Elevate the seldom heard, empower Ireland's future!
An investigation into seldom heard youth's involvement in youth participation
in the Republic of Ireland.

Mia White
S5140846
PAMAY502
Pedagogy: Youth (0-21), Society, and Policy
Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences
University of Groningen
30th June 2023

First assessor: dr Pauline Schreuder
Second assessor: dr Niek Frans
Word count: 10,718

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child mandates that children and young people must be given the space to voice their views freely on all issues that affect them, that their opinions will be taken seriously, and that they will have adequate opportunities to express these views. To which, Ireland has been making increasing and serious progress in this arena. However, the sphere of youth participation has been namely a restrictive and privileged space for children and young people, which hinders the participation of those children and young people who often fall 'seldom heard' as they are not given this space to participate in decision-making on matters that affect them. In which, the youth organisations that promote youth participation play a pivotal role. Adult professionals within such organisations play a key role in implementing and carrying out such policies, aims and strategies. This qualitative study investigated the sphere of Irish youth participation for seldom heard youth by probing five youth work professionals working in the top Irish youth organisations. Which, found that Ireland's youth participation sphere reflects this restrictive and privileged nature, whereby seldom heard youth are not *adequately* included. To which, the policy-makers and youth workers must work together to implement inclusive policy and practice which include all youth in order to allow decisions to be shaped by an aggregation of youth who reflect an authentic pulse of the nation.

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

CYP: Children and Young People
BOBF: Better Opportunities Brighter Futures
CYPSC: Children and Young People's Services Committee

Chapter 1
Review of Literature

1.1. Focus of this study

This thesis is concerning the youth participation of seldom heard youth in decision-making in the Republic of Ireland. The importance of children and young people's (CYP hereafter) participation has evolved to such a magnitude that it is now seen as a basic human right for CYP. For instance, participation is one of the foundational principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In particular, Article 12 of the Convention mandates that States' Parties guarantee children the ability to voice their views freely on all issues that affect them, that their opinions will be taken seriously, and that they will have the opportunity to express their views. Or, as the Convention's Article describes, CYP's views should be given '*due weight*' (Article 12, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990). The Republic of Ireland committed to protecting and furthering the Convention in national legislation and social policy by signing it on September 30, 1990, and ratifying it without any stipulations on September 21, 1992. Despite such an official sanction, it has proven difficult to create genuine and meaningful spaces for youth participation. Seldom heard groups are often perceived as a particularly vulnerable group of young people who are in need of greater and varied supports. However, their participation in decision-making is relatively limited, or they are not often given the opportunity to contribute significantly in decision-making. Seldom heard youth generally feel exclusion from Irish society and within Irish decision-making processes (Leahy and Burgess, 2011), and also feel a limited sense of belonging in Irish society (Walsh, 2017). This sense of exclusion can be translated into the realm of Irish decision-making for seldom heard youth, as Walsh (2017) exemplifies that seldom heard youth often ostracise themselves from authoritative opportunities where they can be leaders or decision-makers

CYP that belong to minority ethnic groups, disadvantaged communities, those with disabilities, those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, and those under the care of the state encounter greater obstacles in exercising their participation rights in Ireland. Nonetheless, it is important to note that these cohorts of children are not inherently deficient in their participatory abilities. Rather, the frameworks of participation neglect to adopt a comprehensive perspective or effectively guarantee that these perspectives are acknowledged (Horgan & Kennan, 2021). For this research, the definition of 'seldom heard' CYP will encompass a variety of groups of CYP. For example, typically underrepresented youth such as,

sexual and gender minorities, youth with disabilities, and youth who typically do not fit the traditional conception of childhood and youth, such as youth in care, homeless and deviant youth will be included in this study's definition of seldom heard CYP. Also, as minority groups of CYP are also often 'seldom heard', minority youth are also included in this definition. Minority youth are any specific group of people that makes up less than fifty per cent of the total population on a State's territory and whose members share common traits of culture, religion, or language, or a combination of any of these, is considered an ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority (United Nations Human Right Office). The Irish 'Better Opportunities, Better Futures' national youth policy framework is aimed at CYP, aged zero to twenty-four. Therefore, this is the age range that describes CYP in this thesis.

1.2. The Complex, and Contextual Nature of Youth Participation

Cahill and Dadvand (2018) assert that youth participation is a field of research, policy, and practice that has persistently been under-theorised, despite its sanction. Cahill and Dadvand (2018) also highlight the frequent, and critical issue of youth as 'becoming'. Often, young people are considered as unprepared to take an active role in decision-making, as they are perceived as people who are 'becoming' an independent, autonomous, responsible adult or contributor to civic life and decision-making (Cahill and Dadvand, 2018; Kelly, 2011). This future-oriented approach remains an issue within the Irish national youth framework (BOBF Advisory Council, 2018). This approach values young people more for what they will become rather than what they can contribute at present and conflicts with the appreciation that CYP are able to, and do actively contribute and participate in society (Andersson, 2017; Mager and Nowak, 2012; Tisdall, 2017). According to Gal (2017), youth participation should be contended as a process that is circumstantial, relative, and individually connected to each young person's own life-trajectories. Tisdall (2017) delves into the intricate dynamics of youth participation and highlights a common trend that transcends individual differences among children. Specifically, Tisdall notes that youth participation is often characterised by a rigid and restrictive framework that limits the ability of young people to fully engage in decision-making processes. This observation sheds light on the challenges that young people face in their efforts to participate meaningfully in various spheres of life, and underscores the need for more inclusive and empowering approaches to youth participation. A number of models have

also been developed in response to the recognition of the situational traits of participation in order to promote the involvement of young people in programs and services.

Hart's (1992) framework of participation is one of the most recognised conceptions of youth participation. Hart's 'Ladder of Participation' (1992) represents eight hierarchical levels of participation. The 'rungs' of a ladder are used to symbolise these ascending stages. 'Non-participation' is defined as the bottom three rungs, which are designated as manipulation, adornment, and tokenism. 'Tokenism' can be described as a symbolic act or effort for the sake of appearance (Lundy, 2018). Tokenistic participation is usually giving the impression of including a particular group of people, in this context it is CYP or minority youth.

A greater and supposedly more preferable level of participation is represented by the top five rungs, which are 'assigned but informed', 'consulted and informed', 'adult-initiated, shared decisions with children', 'child-initiated and directed', and 'child-initiated, shared decisions with adults'. One feature of Hart's approach is that it shows how involvement can occur across a variety of actions. However, its linear shape is constraining since it implies an inherent hierarchy of development from non-participation to full-participation. While Hart's (1992) model of participation has been influential within the sphere of youth participation, Lundy (2018), and, Cahill and Dadvand (2018) present a contextual lens and critique to the model. Cahill and Dadvand (2018) elucidate that Hart's ladder implicitly implies that there is a spectrum of more and less 'desirable' or authentic levels of participation for CYP. Recently, academics and experts often delineate that all levels of participation on Hart's ladder can contribute to meaningful participation depending on the context of the particular participatory actions. Lundy (2018) disputes the accuracy in coining the lower rungs of Hart's ladder as 'non-participation'. These "non-participation" degrees of participation provide a beneficial first step toward engaging and meaningful interactions with CYP. Lundy delineates that 'seeking children's views and doing so in a tokenistic fashion is also wrong but arguably not as wrong as not starting at all' (2018, p.352).

Also, some participatory agendas may not aim to reach, or require the highest rung of participation. This research is not investigating to see if a particular type of participation is present within the Irish realm of decision-making. However, the level of participation will be criticised in this research in contextual terms to investigate if minority youth's views and voices are given the 'due weight' that is required by the Convention. As discussed, lower levels of

participation can have merits, depending on the context. The levels of participation presented in the data will be critically analysed using this contextual lens within this thesis.

Moreover, Lundy's (2007) model provides a participatory framework for CYP. Lundy conceptualises that to achieve the Conventions stipulations, four interrelated concepts must be taken into consideration. The first interdependent concept is 'space', meaning that CYP must be given the opportunity to express their views. The second is 'voice', CYP must be facilitated and assisted to express their view. 'Audience' is the third concept, meaning that CYP must have the opportunity for their views to be heard and listened to. 'Influence' is the final concept, CYP's views must be appropriately acted upon. Lundy provides a compelling framework which assists and assures the implementation of youth participation policies, programs and strategies. Lundy's framework is a mechanism which allows for CYP to be given their 'due weight' in most contexts, and is not dependent on one particular or specific 'level' of participation. Although Lundy's model was created specifically to examine how children participate in the educational context, it can also be used to examine how children and young people experience participation in other contexts. It provides a framework for understanding, formulating legislation, and assessing current practice in relation to participation with CYP in broader societal contexts, such as in decision-making (Horgan et al., 2015).

1.3. Participation of Vulnerable Children

Rather than engaging young people in decision-making discourse, adults often excerpt information from them, and oftentimes such information is insufficiently considered by, or ineffectively disseminated with the relevant decision-makers. This form of adult-centred 'youth' participation establishes a restrictive, authoritarian structure and space for youth in decision-making (Gal, 2017). Moreover, this adult-structured approach to youth participation policy often leads to disparities within the inclusion of *all* CYP. Tisdalls (2017) perspective of vulnerability provides compelling insights for positively transforming the relationship between the state, services, and CYP. For instance, because of their visibility inside the state, certain children are "over-consulted," while others, many of whom are seldom heard CYP, face a likelihood of not having the opportunity to participate in any capacity. Furthermore, these adult organisations may be unwilling to recognise and include particular groups of youth's voices who are viewed as disrupting public order, or conventional notions of childhood, such as homeless and deviant youth. Minority groups are a particularly vulnerable group, with all

differing needs and often, in the name of child protection, are not included in CYP participation. It can be particularly challenging for child protection policies, procedures, and practices to acknowledge children's and young people's participation, let alone guarantee that such participation is meaningful, efficient, and long-lasting (Gal, 2017; Tisdall, 2017).

Tisdall (2017) also conveys a foundational perspective to understanding the complex and contextual dimensions of youth participation. Tisdall highlights the obstacle of youth participation 'in practice'. The problem of participation policies in practice is eminently reflected within the Irish sphere of youth participation. There are many persistent challenges in youth participation in decision making, for example, tokenism, limited impact on decision-making, and a lack of sustainability (Andersson, 2017; Cahill and Dadvand, 2018; Mager and Nowak, 2012; Tisdall, 2017).

Furthermore, within youth decision-making, CYP are often consulted too late into the decision-making process. This can be problematic for CYP participation as it leaves them with a limited window of opportunity to express their views and ideas, which in turn results in their opinions having less of an impact on the final outcome. Moreover, it is worth noting that in cases where CYP are given the chance to participate in decision-making processes, there is often a lack of follow-up feedback provided to them. This can result in ambiguity as to whether or not their insights and perspectives have been taken into account and ultimately influenced the decision-making process. As highlighted by Tisdall (2017), this is an important consideration when seeking to ensure that the voices of CYP are heard and valued in matters that affect them.

It has been observed that despite the development of numerous participatory methods, the perspectives and voices of CYP are conspicuously missing and do not seem to have any significant impact on decision-making processes (Gal, 2017). This lack of representation and influence of CYP's views and perspectives in decision-making is a cause for concern as it can lead to decisions that do not fully consider the needs and desires of all demographics of CYP. Therefore, it is crucial to find ways to incorporate the perspectives of CYP in decision-making processes to ensure that their voices and needs are met. Typically, children and young people are more concerned that their participation is valuable and that decisions are communicated to them than that their opinions have influence and are always taken into consideration (Davey et al., 2020; Horgan et al., 2015). Genuine participation is beneficial for all CYP alike, for a number of reasons. For CYP, it serves to enhance self-esteem, responsibility, communication

and decision-making skills. Youth participation also contributes to improving CYP's understanding of their rights, and aids in ensuring that CYP's needs are met in matters that affect them (Horgan & Kennan, 2021). Youth participation, in a wider context, can lead to positive outcomes that accrue not only to CYP, but to adults and the community as a whole (Correia et al., 2019).

1.4. 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures' and Youth Participation in Ireland

At face value, Ireland has made compelling progressions within the Republic's youth participation sphere. The most recent national youth policy framework; 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures' (BOBF hereafter) (2014-2020), showcases the nation's pledge to involve CYP in Irish decision-making. It is the first comprehensive national policy framework for children and young people from birth to 24 years old. It defines six major aims, five national objectives, and the new implementation structures that would enable cooperation and result-based accountability among governmental departments. This framework constituted an in-depth breakdown of all government departments' objectives, promises, and commitments to children and young people. The youth strategy's third goal is particularly relevant for this research as it aims to 'listen to and involve young people'. In which, the Irish Government has committed to 'develop[ing] and implement[ing] a National Policy on Children and Young People's Participation in decision-making to strengthen efforts to ensure children and young people are supported to express their views in all matters affecting them and to those given due weight, *including those of 'seldom-heard' children'* (p.31). Contextually, it is imperative for the national policy framework to recognise the necessity of inclusion for such 'seldom heard' young people. According to the latest available data, almost 1 in 7 young people aged fifteen to twenty-four in Ireland are minority youths (CSO, 2017; Walsh, 2017). This considerable number of seldom heard youth would suggest a substantial focus on supports and initiatives for seldom heard CYP in general and also to ensure the Frameworks goal of participation of those who are 'seldom heard'.

Despite the number of seldom heard young people and the government's claims for inclusion and diversity within youth participation, the framework's Advisory Council evaluates that the policy strategy has not been successful in reaching its goals. The Council exemplifies the issue of systemic inequality in Ireland, which has inhibited the overall prosperity of 'Better Outcomes Better Futures' success. The Advisory Council expresses that 'no inroads have been

made on structural inequality and this is a serious shortcoming' for the State's youth framework (BOBF Advisory Council, 2018, p. 8). Which showcases one of the problems facing seldom heard youth's participation and inclusion in Ireland. How can seldom heard CYP's participation be fostered if the State cannot create structures that overcome youth systemic inequality? The involvement of seldom heard CYP in decision-making processes is sure to be limited as a result of overall intrinsic inequality issues within the country.

In addition to the aforementioned concerns, it is important to note that there are several other noteworthy issues pertaining to the participation of Irish seldom heard youth in decision-making processes. According to Leahy and Burgess (2011), it has been observed that Irish CYP often feel that their views and opinions are not given due consideration and are excluded from decision-making processes. This sense of exclusion and neglect can have a significant impact on their overall well-being and can lead to feelings of frustration and disillusionment. It is important for policymakers and practitioners to recognize the importance of involving CYP in decision-making processes and to create opportunities for them to express their views and opinions in a safe and supportive environment. According to Horgan et al. (2015), it has been observed that youth in Ireland often feel that their participation in decision-making processes is not given due importance. This lack of meaningful involvement can have significant implications for the development and implementation of policies and programs that affect the lives of young people in Ireland. In conclusion, it is worth noting that when it comes to the participation of CYP, there is a persistent issue of systemic inequality that continues to affect Irish minority youth. This observation is supported by the findings of the BOBF Advisory Council (2018), which underscore the importance of addressing this problem in order to ensure that all young people, regardless of their background, are able to fully participate in society and achieve their full potential. Horgan and Keenan (2021) also recognise disparity between groups of CYP in Ireland as they delineate that disadvantage, ethnicity and sexual orientation act as barriers to participation of seldom heard youth. The existing gap that exists in Irish CYP participation creates a space where seldom heard youth are not given the necessary tools to engage in participatory strategies, which ultimately hinders their ability to be involved in decision-making processes.

The current state of youth participation in decision-making in Ireland can be characterised by this restrictive and rigid nature, which has been observed to have a particularly negative impact on minority youth. This observation has been made by various sources (BOBF

Advisory Council, 2018; Horgan et al., 2015; Leahy and Burgess, 2011; Walsh, 2017). The Irish State acknowledges the value of youth participation in Irish society. Such participation is not only considered as constructive, but also meaningful, as it allows young people to engage with and contribute to the society in which they live. Upon conducting a thorough analysis of the issue at hand, it has been brought to light that the youth participation in Ireland seems to be characterised by a certain level of privilege and restriction. This can be attributed to the inherent challenges of equality that exist within Irish society, which are further compounded by the adult-centric approach that is taken towards the participation of children and young people.

In Ireland, there exist a number of organisations that emphasise youth participation as a key aspect of their agenda. Professionals from four organisations are represented in this thesis, however the names of these organisations will not be disclosed, to ensure anonymity. This thesis will investigate professionals working within the realm of youth participation in Ireland. The implementation of approaches, policies, and strategies related to Irish youth participation is primarily carried out by specialists and professionals in the field, who are considered to be of significant value for this study. The professionals offer unique and contextual viewpoints pertaining to the matters of seldom heard youth participation within their respective fields of employment. Thus, incorporating a fundamental perspective and significant value to this study. Adult professionals within the realm of youth participation play a key role in implementing and carrying out such policies, aims and strategies. Utilising adult professionals allowed this research to investigate the perspectives on the issues within their line of work.

1.5. Aims, and Research Question

This chapter has underpinned the nature and problems of youth participation for seldom heard CYP in Ireland, which illuminates the aims, and research question for this research:

The aim of this research is to investigate the of extent of youths participation in decision-making in Ireland in order to:

- gain an understanding of the extent, levels and types of participation that seldom heard youth are involved in.
- identify the challenges facing seldom heard youth's participation within the sphere.
- investigate opportunities and solutions that foster participation of seldom heard youth in the future.

Research Question:

According to specialists working within the realm of Irish youth participation, what is the extent of the challenges and opportunities of youth participation for seldom heard youth in Irish decision-making?

Chapter 2
Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study utilised interviews as the primary method for data collection. Qualitative research has permitted this research to investigate the knowledge and attitudes of professionals within the Irish youth participation sphere. Interviews also assisted this research in achieving its aims by allowing for the probing of the participant's perspectives and ideas regarding potential solutions. Minority participation is fundamentally a social issue, hence the epistemological and ontological approaches are considerably more appropriate for this research. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach. The structure of the study was informed by the perspectives of the interviewees and the initial research ideas (Bryman, 2016). The study placed a significant emphasis on the perspective of the interviewee, rather than that of the researchers. The interview process was designed to facilitate tangential conversation, allowing interviewees to elaborate on their beliefs and provide a deeper understanding into their perspectives (Kara, 2015). The interview structure was designed to be flexible in order to effectively accommodate the interviewees' input and guide the direction of the conversation accordingly. Each candidate was interviewed once, with a maximum duration of one hour per interview. The audio recordings of the interviews were used to facilitate transcription and subsequent analysis of the subject matter. The interviews were initiated in a casual manner, wherein the researcher gathered basic information about the interviewee. The progression subsequently evolved into more focussed and structured inquiries, while allowing for flexibility in the conversation's trajectory in certain sections. It is important to note that some queries raised do not precisely align with the structure delineated in the interview schedule.

2.2. Participants

A sample size of five adult professionals has been selected based on the prediction that theoretical saturation will be attained at that juncture. The five individuals were affiliated with the primary organisations that are involved in promoting youth participation in Ireland. Those organisations are organisation 1, Ireland's primary child and family agency, organisation 2, Ireland's leading youth organisation, organisation 3, and organisation 4, Ireland's child and youth council. The present study employed a purposeful sampling technique, which entails the systematic selection of participants based on their relevance to the research objectives. According to El-Masri (2017), purposeful sampling is a distinct sampling method that does not entail the random selection of participants. In addition, this study employed a theoretical framework that involved sampling interviewees until theoretical saturation was achieved. This refers to the point in time when emerging concepts have been thoroughly examined and no further insights are being produced (Bryman, 2008). The selection of the sample was based on the assumption that, considering the constraints of the study, the participants chosen would offer a satisfactory portrayal of the experts involved in the realm of youth participation in Ireland. According to Quinlan (2011), a fundamental aspect of carrying out research is ensuring that the sample is representative. One could argue that purposeful sampling may introduce bias as the researcher has complete control over determining which individuals meet the research criteria (Bryman, 2008).

2.3. Concepts and Instruments

This study employed semi-structured interviews, which consisted of a predetermined list of specific topics to be addressed during the interview. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. However, it is important to acknowledge that the answers provided by the interviewees showed considerable versatility (Neuman, 1991). Semi-structured interviews often deviate from the predetermined interview schedule with regard the order of questions, while still ensuring that the key topics are addressed (Bryan, 2008). It is customary during interviews conducted in this manner to explore some of the topics introduced by the interviewee, thereby contributing to the diversity of each interview. Conducting semi-structured interviews has proven to be more effective in facilitating insightful conversations compared to fully structured interviews. When devising the interview schedule, it was imperative to ensure that the primary subjects could be addressed in an open-ended manner (Desai and Reimers, 2019). Considering the researcher's initial assumption that the interviewees may have varied knowledge regarding

seldom heard youth participation, it was imperative to ensure that the language utilised in each question was both clear and straightforward.

Central themes such as the overall extent, opportunities, challenges and solutions for seldom heard CYP's participation were probed to gain appropriate knowledge about Irish seldom heard youth participation in corroboration with the issues presented in chapter 1. Moreover, the interviews included attributional inquiries regarding the participants' job position and the nature of their work, knowledge-based questions, such as "what is your understanding of this?", and attitudinal inquiries, to which the interview schedule can be found in the Appendix. To address ethical considerations, the study refrained from utilising behavioural and experimental inquiries in order to safeguard the well-being of the participants. As the research was qualitative in nature, the questions were designed to be open-ended in order to facilitate dialogue. In addition, the interviews incorporated several vignette questions to enable the interviewee to respond to behavioural inquiries in an indirect manner. Vignette questions are utilised to elicit an understanding of how specific contexts shape behaviour, as stated by Bryman (2008). To ensure impartiality, the interviews were conducted without the use of leading questions.

2.4. Procedure

The recruitment process involved identifying central Irish organisations that cater to youth participation and obtaining contact information through online sources. Subsequently, the individuals were contacted through electronic mail by the researcher. The interviews were conducted by the researcher via video conferencing with audio recording.

Participants were provided with information and consent forms prior to taking part in this study. Informed consent forms ought to provide the participant with sufficient details regarding the research in order to enable them to make a knowledgeable decision about whether or not to participate (Tai, 2012). Moreover, a printed sheet of information outlining the objectives of the study and the data processing procedures was distributed to the participants. The information sheet additionally advised that the participants could leave the study at any time and there would be no repercussions (Tai, 2012). It was necessary for participants to sign the document to show that they understood the research.

The concept of consent and privacy are mutually aligned. The preservation of privacy is of paramount importance in the realm of research. It is imperative for the researcher to

carefully refrain from encroaching upon the privacy of the participant. Participants' identities were not disclosed to third parties or discussed in public. Only the researcher and their supervisor had access to the data collected for the study. The following procedures guaranteed participant confidentiality:

(i). The erasure of the interview's audio recording after it has been transcribed.

(ii). The employment of pseudonyms.

(iii). Avoiding using direct identifiers.

As mentioned above, the present study endeavours to abstain from utilising direct identifiers. Furthermore, given the limited number of job positions available in each organisational area, job descriptions were not included in this thesis. To ensure that this research was conducted to a high ethical standard, this thesis was conducted according to the ethical guidelines and procedures of the Behavioural and Social Science Faculty at the University of Groningen. To which, the transcripts will be stored safely within the faculty's regulations. Throughout their participation in the study, the participants were not anticipated to be exposed to any kind of risk (Bryman, 2012). There was no perception that the study's subject matter was delicate or problematic in any manner. Additionally, participants were fully informed about the research's purpose and the subjects it involved, and had the opportunity to decline before the interview. Please find the information letter and a blank consent form in Appendix 2, and 3.

2.5. Analysis Plan

Qualitative Content Analysis was utilised for analysing the data (Mayring, 2022). Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher transcribed the audio in its entirety. The Constant Comparative Method was the approach employed to carry out the qualitative content analysis. Boeije's (2002) five step approach was applied in the analysis. The first step entailed comparison within a single interview. Meaning that a comparative analysis was performed within a single interview. During the open coding process, each segment of the interview was carefully analysed to ascertain the precise content and assign an appropriate code to each segment. The refined themes were consolidated into key sections to effectively present the data in a comprehensive manner. To which, the list of codes is available in Appendix 4. Comparison between interviews within the same group was the next step. The increasing number of memos, codes, and coding are observed as a consequence. Then, upon conducting multiple interviews, a comparative analysis of the interviews was performed. This step involved a comparison of

interviews that were conducted within the same group, wherein individuals shared similar experiences. The third step, then, was the comparison of interviews from different groups. In this step, a comparative analysis was conducted between interviews obtained from two distinct groups. A comparison in pairs at the level of the couple was conducted in the fourth step. The disparity between the current stage and previous ones lies in the degree of scrutiny. This pertains to the dyadic level, as it involves both partners within a couple. The act of comparing yielded valuable insights regarding similarities and disparities in viewpoints, problem-solving approaches, concurrence or discordance on pertinent topics, among other aspects. The complexity of a relationship is heightened when viewed from multiple perspectives, as opposed to a singular individual's experience. The last step entailed comparing couples. In this step, interviews that revealed two distinct perspectives, namely those of individuals who did not share identical experiences were analysed. Subsequently, a depiction of the correlation materialised based on the interaction between the two parties. The outcome of this analytical process was a comprehensive list of requirements for evaluating the interviews. Another outcome was a pattern of interconnected interviews and data. The patterns were founded upon the identification of dimensions that may function as discerning criteria for identifying diverse relationships and connections between data (Boeije, 2002).

Chapter 3

Analysis

3.1. Introduction

This chapter the outcomes of the qualitative interviews. The illustration of the results is constructed through content analysis and is categorised into three principal themes of opportunities; challenges; solutions.

Organisation	Opportunities
Organisation 1	- Youth Participation Strategy - Financing - Quality Assurance - Practice Procedures
Organisation 2	- Youth Participation Strategy - Youth Forums - Reference Panel
Organisation 3	- Youth led: - Programmes - Workshops
Organisation 4	- Youth Councils - Youth Forums

Table 1: An overview of the participation opportunities in organisations investigated in this thesis.

Firstly, when asked what the specific opportunities available are, the participants failed to mention specific and concrete examples. Therefore, this section will first mention a brief overview of some examples of the participatory actions that each of the main organisations provides. Organisation 1, Ireland's family and child agency, aids the State in implementing the BOBF framework by instituting a Child and Youth Participation Strategy. Organisation 1 deals with the facilitation of quality assurance mechanisms for child and youth agencies across Ireland, such as funding, website development, and best practice procedures. For example, this organisation supports the facilitation of the Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) in their efforts to establish frameworks and protocols that incorporate the active participation of children and young people in the planning, development, delivery, and

assessment of children's services. Organisation 2 is Ireland's leading national youth development organisation. In which, this organisation promotes youth participation via implementing the Youth Strategy, youth forums and a reference panel, whereby a group of sixty-four young people represent this organisation at National Executive Conferences to influence organisation decisions. Organisation 3, then, is a Federation comprising twenty member youth services and a national office that collaborate to provide the most effective youth work services aimed at supporting, empowering, inspiring, and educating CYP. This organisation promotes youth participation through youth-led programmes and workshops. Lastly, organisation 4 provides 31 youth councils across Ireland whereby they aim to give people a voice on local services and policies. This is carried out through annual youth forums where CYP identify topics and issues which affect them. To which, this organisation aims to allow CYP to have a say and provide feedback on local services and policies.

3.2. Theme 1: To obtain an overall understanding of the extent of the opportunities for seldom heard youths participation in Ireland.

When asked what the focus on youth participation in general was like in Ireland, the participants had quite similar answers. They said that the focus in each of their respective organisations is quite good (Participant 2, 5). Furthermore, two of the participants acknowledged that ''over the last number of years, I think, um, there's really been a real focus on participation'' (Participant 1), and that the focus on youth participation has been 'gaining momentum' (Participant 4). However, participant 2 noted that the focus can be on implementing participation structures rather than on capacity building. However, the majority of the participants concluded that seldom heard youth are not *adequately* included in the sphere of Irish youth participation, ''They're probably not adequately [included] in my own opinion'' (Participant 5). Participant 2 noted that at surface level it may seem that there is adequate inclusion but youth participation still remains as a ''middle class preoccupation''. The participant in disagreement with the majority expressed that there are ''there's a couple of working groups set up around the country'' which are aimed at seldom heard youth participation. This participant also delineated that funding for these groups is given to ensure seldom heard participation. Three of the participants did acknowledge that while seldom heard youth are not adequately included, their organisations do promote spaces for seldom heard

youth participation, ''that's why we've got youth organisations like organisation 2 that are pushing for the minorities to be included'' (Participant 5).

The participants' opinion was split when asked if there were adequate opportunities for involvement and access to participation. One participant denoted that there were not adequate opportunities for involvement and access, and another acknowledged that ''there definitely could be more opportunities'' (Participant 4). In contrast the other two participants expressed that there ''absolutely is'' enough opportunities (Participant 5) and that ''there's more and more platforms available for youth participation'' (Participant 3). Overall, the participants clarified that the general participation ''opportunities [are] for every single young person involved'' (Participant 5), and hence, that is how seldom heard youth are involved. The main answer that was demonstrated by the participants was that there are ''so many organisations'' (Participant 1), services, and structures, which provide opportunities for youth participation in Ireland. These participatory services can take place through youth participation structures and frameworks (Participant 1, 2, 5), at a local level through local youth and community projects (Participant 2, 4), or, on a national level via a National Youth Council (Participant 1). However, no concrete examples of specific opportunities were mentioned. It was mentioned that organisation 3 reserves one third of the space at their project for seldom heard youth's participation.

3.3. Theme 3: To identify the challenges facing seldom heard CYP participation within the sphere.

The interviews involved exploring the challenges that hinder the participation of seldom heard CYP. The respondents were interviewed in regards to the challenges that were highlighted in the first chapter. The questions that were drawn from the literature focussed on the implementation of participation policies 'in practice', the issue of tokenism, and inclusivity within the Irish youth participation sphere. Additionally, the participants were queried regarding their perceptions of additional challenges which also restricted seldom heard CYP's participation.

The issue of participation policies 'in practice' was illuminated in chapter one. A significant proportion, four out of five, of the respondents reported encountering challenges when seeking

to implement strategies for promoting youth participation, ''Yeah, you do, you can hit some red tape sometimes mm-hmm'' (Participant 4). One participant reported that the participation recruitment process can prove to be difficult to implement as ''they've got a very strict set of guidelines'' (Participant 4). Similarly, another participant mentioned that engagement, or a lack thereof, can create issues implementing strategies 'in practice'. Lastly, Participant 3 specified that it can be challenging to attain these goals due to a large workload, in which other issues that require immediate action must take precedence over exerting a significant effort to carry out the participatory goals. ''We're dealing with the day-to-day challenges that these individuals (CYP) experience. So any new policy or framework that comes out, sometimes it gets lost'' (Participant 3).

Moreover, some of the study's participants also indicated that they perceive tokenism as a concern that impacts overall youth participation, and also acknowledged that they aim to avoid it in their respective lines of work, ''I've certainly seen social workers use tokenism as a way to just, say, yeah. 'We've done it' and it's a tick box exercise'' (Participant 1). According to their statement, participant 1 showcased that a lack of understanding of youth participation among society is what creates opportunities for symbolic forms of participation. One of the participants reported observing instances of tokenism in the realm of youth participation. However, this individual mitigates tokenistic forms of participation by ensuring that the goals set are both meaningful and achievable (Participant 3). In contrast, Participant 4 did recognise tokenism as an issue that affects CYP participation, but also acknowledged that 'smaller' participatory actions can be meaningful too and that these actions can be ''something to build on''. Further, participant 2 has mixed feelings regarding tokenism. This participant illuminated that some CYP may not have the capacity to engage at a 'higher' level of participation and that 'smaller' forms of participation can also be meaningful, as long as there is honesty about the level and goal of the participation. However, he did illustrate that some youth workers perceive youth participation as a 'tick-the-box' exercise that is sometimes not valued.

As inequality and inclusiveness was a prevalent issue presented by the literature, the participants were questioned if they believe that Irish youth participation is inclusive. Again, all of the participants stated that they aim to create an inclusive space for all CYP participation, but delineate that ''young people on the fringes can be ignored'' (Participant 1). Participants

2, and 5 were doubtful that youth participation was *actually* inclusive beyond surface level. Participant 5 acknowledges that while Irish youth participation aims to be inclusive, it is ''a hard question because I'd like to think yes. But I'm speaking from some, you know, from a very privileged place. Um, if I was in a minority group, how would I feel about that?''. All of the participants also noted that there are some groups of young peoples' voices noticeably missing within the youth participation sphere, which will be delineated in section 3.4. Also, it was illustrated that the ''audience'', meaning society in general, are not always receptive to seldom heard youth participation, and therefore hinder its inclusiveness (Participant 2). Evident ways in which Irish youth participation has been inclusive is through an ''open door policy'', where any young person can find meaningful ways for them to engage (Participant 3). Further, it was mentioned that some targeted practices are utilised by organisation 1 to aim to include some seldom heard CYP. It was mentioned that organisation 1 implements this targeted strategy to ensure traveller youths participation and involvement.

Challenge	Frequency
Schools	4
Communication	4
Understanding of Rights	2
Encouragement & Empowerment	2
Overrepresentation of Middle-class CYP	2
Trust	1
Funding	1

Table 2: Frequency of Challenges

The participants identified a range of other challenges regarding minority youth participation than what was exemplified in the literature. Schools were strongly criticised as perpetuating difficulty for youth participation. Participant 2 illustrated that if a school's principal or system does not value participation then these schools won't put enough focus on it. Furthermore, four of the participants emphasised that schools have the potential to enhance youth participation through greater cooperation with youth services. Moreover, communication between CYP and

adults has been proven to be an issue for seldom heard youth participation in Ireland, according to four of the participants. Communication at a level that young people can understand, ''on their level of language'' and treating CYP as contributors and partners has been challenging within the Irish youth participation sphere (Participant 1). Both participants 2, and 3 conveyed that some CYP may not have the ability to express themselves too. Also communicating to seldom heard CYP ''how important their voice is'' (Participant 5). According to two of the participants, CYP often have a lack of understanding regarding their rights to participate and have a voice, and therefore lack encouragement and empowerment in their participation. It was noted that the youth participation demographic primarily consists of middle-class CYP and that there is often an overrepresentation of this group and a lack of representation from those that are seldom heard (Participant 1,2). The level of influence and trust that CYP's views will be heard was also delineated as a challenge for seldom heard CYP participation (Participant 2). Participant 2 also recognised funding as an issue which hinders seldom heard CYP's participation. However, the participants from 'larger' organisations which were focussed on Ireland's central regions positively denoted that funding was not an issue.

3.4. Theme 4: To investigate solutions that foster greater participation for seldom heard youth in the future.

The final aim of this thesis was to investigate the solutions that foster greater participation of seldom heard youth in the future. To obtain this aim, the participants were asked for suggestions concerning the groups of CYP which require greater inclusion, and also regarding solutions which promote increased youth participation of those who are seldom heard. In order to ensure seldom heard CYP's inclusion, recognising groups of CYP who are often seldom heard and require more inclusion is imperative. Many groups of 'seldom heard' children were described across the participants as requiring more inclusion in the future. Firstly, youth with disabilities was the most common answer among participants (Participants 2,3,4,5), ''I would probably say disability, definitely. Mm-hmm. The whole area of disability in Ireland, the whole sector is under pressure'' (Participant 5). The next most common answer was immigrant youth (Participants 1,4,5). Also, homeless youth (Participants 3,5), CYP in care (Participants 3,5) were noted as being youth who are often seldom heard. Furthermore, other groups of CYP that the participants considered to be seldom heard of were youth with addiction issues (Participant 3), and traveller youth (Participant 2). This study found that traveller youth participation is

situational. Some participants indicated that there was significant effort committed to facilitating the participation of traveller youth. However, these participants, again, were focussing on more central regions in their work. Besides this, most of the participants highlighted that there was not an issue with LGBTQI+ inclusion in participation.

Solution	Frequency
Focus in schools	4
Youth Ambassador	3
Multi-stakeholder Approach	2
More targeted/focussed on reaching seldom heard	2
Grassroots Approach	1

Table 3: Suggested solutions frequency

Finally, some solutions and suggestions for future policy and practice were probed. Firstly, it was also noted by most of the participants that ''the schools could play a bigger part in youth participation'' (Participant 3). The provision of some form of youth ambassadors was the second most common response from the participants (Participants 1, 3, 5). Participant 5 exemplifies that there should ''I think it's a great idea to have some kind of community youth worker in every school, at least one of them where they've got their own office and they've got their own space and you're there to be their voice and have somebody who's representing them as an adult to encourage them within the school. And that's not my suggestion. That is a suggestion that has come from the young people many times. Kind of like a youth ambassador''. Moreover, two of the participants suggested a stronger multi-stakeholder approach (Participants 3,4) which ''identify those different groups that need to be targeted a bit more specifically'' (Participant 4). One participant suggested that government policy should implement a more focused approach ''to reach young people on the fringes'' (Participant 1). Lastly, participant 2 recommended implementing a ''grassroots'' approach where seldom heard and CYP participation in general is encouraged and implemented at a local level, by local councils where the focus for CYP is on making decisions at a local level that have genuine impact.

Chapter 4

Discussion & Conclusion

4.1. Introduction

This chapter highlights the findings presented in chapter three, and interprets them in relation to the literature presented in chapter one. Through this process, the study delves into the interpretation of the outcomes and discerns the significance of the findings. The diverse work positions and organisational affiliations of the participants in this study have influenced their differing discourse regarding the extent, opportunities, challenges and solutions of youth participation of seldom heard CYP.

4.2. Aim 1: To obtain an overall understanding of the extent of the opportunities for seldom heard youths participation in Ireland.

This investigation has revealed that the focus on youth participation in Ireland has been steadily increasing and gaining importance in Ireland in recent years. All of the participants revealed that the focus was good, however, one participant was not totally satisfied and noted that this focus may be misconstrued. It was illustrated that while there is a good focus on youth participation in general, the majority of the focus is on implementing participatory structures rather than capacity building. To which, this could account for why these professionals do not feel as if seldom heard CYP are *adequately* included in the Irish youth participation realm.

Despite this, the majority of the professionals did acknowledge that they ensured efforts to adequately include all CYP, especially those from seldom heard groups. The participants highlighted ways in which minority participation was promoted and ensured. Furthermore, it has been observed that organisation 1 has established working groups specifically aimed at promoting the participation of traveller youth. This initiative has proven effective in enhancing the representation of this particular group within the realm of youth participation. Perhaps, this successful targeted strategy could be employed to assure other groups of seldom heard youths representation and inclusion in participation activities. Additionally, there are contentions regarding funding among these organisations. Some participants elucidated that adequate funding has helped to set up projects and strategies which has aided seldom heard participation in their respective organisations. However, this funding does not seem to translate to every

organisation for youth participation as one participant contended that funding has been an issue. This could potentially explain why certain organisations may not exhibit the same level of inclusivity as others. A lack of funding can hinder organisations' ability to explore new programs and structures. Ultimately, this constrains the opportunities available for promoting the engagement of underrepresented CYP.

Thus, the research found that opportunities for youth participation of seldom heard CYP seem to differ across the country. For example, it was discerned that there are enough opportunities for involvement and access to participation structures. Yet, it was also established in the investigation that seldom heard participation is in fact limited. Rather than specific participation structures or programs, organisations were suggested as ways in which seldom heard CYP can participate. Notably, local groups and projects such as organisation 2 and organisation 4 were positively regarded as groups which bolstered participation. It was exemplified that organisation 4, in particular, aims to ensure space for seldom heard groups of CYP by reserving a third of its spaces for such groups. It is possible that other organisations could learn from the achievements that they recognise from these groups and apply them to their own initiatives.

4.3. Aim 2: To identify the challenges facing seldom heard CYP participation within the sphere.

Many challenges that are currently facing participation for groups of seldom heard CYP have been observed. Some of the challenges concur with the literature explored in chapter one of this thesis, however, the participants brought to light other challenges also. Overall, three challenges: of policies and programs 'in practice'; tokenism; and inclusiveness of the Irish youth participation sphere, were derived from the literature and probed in the interviews. Moreover, other prominent challenges facing seldom heard CYP participation were also brought to light. The three most prominent challenges are regarding encouragement, empowerment and communication. Additionally, an overrepresentation of certain youth groups, the role of schools and the allocation of funding were also identified as significant challenges.

Firstly, youth participation policies do not always translate well to real life, 'in practice' (Tisdall, 2017). This has been elucidated as an issue for Irish youth participation. A major issue

in terms of implementing participation policies in practice is regarding time. It was illustrated that often these professionals are too busy dealing with a large workload and more urgent issues in their respective fields and that often participation goals need to take a backseat. It was also revealed that sometimes there can be an inundation of updated policies and due to the lack of time, it can prove difficult for these professionals to find an opportunity to look into these new policies and strategies. Tisdall (2017) also highlights that this issue of rigid rules and guidelines hinders participation for seldom heard youth. These rigid guidelines within Irish youth participation structures have also proven difficult to recruit seldom heard CYP to participate in the first place.

Whether it is seen in a positive or negative light, youth participation has often been characterised by tokenism (Lundy, 2018). To which, tokenism was observed as a prevalent issue facing seldom heard youth's participation. In this context, tokenistic forms of participation were regarded negatively, as not providing CYP with fulfilling and meaningful participatory actions. Interestingly, one participant delineated that the process of inclusion can be a 'tick-the-box' exercise for seldom heard participation in Ireland. To the contrary, some of the participants were also in defence of tokenism. As explicated in the first chapter by Lundy (2018), tokenism may not inherently possess a negative meaning. Some of the participants have asserted that tokenistic participatory actions may be more advantageous in certain instances. The issue of a lack of capacity and ability for seldom heard CYP was illustrated as an issue within youth participation (Tisdall, 2017), this was also brought to light in the interviews. Smaller, more achievable actions can be easier to reach, as in some cases seldom heard CYP may not have the capacity to engage at a higher level (Horgan and Keenan, 2021). One of the participants shed light on the fact that although less impactful forms of participation may be subject to criticism, they can still provide a sense of fulfilment for CYP.

For example, this participant was criticised when asking CYP to participate and decide on what colour the walls should be and what way the room should be arranged in a new youth centre. Other adults criticised that this was not 'genuine' or 'meaningful' forms of decision-making, however this participant defended that even though this form of participation seemed 'small', it provided a foundation, and starting point for further youth participation. Moreover, he explained that CYP should have a say on their own space, at least. Another participant mentioned that tokenistic forms of participation can be merited, as long as adults are honest

with CYP about their expectations of the participation. This is in line with Lundy's (2018) defence of tokenism, whereby she argues that some participation is better than nothing at all.

As the BOBF Advisory Council (2018) demonstrated inclusiveness to be an issue for minority inclusion, the participants were asked if Irish youth participation is inclusive. To which, the majority of the participants acknowledged that the sphere of youth participation can be restrictive and exclusive in nature. It was made clear that beyond surface level, seldom heard youth can be ignored. It was also mentioned in the data that the 'audience' may be the issue for this, as Irish society in general was perceived as not being receptive to, or may not value the participation of seldom heard youth. Therefore inclusiveness remains as an issue within the sphere of youth participation for seldom heard youth, which is perpetuated by exclusivity, and a lack of reception (BOBF Advisory Council, 2018; Horgan et al., 2015; Leahy and Burgess, 2011; Walsh, 2017).

Three challenges surrounding encouragement, empowerment and communication were the major issues that were highlighted. Seldom heard CYP in Ireland feel excluded from Irish society (Leahy and Burgess, 2011). Moreover, Walsh (2017) depicts that seldom heard youth often ostracise themselves from participatory actions due to this exclusion, and a lack of encouragement and empowerment. Encouraging and empowering seldom heard CYP to take part in programs and strategies is a key issue for their participation. This was also said as being due to a lack of understanding of their rights. As CYP are often valued as beings of 'becoming', participatory actions for CYP can be adult-centred and difficult to understand (Cahill and Dadvand, 2018; Kelly, 2011). Thus, this form of participation can be restrictive for many CYP as they may not be capable of participation at such a level (Gal, 2017). To which, communication was also highlighted as an issue for seldom heard youth participation. The data presented in part 3.4 highlighted that communication is an issue which hinders seldom heard CYP's participation. As elucidated in chapter one, CYP's participation should be conducted at a level that is understandable, and also where they are treated as mutual contributors. For seldom heard CYP to be empowered and encouraged to participate, they must be communicated to, that their views and participation holds value and has influence (Davey et al., 2020; Horgan et al., 2015).

Traditionally, youth participation being privileged in nature has been an issue. Tisdall (2017) exhibits that certain groups of CYP are often 'over-consulted'. As revealed by the

participants, there is an over-representation of some youth in the Irish sphere. It was revealed that youth participation in Ireland remains as a middle class preoccupation, which corresponds with chapter one, which illustrates how some groups of CYP in the Irish participation sphere are consulted more often than others (Horgan and Keenan, 2021; Tisdall, 2017). The participants delineated that middle-class CYP, who are generally out-going and academic, have the most access and representation within youth participation in Ireland. This concurs with Horgan and Kennan (2021) that youth participation is generally privileged. In relation to this, schools were relatively criticised as a challenge which hinders seldom heard CYP's participation. According to the participants, schooling systems can put little value on youth participation, and when there are participatory strategies they are ultimately tokenistic. Moreover, as mentioned, when there are participatory actions, such as a school student council, it typically consists of highly academic, middle-class CYP. A lack of trust in young people's influence was also presented as challenges for seldom heard youths participation. If CYP does not have trust that their voices will be heard and that they have influence when they participate, CYP will not be motivated to keep participating (Davey et al., 2020; Horgan et al., 2015).

Lastly, funding was noted as a challenge in ensuring seldom heard CYP's participation. However, in contrast to this, funding was also praised by some participants. After analysing the respective participants' types of work, it seems as if funding is contingent on organisation, and the location of the work. It has been observed that the participants in larger organisations, and in more centralised parts of the country praised that funding was not an issue, compared to those from lower-regarded areas who work in smaller organisations.

Recognising the challenges facing seldom heard CYP participation allows researchers and policy makers to understand how to implement better quality services. Further, the professionals in this study are working to implement youth participation structures, policies, and programmes. Thus, their perspectives regarding the challenges facing seldom heard CYP's participation is immensely relevant and important to analyse and take on board.

4.4. Aim 3: To investigate solutions that foster greater participation for seldom heard youth in the future.

Tisdall (2018) reinforces that the participation of vulnerable youth proves to be an issue. To which, many seldom heard CYP are considered to be vulnerable in particular. Tisdall reinforces

that CYP who do not meet the 'traditional' conception of childhood are often absent in youth participation and decision-making arenas. This was also reflected in the data from the interviews. Frequently, organisations display reluctance in acknowledging specific groups of children and young people who are perceived as causing disturbances to public order, or those who deviate from conventional understandings of childhood (Tisdall, 2017). These particular groups of CYP are rarely given a platform to express their perspectives and hence, are left seldom heard. Homeless youth, youth with addiction issues and CYP in care are specified as youth that are often seldom heard and that require more inclusion in the future. Moreover, and most notably, youth with visible and invisible disabilities was noted as a group that is persistently absent from youth participation in Ireland. Migrant youth were also mentioned as a group who also require more inclusion. There were mixed opinions regarding greater inclusion of traveller youth. It seems as if the participation of traveller youth is a contextual issue as in some parts of the country there is a targeted approach to traveller youth inclusion, and in others, not so much.

Moreover, it was also elucidated that the inclusion of LGBTQI+ youth had significantly increased, and it was not observed that this group had problems regarding inclusion in youth participation avenues.

Furthermore, a range of solutions was provided which are expected to aid these issues for Irish youth participation. First of all, and most notably, the provision of local and accessible 'youth ambassadors' was recommended. Apparently, this is a suggestion that has often come directly from CYP. It was delineated that this 'youth ambassador' could potentially be a person who works in schools, or just a local, easily accessible person who advocates for, aids and promotes youths rights and participation.

Participants' suggestions for solutions reveal a significant need for advancement of youth participation in schools to aid bolstering seldom heard youth participation. A stronger multi-stakeholder approach was recommended to aid identifying seldom heard CYP. In which, it was also acknowledged that schools could play a bigger part in promoting and bolstering youth participation, particularly for seldom heard youth. The majority of participants spoke negatively about youth participation in schools. It was illustrated that the majority of CYP spend most of their time in school and that schools have the easiest access to CYP. Thus,

schools could be doing more to promote CYP's rights either solely, or in connection with local organisations and projects..

A more focussed and targeted approach in government policy was also suggested. Another suggestion was a 'grassroots' approach to youth participation policies whereby local councils are given more autonomy in implementing participation strategies and programs. This participant conveyed that due to the contextual nature of youth participation (Cahill and Dadvand, 2018), and one restrictive framework (Tisdall, 2017) for youth participation does not work in all contexts of Irish society. A localised approach to youth participation strategy implementation could benefit the overall realm of youth participation. This is a valuable suggestion for future policy and practice as an array of literature suggests that youth participation should be contended as a process that is circumstantial and relative to differing contexts (Gal, 2017). This localised approach would also mean that youth participation goals could be structured around achieving meaningful participation that impacts the community, rather than striving for and ultimately not achieving 'larger' goals and forms of participation.

4.5. Conclusion

Overall, seldom heard CYP's participation has been thoroughly investigated in this thesis. Since the establishment of Article twelve of the CRC, and the subsequent introduction of Ireland's BOBF youth framework, youth participation in Ireland has undergone a significant advancement. However, this thesis has exemplified that a presence of seldom heard CYP is evidently absent in this arena. The results exemplify professionals' dissatisfaction regarding the level of participation from those that are often seldom heard. Further, the findings of this investigation reveal that professionals have the awareness that seldom heard youth require greater inclusion. It also reveals that the professionals have the knowledge of solutions which combat the issues and challenges that have been presented. The fortuitous timing of this thesis is aligned with the ongoing update of the BOBF Framework, which is poised to usher in the next phase of the frameworks evolution. To which, a blueprint policy framework for the BOBF (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth, 2022) has been proposed in the past year for its implementation in 2023. The blueprint proposes to retain the five key objectives, which includes the participation aim. As per the blueprint, there are plans for enhancing the involvement of all CYP in governmental decision-making processes. This is said to be achieved through initiatives such as conducting interviews with CYP, supporting CYP as

investigators, and bolstering the government's ability to integrate the participation of all CYP into policy-making and implementation of the Framework. This thesis has demonstrated that although progress is being made towards enhancing youth participation in Ireland, there is a pressing need to prioritise the inclusion of those that are seldom heard. The blueprint illustrates that the next framework will ''spotlight areas requiring coordinated focus in order to address the challenges being faced by children and young people in Ireland, and to generate momentum for change'' (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth, 2022, p. 1). To which, this thesis has elucidated the need for this ''spotlight'' to be shone on those who are often seldom heard in order to enhance CYP in decision-making processes, to potentially 'generate momentum for change'. To conclude, the evidence presented in this thesis has shown that improving seldom heard youth participation should be a main objective for improving Irish youth participation overall. Elevate the seldom heard, and empower Ireland's future!

4.6. Limitations

This research would yield a more precise representation of the scope of seldom heard youth participation as a result of a larger sample size. The inclusion of a more extensive range of professionals would enable the acquisition of more informative data. To enhance the data's representativeness, it would be advisable to incorporate participants from a greater range of organisations across Ireland. For example, as schools were unprecedentedly criticised in this study, it may have been beneficial to include teachers and principals in the sample of this study. Moreover, this study could have benefitted from including seldom heard CYP in its sample to avoid bias from the professionals. It was observed that some of the participants held a positive bias towards their organisations. It appeared that they were hesitant to portray their organisation in a negative light.

As per ethical protocol, the interview questions must refrain from including any behavioural or experimental inquiries that could potentially yield more comprehensive research outcomes. The subjectivity inherent in the research method and data analysis may hinder the provision of an accurate interpretation of the participants' knowledge and attitudes. It is highly probable that replicating the study may pose a challenge due to the fact that each interview involved distinct tangential discussions. The study's potential limitations may stem from the absence of quantifiable data. However, utilising quantifiable research methods could restrict the study's scope and exploratory nature. The qualitative findings may serve as a basis for

future quantitative research, although such investigation is outside the scope of this study. According to Kara (2015), often, research can benefit from the utilisation of multiple research methods. Combining the tools provided by both qualitative and quantitative methods can result in a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of this research topic. Due to time constraints, adult professionals in the field were sampled rather than CYP. Also, due to circumstances beyond my control, the sample size was limited to only five participants. Moreover, given the study's relatively small-scale nature, its findings may not be generalisable to all contexts in Ireland or to all young people from minority backgrounds who have very diverse and complex experiences.

To conclude, the Irish youth participation sphere must aim to embrace the power and voice of those that are seldom heard in order to unlock the potential of Ireland's future and accept the States invitation for change. Let Ireland's decisions be shaped by the perspectives and experiences of CYP who reflect an authentic pulse of the nation.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Codebook

Theme	Definition	Code		
Extent	Participant illustrates an overall picture/ understanding of youth participation in Ireland.	**Extent_focus:** - Increased -Good -Promoted -Structures -Capacity	**Extent_app:** -No -Yes -Attitudes	**Min_incl:** -No -50_50

Theme	Definition	Code		
Opportunities	Participant discusses the circumstances in which seldom heard youth participate.	**Incl_good:** -No -Yes -Person_centred -Class	**Participation_how:** -Organisations -Youth_Council -Policies -Funding -Working_groups -Y_P_S -Projects -Schools -Care_plan -Youth_Seminar	**Ops_enough:** -No -Yes -Mechanisms -Space_reserved -Thought_out

Theme	Definition	Code			
Challenges	Participant discusses barriers which inhibit seldom heard youths participation.	**In_practice:** -CYP_traning -Framework -Needs	**Tokenism:** -Yes -Tick_box -Guidelines -Rules	**Inclusive:** -Ignore -Unsure -Confidence_lack	**Challenges_gen:** -Access -Communicati

			37	-Capacity -Honesty	-Aim -Reception -Acceptance	on -Attitudes -Language -Age -Time -Policy -Promotion -Rights -Schools -Motivation -Focus -Awareness_lack -Confidence_lack -Understanding_lack -Funding -Bureaucracy -Disempowement

Theme	Definition	Code	
Solutions	Participant proposes a resolution or suggestion which promotes seldom heard youths participation.	**More_incl:** -Middle_class -Immigrant -Children_Care -Roma -Homeless -Addiction -Travellers	**Solution:** -Mandate -Communication -Approachable -Govt_policy -Youth_Ambassador -Commitment -Focus -Trauma_informed -Grassroots_local -Collaborate -Democracy

Appendix 2: Information form
INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH

"An investigation of youth participation of seldom heard youth in decision-making in the Republic of Ireland."
PAMAY502

➢ Why do I receive this information?
You are being invited to participate in this research as you are a professional in the field of youth participation. The research started on the 17th April 2023, and is intended to end by the 7th July 2023.

➢ Do I have to participate in this research?
Participation in the research is voluntary. However, your consent is needed. Therefore, please read this information carefully. Ask all the questions you might have, for example because you do not understand something. Only afterwards you decide if you want to participate. If you decide not to participate, you do not need to explain why, and there will be no negative consequences for you. You have this right at all times, including after you have consented to participate in the research.

➢ Why this research?
The aim of this research is to investigate the scope of seldom heard youths participation in decision-making in Ireland in order to:
● gain an understanding of the extent, levels and types of participation that seldom heard youth are involved in.
● identify the challenges facing seldom heard participation within the sphere.
● investigate opportunities and solutions that foster participation of seldom heard youth in the future.

➢ What do we ask of you during the research?
Firstly, you will be asked for your consent to participate. An interview will be conducted using video conferring with audio recording, and take approximately one hour. Zoom will be the video conferring tool used for this research. The interviews will investigate the extent of minority youth participation in the participants line of work. Challenges and issues, and opportunities and suggestions for future policy and practice will also be explored. The data will be thematically analyzed. No compensation will be provided.

➢ What are the consequences of participation?
This research should contribute to the knowledge within the sphere of youth participation in decision-making in Ireland. In the case of mental or physical discomfort, the participant has

the right to withdraw from the research project, though this should be unlikely as I will take the utmost care to be respectful and considerate during the research.

➢   How will we treat your data?

The data that is collected will be presented in my Msc thesis. The collected data will be transcribed and thematically analyzed by me. To which, the most relevant data will be presented in my Masters thesis. The personal identity of the participants will be confidential and not revealed in the thesis. The research data will be safely protected, stored and secured in correspondence with the university's guidelines. A pseudonym will be used to preserve anonymity of the participants and others who may be potentially affected by this research. Participants have the right to access, rectification, and erasure of their personal data. Participants also have the opportunity to receive a copy of their personal data, have erroneous personal data corrected, and have their personal data withdrawn.

➢   What else do you need to know?

You may always ask questions about the research: now, during the research, and after the end of the research. You can do so by speaking with one of the researchers present right now or by emailing [researchers email] or phoning [researchers phone number]. Do you have questions/concerns about your rights as a research participant or about the conduct of the research? You may also contact the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences of the University of Groningen: ec-bss@rug.nl.

Do you have questions or concerns regarding the handling of your personal data? You may also contact the University of Groningen Data Protection Officer: privacy@rug.nl.

As a research participant, you have the right to a copy of this research information.

Appendix 3: Consent form

INFORMED CONSENT

"An investigation of youth participation of seldom heard youth in decision-making in the Republic of Ireland."

PAMAY502

- I have read the information about the research. I have had enough opportunity to ask questions about it.

- I understand what the research is about, what is being asked of me, which consequences participation can have, how my data will be handled, and what my rights as a participant are.

- I understand that participation in the research is voluntary. I myself choose to participate. I can stop participating at any moment. If I stop, I do not need to explain why. Stopping will have no negative consequences for me.

- Below I indicate what I am consenting to.

Consent to participate in the research:

[ ] Yes, I consent to participate; this consent is valid until 07-07-2023

[ ] No, I do not consent to participate

Consent to make audio / video recordings during the research:

[ ] Yes, I consent to make audio / video recordings of me as a participant in the research.

[ ] No, I do not consent to make audio / video recordings of me.

Consent to processing my personal data:

[ ] Yes, I consent to the processing of my personal data as mentioned in the research information. I know that until 07-07-2023 I can ask to have my data withdrawn and erased. I can also ask for this if I decide to stop participating in the research.

[ ] No, I do not consent to the processing of my personal data.

Participant's full name:	Participant's signature:	Date:

You have the right to a copy of this consent form

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

- What is the focus like on youth participation in Ireland?
- Do you think that there is an appropriate focus on youth participation in Ireland?

- Do you think that seldom heard youth are adequately included in Irish decision-making? In what ways is seldom heard participation ensured?

- Are there adequate opportunities for involvement and access to participation in decision-making?

- What are the opportunities for youth participation in decision-making in Ireland at the moment that you are aware of? How are seldom heard youth involved in decision-making processes in Ireland?

- The 'Better Opportunities Brighter Futures' framework for youth participation aims to reach many goals for youth participation, but literature highlights that there are often problems with participation policies 'in practice', have you identified any issues of these goals/ aims/ strategies in practice?
- Literature often showcases the issues of tokenistic, and adult-centred forms of youth participation, meaning that participation is often limited, and symbolic rather than having a genuine impact, has this been prevalent within youth participation in general/ in seldom heard youth participation in particular.

- Do you think that Irish youth participation is inclusive? In what ways in particular has this been evident, or not evident?
- What are the challenges within the sphere facing seldom heard in particular?

- Is there a particular group of CYP which are often 'seldom heard'/ require more inclusion in the future?
- What are some solutions to these challenges? / Suggestions for future policy and practice.

References

Andersson, E. (2017a). Young People's Political Participation. *Young*, *26*(2), 179–

    195. https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308817729971

BOBF Advisory Council. (2018). *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Mid-Term*

    Review Available at:

        https://assets.gov.ie/26803/c9179d1adbde46c898993186149ea920.pdf

Boeije, H. (2002). A purposeful approach to the constant comparative method in the

    analysis of qualitative interviews. *Quality and Quantity : International*

    Journal of Methodology, *36*(4), 391–409. Available at:

    https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1020909529486

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (Fifth). Oxford University Press.

Cahill, H., & Dadvand, B. (2018). Re-conceptualising youth participation: A framework to

    inform action. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *95*, 243–253.

    https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.11.001

Central Statistics Office. (2017). *Database of Interactive Tables (EY029)*. Available   at:

        www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Database/eirestat/Summary%20Results%20Part%20

    1 /Summary%20Results%20Part%201_statbank.asp?SP=Summary%20Results%20P

    art%201&Planguage=0

Correia, N., Camilo, C., Aguiar, C., & Amaro, F. (2019). Children's right to participate in

    early childhood education settings: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services*

    Review, 100, 76–88. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.02.031

Davey, C., Shaw, C. and Burke, T. (2010) Children's Participation in Decision-making: A

    Children's views report. London: *Participation Works*

Department of Children and Youth Affairs. (2014). *Better Opportunities Better Futures.*

Available at:

https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Ireland_2014_Youth_Policy_Framework.pdf

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth. (2022). *Policy*

Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028 Blueprint. Available at:

https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/233252/a5fce678-ec09-43f0-b33b-

7ee7aa7777e3.pdf#page=null

Desai, S. C. & Reimers, S. (2019). *Comparing the use of open and closed questions for Web-*

based of the continued-influence effect. Behavior Research Methods. Doi:

10.3758/s13428-018-1066-z

El-Masri, M. M. (2017). *Non-probability sampling: The process of selecting research*

participants non-randomly from a target population. Canadian Nurse. Available at:

https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=c8h&AN=123060137&site=

eds-live

Gal, T. (2017). An ecological model of child and youth participation. *Children and Youth*

Services Review, *79*, 57–64. Available at:

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.05.029

Hart, R. (1992). Children's participation : from tokenism to citizenship. *RePEc: Research*

Papers in Economics. Available at: https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA56816220

Horgan, D., Forde, C., Parkes, A. and Martin, S. (2015) Children and young people's

experiences of participation in decision-making at home, in schools and in their

communities. Dublin: *Department of Children and Youth Affairs*. Available at:

http://hdl.handle.net/10468/6826

Horgan, D., & Kennan, D. (2021). Child and Youth Participation in Policy, Practice and

Research (1st ed.). *Routledge*. Available at: https://doi-org.proxy-

ub.rug.nl/10.4324/9781003099529

Kara, H. (2015). *Creative Research Methods in the Social Sciences: A Practical Guide.*

Policy Press.

Kelly, P. J. (2011). An Untimely Future for Youth Studies. *Youth Studies Australia*, *30*(3),

47–53. Available at: http://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30040337/kelly-anuntimely-

2011.pdf

Leahy, P., & Burgess, P. (2011). *Project Up2Youth; Youth, Actor of Social Change : Youth

Participation in the Republic of Ireland*. Youth Work Ireland. Retrieved April 4,

2023. Available at: https://www.youthworkireland.ie/wp-

content/uploads/2022/02/Youth_Participation_in_the_Republic_of_Ireland.pdf

Lundy, L. (2007). 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations

Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal*, *33*(6),

927–942. https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701657033

Lundy, L. (2018). In defence of tokenism? Implementing children's right to participate in

collective decision-making. *Childhood*, *25*(3), 340–354.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568218777292

Mager, U., & Nowak, P. (2012). Effects of student participation in decision making at school.

A systematic review and synthesis of empirical research. *Educational Research

Review*, *7*(1), 38–61. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2011.11.001

Mayring, P. (2022). *Qualitative content analysis : a step-by-step guide*. Sage.

Neuman, W. L. (1991). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*.

Available at: http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA50923374

O'Gorman, R. (2020). *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Annual Report 2020.* Department

of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Available at:

https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/213554/a6157aee-36e1-4bb5-9997-

bbd0d14e8efd.pdf#page=null

OHCHR. (1990). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Available at:

https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-

child

OHCHR. (n.d.-a). *Concept of a minority: mandate definition*. Available at:

https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-minority-issues/concept-minority-

mandate-

definition#:~:text=An%20ethnic%2C%20religious%20or%20linguistic,combination

%20of%20any%20of%20these.

Quinlan, C. (2011). Business Research Methods.

Roulston, K., deMarrais, K., & Lewis, J. T. (2003). Learning to Interview in the Social

Sciences. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *9*(4), 643–668. Available at:

https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403252736

Ruane, J. M. (2005). Essentials of research methods : a guide to social science research.

Polity. Available at: http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA68112724

Tarling, R. (2005). *Managing Social Research: A Practical Guide*. Available at:

http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/72862/1/18pdf.pdf

Tisdall, E. K. M. (2016). Conceptualising children and young people's participation:

examining vulnerability, social accountability and co-production. *The International

Journal of Human Rights*, *21*(1), 59–75. Available at:

https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2016.1248125

Walsh, A. (2017). *Make Minority a Priority: Insights from minority ethnic young people growing up in Ireland and recommendations for the youth work sector*. National Youth Council of Ireland. Retrieved April 6, 2023. Available at: https://www.youth.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/MakeMinorityAPriority_Complete_Research_Final.pdf