program, I have noticed that they also listen to it and take our advice and see how they can do with it.*

### **Discussion**

The aim of the research was to evaluate the *Jongerendentank* program. This was done by giving an estimate of the potential effectiveness, evaluating the implementation and the perceived outcomes. This study is important because it contributes to the development of the *Jongerendentank* program, to evidence-based knowledge and to the democratic citizenship of youth (Timmerman, 2008; Van Yperen, et al., 2017)

#### **Potential Effectiveness**

The first research question was ‘what is the potential effectiveness of the theoretical framework of *Jongerendentank*?’. Based on the assessments in the document analysis, the potential effectiveness is not considered high. This is in line with the expectation that the program is potentially ineffective because of the development of the program from practice (Van Yperen, et al., 2017). The documents still have a number of substantive and operational inconsistencies and defects. The assessment of the methodical condition in all conditions is not classified higher than ‘somewhat described and justified’. The weak points are in particular the social and epidemiological analysis, the behavioral determinants and the evaluation plan. The risk factors, the specific program goals, and the implementation protocol are described most clearly in the documents.

It is important to emphasize that the conclusions drawn are only based on the written documents of the *Jongerendentank*. At the time of this study, the documents were adapted and edited by the program makers for the submission of the program at Movisie. It is likely that the results from this analysis are not completely up-to-date. Nevertheless, the implications from the analysis can make an important contribution in optimizing the documents for the submission at Movisie.

#### **Implementation of the Program**

The second research question was ‘How is the implementation process of the *Jongerendentank* valued by youth, policymakers, and the program makers?’ The results of the process analysis showed that the majority of policymakers and youth were satisfied with

the implementation of the program and that their expectations were fulfilled and that the policymakers wanted to make youth participation more sustainable in their municipality.

The findings of the process analysis were in line with the expectation that the program would be adapted by the trainer to each specific target group, so the program would fit their expectations, interests, and possibilities (Baar et al., 2007; Daamen, 2015). This was observed in all implementation phases. In the dissemination of the program, the information was focused on the added value for the municipality or school. In the adoption phase, the program was adjusted by the trainer after thinking along with the municipality and school about the implementation. The youth indicated that the meetings, during the implementation phase, were adapted to their level. The continuation was visible in the way the trainer think along with the municipalities about ways to continue with effective youth participation while monitoring the quality of it. Thus, the program was not exactly carried out as intended, but attention was paid to ensuring the quality of the program (Blase & Fixsen, 2013).

It was expected that there would be several factors influencing the effectiveness of the implementation of the program (Fleuren et al., 2014). The findings were also in line with this expectation. Firstly, the role of the trainer is important in the implementation. The trainer ensures the connection between youth and the policymakers. In addition, the professional and positive attitude of the trainer was highly valued by the target groups. Secondly, there were different visions on the continuation of youth participation among the policymakers, this was an important factor for the actual way the program continued in the municipality (Timmerman 2008). Lastly, it is important to notice that StC and the trainers often evaluate the program in order to identify influencing factors.

### **Perceived Outcomes**

The third research question was: ‘What are the perceived outcomes of the *Jongerendenktank*, according to former participants and policymakers? The results of the outcome evaluation showed that youth learned a lot about the policy subject and about exerting influence in policy-making. Besides, their image of the municipality has changed and half of the students indicated that their self-confidence has increased. Policymakers have come to know different conditions for effective youth participation.

The findings are in line with both expectations. The first expectation was that youth and policymakers would experience both the instrumental and pedagogical function of participation. The second expectation was that youth and policymakers would rate the program as useful. The policymakers were satisfied with the advice and wanted to implement them in their municipalities, this is a result of the instrumental function. The policymakers

learned about effective participation, this can be seen as a result of the pedagogical function (Vandenbroucke et al., 2010). In addition, this result might prove that the program can be the desired tool to increase their abilities to implement youth participation in the future (Mak et al., 2016).

Students developed knowledge and skills to participate and were empowered, those are results of the pedagogical function (Vandenbroucke et al., 2010). A few students also indicated that they had a feeling that they did something for society, this indicates that some students also experienced the social function of participation (De Winter, 2011). However, not all students developed the same knowledge and skills or felt empowered, so not all goals were fully achieved. Possible explanations could be that the program did not fit all youth, or that there was a difference in the intrinsic motivations of the youth because some students joined the program voluntarily while others were required to participate (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Further research is needed to say something about the influence of personal motivation. Nevertheless, all youth indicated the program as useful and important because they were taken seriously and really had a say in the program.

Taken together, the fact that the policymakers were satisfied with the outcome of the program and the students also indicate the program as important might prove that there is a balance between the instrumental and pedagogical function of participation in this program. And that fact that youth indicated that they have been taken seriously and that the municipality is really going to work with their advice, might indicate that there is indeed a high level of youth participation in the program (Hart, 1992).

### **Strengths and Limitations**

A number of methodic comments have to be made with the current research. Regarding the first research question, it is important to mention that the conclusions are an estimate of the potential effectiveness of the program, there is no empirical evidence that all methodological conditions are actually important for the program to be effective (Baar et al., 2007). A program with little potential for effectiveness might be effective in practice (Hausman, 2002). Further effect research is needed into the results of the program to determine the actual effectiveness of the *Jongerendenktank*.

The results of second and third research question may not be generalized to the population of former participants of the program. Because use was made of a convenience sample, there is a possibility that positive participants were overrepresented among the participants (Baarda et al., 2013).

The researcher was not very experienced in conducting interviews. This may have caused a varying quality of the interviews, affecting the validity and reliability of the research. Additionally, due to various evaluations in the *Jongerendenktank* process, self-report could have had a learning effect. This means that the participants know which knowledge, attitude, and behaviors are expected of them with regard to youth participation. As a result, they may have given socially desirable answers, which reduces the validity (Baarda et al., 2013).

The strength of this research is that a holistic view is formed of the *Jongerendenktank*. The program has been viewed from different angles and extensively evaluated. Methodical triangulation has contributed to the increase in reliability and validity in the research (Baarda et al., 2013).

### **Implications**

**Improving the documents of the program.** To bring more focus to the program it is recommended to use a behavioral change model. The ASE model is already mentioned in the documents but needs to be made more operational to define the target behavior and determinants that are important for the program. According to this model, behavior can be explained by the intentions to perform certain behavior. These intentions are influenced by attitudes, social influences, and self-efficacy. By identifying and operationalizing these aspects using the risk factors, it becomes more clear to which aspects the methodology can respond (De Vries, Dijkstra & Kuhlman, 1988)

In addition, a clear evaluation plan must be described. The interviews have shown that evaluations are carried out at many times and at different levels, but this is not described in the manual. An evaluation plan helps to further develop the *Jongerendenktank* into an effective program (Van Yperen et al., 2017). Other detailed recommendations are described in an additional report on the document analysis (Kos, 2018).

### **Recommendations for further research**

Further research on the effectiveness of the *Jongerendenktank* is recommended. An effect study must be done to determine the actual effectiveness of the program. Additionally, further research should investigate the long-term effects of the program in municipalities and in youth and focus on the influence of personal motivation on these effects. Further research should also include schools and teachers who are involved in the *Jongerendenktank* program, to get insight into their opinions and experiences.

### **Conclusion**

The document analysis of the *Jongerendenktank* showed that the potential effectiveness of the program is not considered high. However, the process and outcome

evaluation showed that the program contains important factors that ensure effective youth participation. The program has attention for the pedagogical function of participation and really strives to a higher level of participation. In this way, the program can be an appropriate tool for the municipality to enable youth to participate effectively. The potential effectiveness can be increased by adjusting the documents of the program to the general methodical conditions for effectiveness.

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### Appendix

Table 3.

*Overview of scores on general methodical conditions for effectiveness*

No.	General methodical conditions	Score
<b>1</b>	<b>Social and epidemiological analysis of the problems around effective youth participation</b>	-
1a	Has a social analysis/needs assessment been carried out, prior to the program, into the experiences and ratings of the users (Save the Children) and the target groups (IVE students and policymakers) with a lack of effective participation opportunities in the situations of IVE schools and municipalities?	-
1b	Has an epidemiological analysis/research been carried out, prior to the program, into the seriousness, nature, scope and approach of difficulties with regard to participation in IVE students and municipalities?	-
<b>2</b>	<b>Analysis of risk factors for lack of effective youth participation</b>	+/-
2a	Are potential causes of the lack of effective participation of IVE students and policymakers differentiated by personal factors, personal behavioral factors and environmental factors prior to the design of the program?	+/-
2b	Are these risk factors obtained from empirical research in the specific target group?	-
<b>3</b>	<b>Determine determinants of behavior</b>	-
3a	Is adequate empirically based social-psychological behavior theories used in the design of the program?	-
3b	To what extent is the chosen approach tailored to the operational factors (determinants) affecting participation?	+/-
<b>4</b>	<b>Specifically and operationally formulated program goals</b>	+/-
4a	Are the objectives adequately tailored to personal and environmental determinants?	+/-
4b	Are the objectives SMART (specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic, time-bound) formulated?	+/-
<b>5</b>	<b>Theory and practical based program</b>	+/-
5a	Has the material of the program been tested in advance for the specific target group and for users to understand and operate?	-
5b	Will the experiences and reviews of users and target groups in the specific setting be included in the program so that the program fits in well with this?	+/-
5c	Is the method explicitly explained and justified from clear theoretical starting points?	+/-
5d	Are the methods and techniques operational-oriented to the specific goals of the program?	-
<b>6</b>	<b>Implementation protocol</b>	+/-
6a	Does the program provide a concrete implementation plan that clearly states the implementation procedure (nature, sequence, frequency, duration, intensity) and who is responsible for implementation?	+/-

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6b	Are the project staff and target groups involved in the design of the implementation protocol?	+
6c	Are the competences and skills of the project staff taken into account when implementing the program?	+/-
<b>7</b>	<b>Evaluation plan</b>	<b>-</b>
7a	Does the program provide a concrete evaluation plan that makes clear what, when and how the results are measured?	+/-
7b	Is the evaluation plan justified from specific program objectives?	-
7c	Are the intended outcomes of the program measured with an impact evaluation?	--
7d	Is controlled by a process evaluation whether the program is implemented as intended and why it has been effective or not?	+/-

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