

Youth as Co-Producers: Exploring Youth Participation and Engagement Strategies in Local Climate Policy Processes in Johannesburg and Toronto

by

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Abstract

The need for meaningful youth participation in climate policy and decision-making spaces is increasingly recognized from local to global levels. Yet deeper understanding about models of engagement, design strategies, and the ways youth and supporting practitioners, officials, and researchers create knowledge(s), share knowledge(s), and use knowledge(s) produced is less needed. Existing youth participation research, frameworks, and typologies, tend to focus on higher level processes and do not always consider the precarity faced by youth (Swartz, 2021) or the universal assumptions of Northern theory that can erase knowledge and experiences from the periphery (Cooper, Swartz & Mahali, 2019). Developing appreciation for collective responsibility, greater co-production, and alternative meaning and knowledge creation and incorporation could present new possibilities for youth participation approaches in climate and sustainability related decision-making globally. Centring around two youth co-case studies: the Johannesburg Climate Action Plan (including the Johannesburg Youth Climate Action Plan and South African Youth Climate Action Plan) and TransformTO (including the Youth Climate Action Engagement Strategy), this thesis seeks to provide both an empirical and theoretical contribution to existing modes of youth participation to support strategies for more effective engagement and implementation.

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Acronyms

CAP – Climate Action Plan

CBO – Community Based Organization

CoJ – City of Johannesburg

COP – Conference of the Parties

CRC- Convention on the Rights of the Child

CSO – Civil Society Organization

JYCAP – Johannesburg Youth Climate Action Plan

NDCs – National Determined Contributions

NGO – Non-governmental Organization

SA YCAP – South African Youth Climate Action Plan

SAIIA – South African Institute of International Affairs

TCDSB – Toronto Catholic District School Board

TDSB – Toronto District School Board

TKC – Transdisciplinary Knowledge Co-production

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

YCAES – Youth Climate Action Engagement Strategy

Y-CAT – Youth Climate Action in Toronto

Youth@SAIIA – Youth Programmes at the South African Institute of International Affairs

YPAR - youth participatory action research

Preface

On a Sunday evening in late March 2020, I sat down to watch President Cyril Ramaphosa address the nation, in what South Africans later affectionately called “family meetings”. A strict lockdown was being announced as part of the South African government’s measures to combat the spread of COVID-19. Colleagues and I had just spent the day before with high school learners and youth participants in the rural part of Limpopo province for a Model Legislature negotiations and debate event. Little did we know that it would be almost two years before such events could take place in-person again. Like countless organizations, we found ourselves needing to adapt our programming from exclusively in-person to exclusively virtual, overnight. This process provided a space for a deconstruction of our work and a type of consideration in a way that wasn’t possible pre-pandemic. Many questions arose through this process. These questions were not new to me or indeed many of the practitioners I worked with, but the ability to step back and reflect in a deeper and more nuanced way was not always possible. I found myself searching for a new lexicon and better language to describe work being done to answer the whys and hows. The research below is an attempt by one practitioner to confront these frustrations and seek out new understanding.

Chapter 1

1 Introduction

The world's population lives in increasingly urban environments (UN-Habitat, 2022), and entry points for climate understanding and action for many citizens is not in the global arena, but rather at a local level in their communities and city halls (Gaventa, 2002; Gaventa, 2004). Many of the climate mitigation and adaptation responses, such as transport, infrastructure, water, electricity, and housing, not only fall to a significant degree under the responsibility of the municipal government but are also more directly linked to the day-to-day life of citizens. Cities provide an important space for policymakers, civil society organizations (CSOs), academia, businesses, youth, and the public to come together for action and response to climate change through various forms of engagements and consultations (Vogel et al., 2022). Municipalities have also become global policy actors (Sabine, 2019) and are playing a role in both the localization of the Paris Agreement and the implementation and revising of their country's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Over the last few years, cities around the world have been working on "Paris Agreement-compatible" climate actions plans (1.5°C Climate Action Plans - C40 Cities, 2023), and CSOs, academia, and youth groups, are increasingly taking a role in advocating and pushing city governments to create more ambitious climate agendas. Cities are continuously being framed as important players in supporting polycentric systems and approaches for greater collective action at multiple scales (Ostrom, 2010). While traditional views of scale are often framed as top-down from global or national levels and ending in the municipality, municipalities have the ability to go even further down into neighbourhoods, communities and schools to promote environmental justice and a more equitable, resilient and inclusive society. The scale is also not one directional, and when starting from the grassroots level it is also important to acknowledge that the municipality might serve as the highest level of engagement, not the lowest level, for youth, community-based organizations (CBOs), or local leaders.

Young people are important local actors and need to be seen for their crucial role in the collective learning and realization of climate and environmental justice. Environmental justice is intertwined with social justice and must be incorporated into local climate plans. It demands an appreciation that to truly address issues like climate change, environmental degradation, or

biodiversity loss, we will need to not only consider cross-cutting issues like poverty and inequality, but as Scholesberg states, we will need to confront the “underlying reasons for the injustice” in the first place (Schlosberg, 2013, p. 39). The city or municipality provides the most localized manifestation of environmental and climate action and can serve as an important vehicle for youth to share their lived experience and expertise (Checkoway et al., 2005).

When discussing youth and climate change, there is often a framing that situates young people as only being impacted in the *future* (Thew et al., 2020), while failing to recognize the current impacts experienced by youth and how these impacts may increasingly differ from older generations. The realities of record temperatures (World Meteorological Organization, 2023), increasing water scarcity (United Nations, 2023) and unprecedented wildfires (Carty, 2023), are just some of the aspects that are *already* impacting the schooling, play and recreational opportunities, job prospects, mental and physical health, and relationships of young people. Younger generations, especially in the Global South, are already experiencing intergenerational inequities of climate severity with more extreme weather and climate impacts as compared to their parents and grandparents (Thiery et al., 2021). Now, despite, or perhaps because of, the numerous increasing challenges faced personally, academically, and professionally by young people, we are seeing younger generations seeking out opportunities to speak out and engage through youth participation platforms. Youth participation in the context of this study will utilize a definition by the UNICEF Youth Advocacy Guide (2022) as:

How young people can get involved in processes, institutions and decisions that affect their lives. Since children and youth make up the majority of the global population, we believe these groups should participate in all areas related to social, political, and economic life. (p.7)

The need for meaningful youth participation in climate policy and decision-making spaces is increasingly being recognized from local to global levels, but deeper understanding about models of engagement, the design strategies, and the ways youth and supporting practitioners, officials, and researchers create knowledge(s), share knowledge(s), and use knowledge(s) produced is needed. Existing youth participation research, frameworks, and typologies tend to focus on higher level processes and do not always consider the value and greater aim of the participation (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018). Additionally, there is a lack of consideration for the precarity faced by youth (Swartz, 2021), the politics of representation of young people (Bessant, 2020), or the potential limitations of Northern theory, that assumes universality while potentially erasing knowledge and experiences from the periphery (Cooper et al., 2019). Currently there is a gap: academics and experts often work in a vacuum with limited understanding of how the

knowledge they are producing is being received, used, and can be enhanced. Decision-makers also are often distanced from knowledge production processes and lack awareness or tools for enhancing their public participation and policy work through knowledge brokering (Rycroft-Smith, 2022) and more critically co-designing and co-framing climate and sustainability related processes with youth. In addition, youth are not often involved in actual project design, execution, and implementation to ensure the objectives and goals identified in policy are achieved (Chambers et al., 2021; Vogel et al., 2022).

Centring around two case studies, youth participation work related to the City of Johannesburg's Climate Action Plan (City of Johannesburg, 2021), and youth participation work related to the City of Toronto's TransformTO Net Zero climate strategy (City of Toronto, 2022), this study will provide both an empirical and theoretical contribution to existing youth participation strategies to explore meaningful approaches and possibilities for more effective engagement design and implementation. For the Johannesburg case study, this research will specifically examine the Johannesburg Youth Climate Action Plan (JYCAP) and South African Youth Climate Action Plan (SA YCAP) linked to the Johannesburg Climate Action Plan (CAP). For the Toronto case study, this research will focus on the Youth Climate Action Engagement Strategy (YCAES) process linked to the TransformTO Net Zero Strategy. Both case studies involve academic institutions, community partners, schools, local organizations, individual youth leaders, and the municipality to carry-out the youth policy related work. While aspects of global, regional, national, and provincial examples will be considered, the primary focus area will be at the municipal city level.

Informed by "Eco-Collective Responsibility Theory", an African informed lens on environmental justice put forward by Okyere-Manu, Morgan, and Ssebunya (2019) and what Takayama et al. (2016) describe as "doing Southern Theory", this thesis will utilize a youth participation framework and co-production tools to explore the case studies. Through examining each case study, this research aims to delve deeper into more practical process issues to address existing barriers to effective engagement that work towards addressing the existing lack of application on the ground with both a Global South and Global North context.

1.1 Central Research Question

It is with this framing that the central research question of this study is: *'What strategies are most effective for developing more meaningful youth participation approaches in municipal climate decision-making and policy processes?'*

Chapter 2

2 Literature Review

One hot Saturday morning in late February 2023, I sat in an auditorium at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg. High school learners, university students, and out-of-school youth between the ages of 13-25 years of age filled the hall for a workshop run by the organization I was working for. Joining us were various speakers representing academia, local and national government, business, and other CSOs. The air was filled with electric excitement as hands shot up in the air for questions and comments from the audience. The focus of the day's training was on research, negotiations, and youth participation in policy and decision-making activities. The main themes being addressed were cross-cutting issues of sustainability, climate change, and gender, and the audience had much to say.

It was almost 10am and I made eye contact with one of my colleagues as we were preparing for loadshedding (scheduled power cuts) to start any minute. She gave me a big thumbs up to indicate tea had been set out and the water had been heated. I looked down at my phone to confirm the loadshedding time on the power company's app, and braced myself for the inevitable cut and the wait for the university's generator to kick in. The lights went off at 10:01, but no one shifted in their seats. Loadshedding had been a reality for most, if not all, of these young people's lives, and everyone knew that you just had to learn to make a plan, to adapt. The generator would come on or it wouldn't, and the power would eventually be restored, or it wouldn't. Such was life with daily precarities.

2.1 Environmental Justice and Urban Precarity

It is important to first contextualize current climate action at a local level in a greater movement seeking to address the harm caused by unjust governance of natural resources, the disposal of hazardous waste, and other uses of land that disproportionately and negatively impact racialized and often marginalized communities (Chemhuru, 2022; Lehtinen, 2009 and Schlosberg, 2013). While the environmental justice movement emerged formally in the 1980s in North America (Lehtinen, 2009), the practice of unjust treatment of people and their environment has deep historical roots in slavery, colonialism, and racist practices (Pulido and De Lara, 2018) that can be felt in cities from Canada to the USA to Brazil to South Africa today. Recent work by

Hecht (2023) might describe this as part of the *technopolitics* that has “remained embedded in infrastructures and environments, acquiring new life, causing new harms, and sparking new modes of resistance and refusal” (p.5). It is against this backdrop of technopolitics that Hecht (2023) further describes the emergence of a *residual governance* that is defined as a:

deadly trifecta composed of

- 1 The governance of waste and discards
- 2 Minimalist governance that uses simplification, ignorance, and delay as core tactics
- 3 Governance that treats people and places as waste and wastelands. (p.6)

It is through this residual governance that we see a perpetuation of delays and seeming acceptance that the well-being of certain communities continues to be more important than others.

A continuing challenge with understanding the greater role of municipalities in climate action is that much of the existing research on municipal climate roles tends to focus on cities in the Global North (Du Plessis, Steyn, and Rantlo, 2019), and does not always highlight the heterogeneity of cities, and how the experiences of Northern cities and Southern cities can vary dramatically, especially in policy creation processes, resources, and implementation (Cunliffe et al., 2019). Many scholars also highlight the need to acknowledge precarity or an “urban precarity” and suggest that for “cities of late capitalism, precarity emerges as a multifaceted condition, encapsulating not only legal and economic deprivation but also moral, political, and salutary uncertainty” (Campbell and Laheij, 2021, p.3).

Indeed, environmental justice cannot be truly understood without understanding urban precarity, environmental racism, and an expanding view of environment that increasingly moves beyond an idea of environment being more than a type of *other* space outside of the city or “wilderness” (Schlosberg, 2013) to the *immediate* space of “where we live, work, and play” (Novotny, 2000, pg. 35). In this way environmental justice continues to push for evolution in thinking that moves beyond simply highlighting the wrongs or harm caused in one area over another but prompts a deeper reflection and analysis of why we deem one part of a city, one community, or one group as having less or more value.

2.2 Utu, Ubuntu and Eco-Collective Responsibility Theory

African scholarship on environmental justice provides important insights and a challenge to Northern ontologies (Chemhuru, 2022). An environmental justice lens embedded in a type of Ubuntu/Utu citizenship presents another way and potential framing (Muhonja, 2020). Utu and Ubuntu challenge a more individualistic understanding of citizenship and reframes it as inherently communal (Muhonja, 2020). As Desmond Tutu described in his framing of Ubuntu humans “are really made for this delicate network of interdependence. So that, the completely self-sufficient person is in fact subhuman. I need you in order for me to be me. I need you to be you to the fullest. We are made for complementarity” (Tutu, as cited in the Templeton Prize, 2013, 0.22). An Ubuntu/Utu environmental justice builds on a “I am because we are” understanding and challenges us to create a new model that activists and leading figures like Wangari Mathai and Tutu utilized in both local and global context (Muhonja, 2020).

It is perhaps at this juncture of facing history, acknowledging the present, and understanding the causes of injustices that we are further forced to reflect on deeper philosophical framing of what it means to be human and the relationship that humans have to and with other humans and the non-human world. It is here that Okyere-Manu, Morgan, Ssebunya, (2019) bring together the African communitarian framing and Ubuntu understanding to put forward an “eco-collective responsibility theory” as an environmental justice model. The model is characterized by promoting the common good through an underlying mutually understood dependence, acknowledgment of traumas and disconnection caused by colonial and capitalistic structures, and a deeper appreciation for our need for connection and community to address environmental challenges (Okyere-Manu, Morgan, Ssebunya, 2019). While Eco-Collective Responsibility is rooted in the African experience, it speaks to a broader shift needed for sustainability action, from an individual behaviour focus to greater collective action and social practice (Burch et al., 2014). Okyere-Manu, Morgan, Ssebunya (2019) describe eco-collective responsibility as follows:

It is a clarion call for communities to stand in solidarity with one another and with nature, thereby acknowledging our interconnectivity with each other and with nature. Standing in solidarity is then dependent on individual’s willingness to act as they would wish others to act. It involves the community making a collective decision to conserve the environment as well as the commitment to abide by such decisions. Solidarity involves suffering environmental burdens together and sharing environmental benefits together. Solidarity then puts special obligations between members of a community to support each other and ensure the wellbeing of each other. (p.186)

Eco-collective responsibility provides an important foundation for thinking around new action to combat residual governance and provides alternative possibilities for framing co-production and more meaningful youth participation through a shared understanding of mutual dependence.

2.3 Framing Youth and Youth Participation

It is important to note that there is no consistency in the definition of youth. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines youth as people aged 15-24 but acknowledges that the term is fluid (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2014). In South Africa, as with the Africa Union, youth and young people refer to every person between the ages of 15-35 (African Union, 2006). For Canada, the definition is 15-29 (Government of Canada, 2021). These age definitions of youth can also shift within organizations and at different levels of government. For example, the TransformTO Net Zero Strategy is focused on 'youth' between the ages of 10-25 (City of Toronto, n.d.) for the Youth Climate Action Engagement Strategy that forms part of the Toronto case study.

Of the world's 1.8 billion young people (defined as 10–24-year-olds), 90% live in the Global South (United Nations Population Fund, n.d.). While many parts of the Global North are seeing a demographic trend towards higher aging populations with less children being born (United Nations, n.d.), in Africa the population is young and is expected to keep growing (United Nations Children's Fund, n.d.). Countries like South Africa are not experiencing the same demographic trends as other parts of the continent, but the population is still predominantly children and youth (South African Government, n.d.). Yet, despite the global demographics, the way children and youth are seen is still greatly dominated by Northern perspectives or the "minority world" (Hart, 2008). The dominance of Global North ontologies influences our perception and representation of children and youth and there is a need as Cooper, Swartz, and Mahali (2019) describe to "disentangle, decentre and democratize" studies around youth and our perceptions of young people's lives and lived experiences emanating from different parts of the world. Cooper et al. further elaborate on the potential difference in youth realities and explain that "many more Southern youth generally follow trajectories that diverge from what is considered to be a 'normal' transition to adulthood in industrialized nations in late modernity" (Cooper et al., 2021, p. 47).

Much like the precarity that might face a community or city, Southern theory scholars highlight the need to acknowledge precarity that face Southern youth and a type of emerging precarity that is increasingly becoming present for Northern youth (Cooper et al., 2019; Swartz, 2021).

Structural precarity, including lack of quality universal education, unequal access to health services, high levels of youth unemployment and even basic access to reliable and safe water and electricity are faced daily by youth in the Global South, and, while not experienced to the same degree, are emerging in the Global North (Swartz, 2021) against the backdrop of the climate crisis. It is important to also emphasize that “Southern” experiences should not be strictly defined by country borders or geographic location as there are areas of wealth and poverty everywhere (Cooper et al, 2021).

As will be later described in the methodology section, this study specifically focuses on young people that are between 13-30. The age group selected reflects a younger group still in middle and high school (Toronto case study), and an older group that is studying at a tertiary level, volunteering, seeking employment and/or starting a full-time professional life (Johannesburg case study). A more nuanced view of youth, one that better appreciates context, and different stages of life (Batan et al., 2021) must be incorporated into program design and participation processes. While age can be an important consideration for research and program design, it must be acknowledged that age alone cannot fully encapsulate a young person’s life (Swartz, 2021).

2.4 Emergence of Child and Youth Participation

Calls for public participation, community engagement, and youth action have a long historical legacy (Arnstein, 1969; Terry, 2023), but the articulated desire on the part of adults, especially those with decision-making power, to involve, empower, and increase the voice of children and youth in areas that affect them emerges in a more significant way in the latter part of the 20th century (Bessant, 2004). Child and youth participation was further mainstreamed through the creation of global agreements like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Lundy, 2007; Hart, 2008; Farthing, 2012). Article 12 of CRC put forward the principle that children’s views should be heard on matters that affect them and their lives (United Nations, 1990) and states:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (p. 5)

Article 12 was not without controversy and is one of the primary reasons the United States never ratified the CRC, particularly the perception that the child was framed as a “full human” (Freeman, 1996) with rights, capabilities, and ‘voice’ (Lundy, 2007) that could potentially undermine adult authority (Kilbourne, 1998). However, despite this framing, all countries, except for the United States and Somalia, ratified the Convention.

The release of the CRC provided a new impetus for increasing child and youth participation (Hart, 1992, 2008). Less considered is what the release of the CRC highlighted about the ways in which children and youth and their roles in society are viewed. Children and youth in areas like North America, or what Hart refers to as the “minority world”, are increasingly relegated to adult designated spaces and programs that remove them from greater participation with adults and their community (Hart, 2008). Central spaces for learning with adults, apprenticeships, and informal participatory community activities that might be commonplace and are still integral in other parts of the world, have shifted or been eliminated in many parts of the Global North (Batan et al., 2020). This can also be seen in how youth view themselves as part or separated from community and the society in which they live. In their work about youth and civic engagement in Brazil and the United States, Rizzini, de los Angeles Torres, & del Río Lúgo (2009) highlights how historical context and daily life influence groups from Rio and Chicago. While the Rio youth spoke more about broader communal or societal focus for their work, a legacy the authors note from collective action movements in Brazil, the Chicago group focused more on their own identity group, as identity politics in the USA might be more present (Rizzini, de los Angeles Torres, & del Río Lúgo, 2009). However increasing separation of young people from active roles or even presence in the broader community is not unique to the West, and it is perhaps against this greater global backdrop that child and youth participation might continue to appear “new” even over thirty years later (Hart, 1992, 2008).

While focusing on children, the CRC has continued to influence the framing and services for young people in the participation and advocacy spaces. This can be demonstrated by entities like the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) that has expanded their advocacy work and now includes programming not just for children, 18 and under, but also for young people into their 20s (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2022). Global groups like YOUNGO (the official Youth Constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) state on their website that they represent “all children and youth up to the age of 35” (YOUNGO, n.d.). This broadening of youth is important when presented in advocacy and policy spaces and should

also be understood in an evolving politics of representation of young people and their work (Bessant, 2021). The picture of youth as potential threats to be mitigated or indifferent actors to be engaged (Nkrumah, 2021) has increasingly given way to new images and the idea of “youth advocates”, “youth entrepreneurs” and “youth champions” (Bessant, 2021). These new framings are not necessarily inherently positive or negative but should be interrogated during program design and participation processes with young people through a type of constructive and deeper reflexivity (Bessant, 2021).

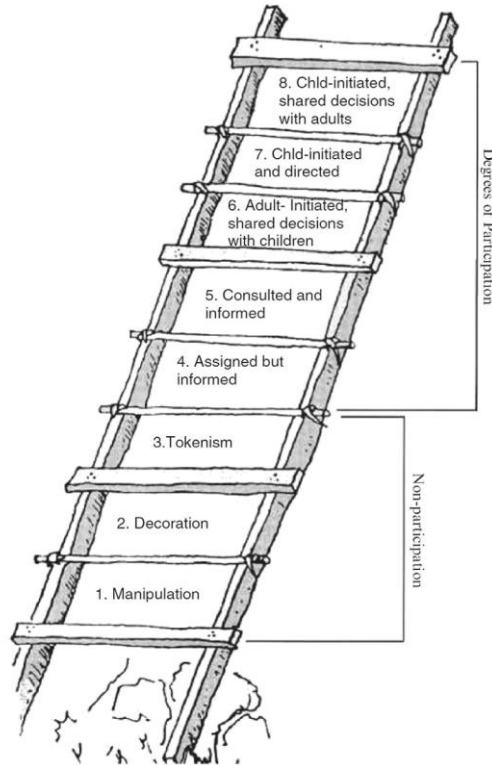
2.5 Exploring Youth Participation and Research Frameworks

While not exhaustive, examples provided below demonstrate the types of current frameworks, typologies, and ontologies prevalent and emerging in youth participation literature. Those presented were selected based on widespread presence (Hart, 1992), evolution of existing models (Wong, Zimmerman, and Park, 2010, and Cahill and Dadvand, 2018), and thematic relevance (O’Brien, Selboe, and Hayward, 2018, and Terry, 2023).

Hart’s Ladder of Children’s Participation, or simply Hart’s Ladder, first shared in 1992 (Hart, 1992) and adapted from Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969), has become ubiquitous in child and youth engagement globally. The original ladder came with the release of the CRC and the ensuing difficulty that many had (and arguably still have) in realizing this document and its principles of meaningful participation with young people (Hart, 2008). The original ladder shows a linear like progression from manipulation, decoration and tokensim on the bottom, to greater degree of participation by youth with youth-led activities on the highest level (Hart, 1992) (Fig. 1). While there are many critiques of Hart’s Ladder, it is important to note that Hart’s own views and explanation of the model developed over time. While some still use the ladder that places child/youth led initiatives at the top rung, the final rung can really be thought of less as a “final destination”, and more a reminder that we must emphasize the need to consider what children think both of themselves and of adults (Hart, 2008). In his later work, Hart called for a retirement of the ladder to welcome a new season of much needed models and approaches (Hart, 2008).

Figure 1

Ladder of Participation



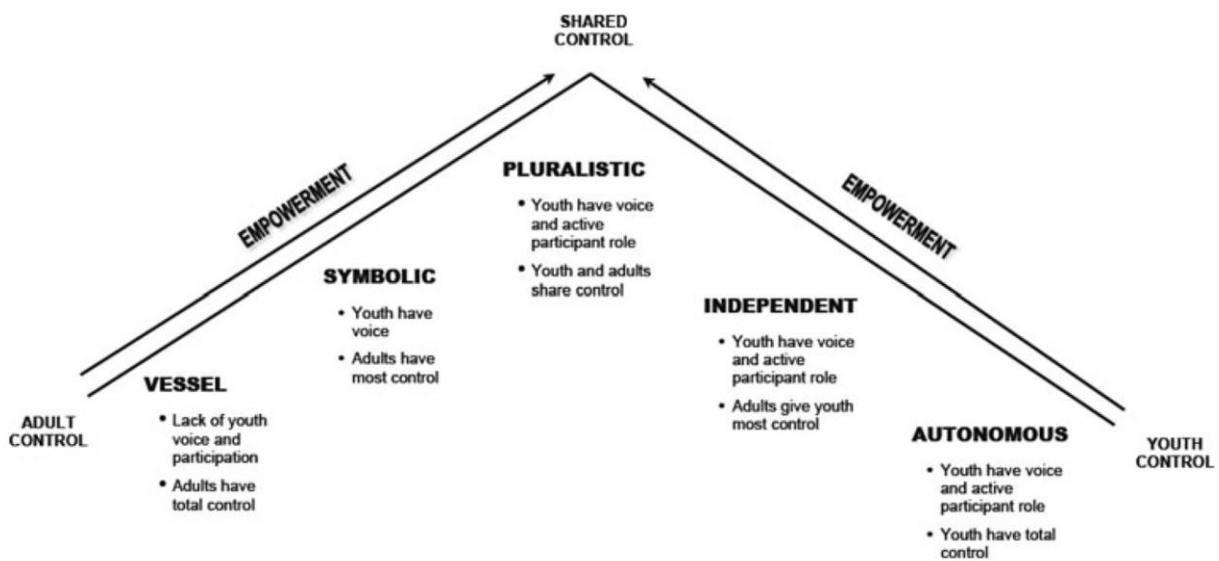
Note. Hart's Ladder of Participation. From Hart, R. A. (1992). Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship. *Papers Inness*, 92(6).

Wong, Zimmerman, and Park (2010) put forward the Typology of Youth Participation and Empowerment (TYPE) Pyramid to further build on older models that were often more linear (e.g. Hart's Ladder) or that make underlying assumptions that youth-driven initiatives are always ideal. As part of the TYPE Pyramid, they highlight five types of youth engagement representing different levels of youth-adult involvement: (1) vessel, (2) symbolic, (3) pluralistic, (4) independent, and (5) autonomous. Each participation type is then represented on the pyramid with an arrow that leads to "shared control" (Wong et. al, 2010, pg. 104) (Fig. 2). The Pyramid builds on prior youth participation framings and addresses some of the previous critiques of models like Hart's Ladder by providing space for youth and adult involvement and the possibility for Youth-Adult Partnerships (Y-APs) (Wong et al. 2010). However, the fluidity of actors and possibility of changing roles is not accounted for in the pyramid. Additionally, the issue of control

is not interrogated in a deeper way that considers not just the adult to youth or youth to adult dynamic, but also the dynamic intra adults (e.g. practitioner to policymaker) and intra youth (e.g. youth participant to youth participant). This is particularly important in cities like Johannesburg and Toronto where youth and their perception and experience of control, voice, and power are different.

Figure 2

Typology of Youth Participation and Empowerment



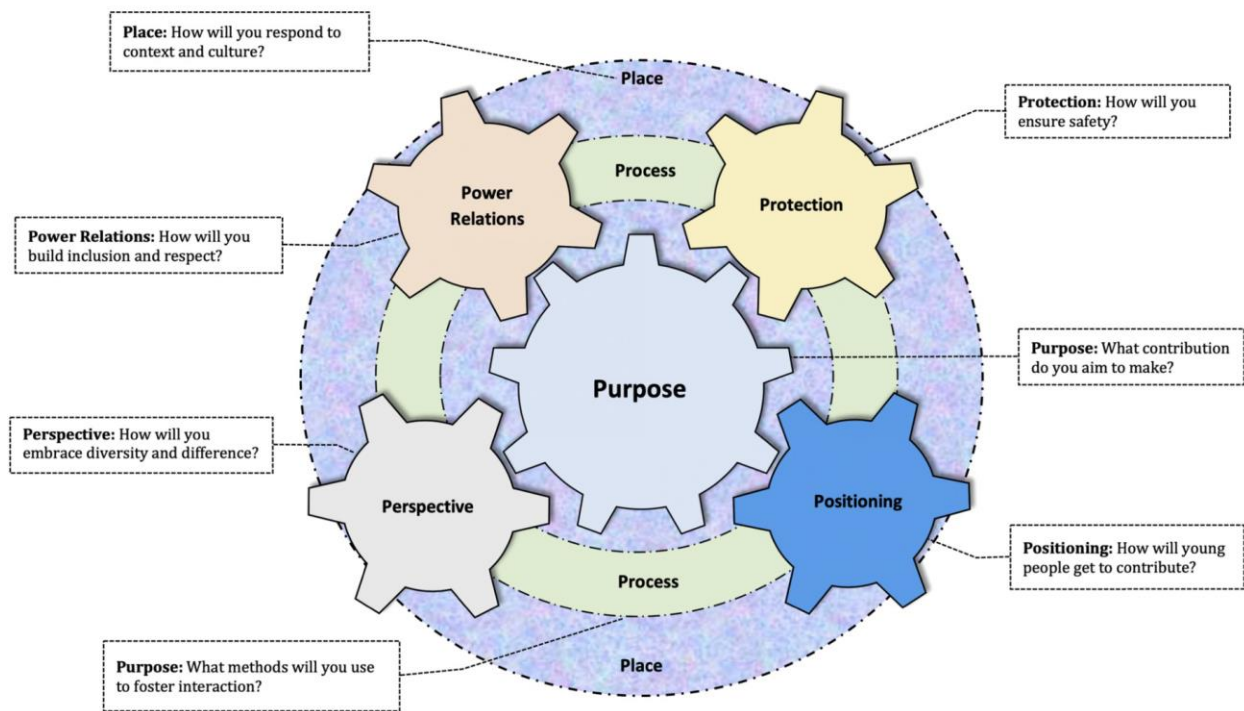
Note. The TYPE Pyramid. From Wong, N. T., Zimmerman, M. A., & Parker, E. A. (2010). A typology of youth participation and empowerment for child and adolescent health promotion. *American journal of community psychology*, 46, 100-114.

Cahill and Dadvand (2018) attempt to address some of the shortcomings of previous youth participation models and a lack of theoretically informed approaches with the P7 Model: A thinking tool for visioning, planning, enacting, and evaluating youth participation (Cahill and Dadvand, 2018, p. 248) (Fig. 3). The P7 tool presents an important departure from other models that continue the Hart-like framing of youth participation as a type of journey from adult-led to a liminal stage of shared control or shared decision making (Hart, 1992; Wong et al., 2010), to youth-led participation. The underlying assumption of other frameworks is that youth-led initiatives are “inherently better” (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018), but the reality on the ground can be more complex. The P7 framework is described as a “thinking-with-theory” tool that is comprised

of an “assemblage” of seven inter-acting parts or “domains”, with each part meant to provoke critical engagement and thinking (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018, p. 247). Beyond the model shown below, the P7 framework further provides “stimulating questions” for each of the domain areas (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018). As will be further described, this thesis will apply these questions to the data that emerged from the two case studies.

Figure 3

The P7 Model: A thinking tool for visioning, planning, enacting and evaluating youth participation



Note. The P7 Thinking Tool. From Cahill, H., & Dadvand, B. (2018). Re-conceptualising youth participation: A framework to inform action. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 95, 243-253. Campbell, B., & Laheij, C. (2021). Introduction: Urban Precarity. *City & Society*, 33(2), 283–302.

2.6 Youth Climate Action Frameworks and Typologies

Moving from models and frameworks, O'Brien, Selboe, and Hayward (2018) provide an important categorization typology on youth activism in the climate space. While describing a diversity of different approaches to climate activism, they have contextualized their work in an this current period of dissent (O'Brien et al., 2018). Youth actions are viewed as forms of dissent, namely: dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous. Dutiful dissent is framed as dissent that involves young people working within existing power structures or new institutions. Disruptive dissent would be activities that might challenge or strive for change while still operating in existing power structures. Dangerous dissent would be those activities and actions that actualize alternatives to the current status quo and do not recognize current institutions and structures. While this presents an important framework for examining youth climate actions beyond a more homogenized image of youth engagement that is often framed solely around youth protest actions, it does not consider the fluidity of youth groups and the ability of young people and youth work to flow between the streets to the decision-making table. The typology is also based on examples from high emitting societies in the Global North, as shown in work done in Johannesburg (Vogel et al., 2022). When asked, youth, especially Southern youth, might categorize themselves across areas and even argue for a different presentation of power and structure of systems and spaces.

Speaking Youth to Power: Influencing Climate Policy at the United Nations (Terry, 2023) serves as a recent addition to the global climate change related literature on youth participation. Terry's work touches on the Johannesburg case study, and focuses on more on the South African Youth Climate Action Plan. He presents "approaches" to youth participation: a Groundswell Approach and a Direct Approach (Terry, 2023). He describes a deep history of movements that have utilized a Groundswell Approach up to the hippie movement that paved a way as a model for future protests, especially in North America and stemming from university campuses in the 1970s and 1980s (Terry, 2023). Terry further highlights youth authorship in policy as a growing demonstration of a Direct Approach and one that could serve as an important addition to creating more meaningful and sustained youth engagement (Terry, 2023). However, as with the frameworks discussed above, there is a lack of deeper acknowledgment of youth precarity, the politics of youth representation, knowledge brokering and how youth see and engage power structures like the United Nations from different contexts.

2.7 Youth, Co-Production and Southern Theory

Decision-makers continually express a willingness for greater youth involvement, but they might lack the capacity or ability to translate this openness into practical actionable steps. Åström (2020) argues that while public officials will often speak about the importance of public engagement, the reality is more complicated. Public officials are aware of embedded risks to getting negative feedback and might not always trust citizens. This is especially true for youth in the climate policy and advocacy space as feelings of anger and resentment over lack of more ambitious action is echoed from the streets to the decision-making table. Added to this is a perception of youth that vacillates between “young leaders” or “change agents” in one context, to “unruly” or “problematic” in another (Bessant, 2021, p.520).

This status quo approach to youth engagement and participation is further upheld by a prevalent paradigm of a type of adultism (Teixeira et al., 2021) that sees youth as actors needing “voice” rather than as potential collaborators who already have a voice and who can be seen as co-producers of knowledge to address real world issues. Youth participation literature rarely speaks specifically to co-production, and while co-production literature might acknowledge youth as potential “non-academic actors,” application and possibilities for co-production as a form of youth participation is lacking. Vogel et al. (2022) provides a unique inclusion of knowledge co-production within youth participation in a Southern context that speaks to the case study research in Johannesburg. The research was conducted and co-authored with a group that included two academics, two youth leaders, a teacher, and a youth engagement practitioner. The configuration and context present a potentially interesting contribution to possibilities for co-production.

Knowledge co-production modes are ever-expanding with various approaches and concepts for exploring and approaching knowledge-policy initiatives (Bandola-Gill, Arthur, and Leng, 2023). Transdisciplinary knowledge co-production (TKC) utilizes a framing of partnerships of both academic and non-academic actors to address societal problems (Robinson, 2024 and Polk, 2015). Robinson describes the use of TKC in engaging non-academic knowledge and how it “requires...different ways of conceiving and enacting the relationship between the development and the use of knowledge” (Robinson, 2024, p.3). TKC provides a useful framing for considering elements of co-production with youth in the Johannesburg and Toronto case studies where academic and non-academic partners (youth, CSOs, and the municipality) are working together. Robinson further describes a shift from more “extractive” modes to more “reciprocal” approaches to research and presents a table with four orientations (Robinson, 2024, p.3).

Figure 4

Extractive and reciprocal forms of research

More extractive	More reciprocal
World as source of data	World as partner
Primary audience is academic	Multiple non-academic audiences
Primary products are academic	Multiple non-academic outputs
Researcher-driven research questions and methods	Co-design of research

Note. From Robinson, J. (2024). Deep interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinary knowledge co-production. In *Elgar Encyclopedia of Interdisciplinarity and Transdisciplinarity* (pp. 152-156). Edward Elgar Publishing.

While Robinson's table is arguably targeted at an academic audience, this table can also resonate with youth and practitioners as they reflect on their own experience of extractive or tokenistic approaches when working with researchers and policymakers. Shifting youth from sources of data to youth as partners with the appreciated capabilities for co-designing and creating multiple outputs for more audiences is a central focus of the case studies to be explored. Youth-Adult Partnerships that are based on "mutuality of concerns and benefits" and that ultimately work towards shared ownership, co-learning, co-design, and youth being directly involved in shaping policies and practices (Cox et al., 2019, p.5) can potentially be incorporated into TKC work.

What TKC might not always address is the situatedness of Northern based academics and researchers and the inherent limitations this can present when wanting to see "world as partner" (Robinson, 2024, p.3). The incorporation of a Southern Theories lens might expand existing knowledge production and structures of participation to a more global or macro level. It challenges us to acknowledge the role of the metropole, or centres of knowledge production that have dominated the world through colonisation and globalization (Roberts, 2021). This research also acknowledges the metropole not strictly as a physical location, but also as an idea (Roberts, 2021). Southern theory calls for alternative meaning and knowledge production outside of the metropole (Rosa, 2014) and critiques a framing of the West as being a continued source of theories while the rest of the world serves as the source of data (Takayama et al., 2016). Exploring what Southern Theory looks like in practice, Takayama et al. (2016) put forward four points for consideration as part of "doing Southern Theory".

Figure 5

Doing Southern Theory

Doing Southern Theory

So what does ‘doing Southern Theory’ actually mean in practical terms? We propose that it entails any, or all, of the following:

1. Identifying and contesting the processes and mechanisms of academic knowledge production that sustain the uneven knowledge producing relationship both within and across nation-states,
2. Bearing witness to the consequences of the epistemic indifference of the global North,
3. Serving as a ‘curator’ or a ‘translator’ of neglected intellectual work produced in/of the South so that those discredited/disenfranchised knowledges are re-acknowledged and resuscitated; and
4. Mobilizing Southern experiences and knowledges as legitimate intellectual resources to illuminate the provinciality and parochiality of Northern knowledge.

Note. Doing Southern Theory as referred to in the text from Takayama, K., Heimans, S., Amazan, R., & Maniam, V. (2016). *Doing southern theory: Towards alternative knowledges and knowledge practices in/for education.*

Doing Southern theory, like TKC, questions who the holders of knowledge are and what knowledge is for, but additionally provides space to consider how inequality, colonialism and global power structures continue to impact the creation and ultimate validation of knowledge (Nyamnjoh and Morrell, 2021). A TKC approach to youth participation, with a Southern Theories lens, has the potential for new meaning making, drawing in from the periphery, and based on mutual dependence to present new possibilities for approaches to research, consultation, and structures of engagement to address climate and sustainability challenges.

2.8 Building on the Central Question Based on the Literature Review

As with the term 'youth', there is no universal definition for 'effective' or 'meaningful' when exploring youth participation approaches and strategies. However, based on the literature review there are concepts and ideas that can serve as key elements to be explored. Building on the central research question the following primary research questions have been developed to guide the thesis work.

Central Research question

What strategies are most effective for developing more meaningful youth participation approaches in municipal climate decision-making and policy processes?

Primary Research questions

1. How can shared mutual dependence and collective responsibility foster more meaningful youth participation in climate decision making and policy processes?
2. How can youth participation support alternative meaning and knowledge production outside of the metropole? How can youth participation support new meaning making that draws in knowledges, experiences, and understanding from the periphery?
3. How can a TKC approach lead to meaningful youth participation in municipal climate decision-making and policy processes?

Chapter 3

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

To answer the research questions, this study will focus on the use of two case studies that involve youth, local organizations led by and working with youth, academic institutions, and local municipal governments. The research will focus on a cohort that includes practitioners, city staff, representatives of donor institutions, academic researchers, and young people between the ages of 13-30. The reason for this age cohort is largely pragmatic. Youth participants in Johannesburg include 19–30-year-olds who are active youth leaders that started while in high school, and former youth leaders who are now working professionals. Youth participants in Toronto were middle and high school participants, and were between the ages of 13-18. Young people are not usually participants or actors in only one club, one organization, or one movement, and, as a result, the notion of bounding the case study (Yin, 2009) is less useful for this research.

Additionally important to note is that while the cities of Johannesburg and Toronto provide important context, it is not the city that serves as the unit of analysis for each case study. Instead, the focus for each case study is rather on exploring a “phenomenon of interest” or central focus (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p.2). As Bartlett & Vavrus describe, “the term phenomenon directs us, first, toward something like a policy or a program and then, as it comes into focus, it leads us to ask what is unexpected about it, and why and to whom does it matter” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 2). The focus or phenomenon of interest for the case studies is youth participation in municipal climate policy processes.

The research will be done through a comparative case study approach (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) which emphasizes tracing the phenomenon of interest across groups and locations. This approach is more useful in local climate policy processes as it breaks from pre-determined units or levels of analysis such as a school, organization, or city government. Further informing the methodology is ethnographic research and a journey that began as a type of “para-ethnographer” or “practitioner theorists” (Islam, 2015, p.234) where I thought alongside academic researchers (Vogel et al., 2022). As I am specifically working with young people, this research also utilizes a form of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) (Teixeira et al.,

2021) that acknowledges adultism, and centres youth, their knowledge and their experiences, while trying to appreciate both current and historical legacy of capitalism, colonialism, and structural racism that exists.

3.2 Case Studies

The first case study is rooted in work I have done as the previous Head of Youth Programmes at the South African Institute of International Affairs (Youth@SAIIA) working with the Global Change Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand, and the City of Johannesburg. The Johannesburg case study will specifically focus on the Johannesburg Youth Climate Action Plan (JYCAP) linked to the Johannesburg Climate Action Plan (CAP), and the subsequent creation of the South African Youth Climate Action Plan (SA YCAP). The research will build on previous work by Vogel et al (2022) by providing a new lens through a South-North comparison, and reflections with participants and practitioners that incorporates later developments and implications for youth participation. The case study involves two separate focus group discussions with a total of 11 youth participants and alumni (18-30) of the Johannesburg CAP and SA YCAP process. It should be noted that not all participants are currently based in Johannesburg but have in some way been involved in the CAP and SA YCAP processes. The Johannesburg case study additionally involves interviews with two CSO practitioners, one academic, and one city official. All interviews were conducted live over a virtual platform, and the city official provided their responses over email. Access to the Johannesburg participants was done through my existing relationships and previous work in South Africa. Participants were selected based on their expressed interest, and demonstrated previous and current participation in the CAP and SA YCAP process, and/or current role in youth participation or public participation programming.

The second case study focuses on the creation of the Youth Climate Action Engagement Strategy (YCAES) that forms part of TransformTO Net Zero Strategy. The City of Toronto has numerous examples of youth engagement activities and strategies (City of Toronto, 2017), but I am specifically interested in youth participating in the climate policy process. TransformTO already existed, but I noted the mention of the YCAES as part of the larger plan. Prior to arriving in Toronto, I saw that the year-long process to create the YCAES was just beginning and was being led by researchers at the University of Toronto through a project called Youth Climate Action in Toronto or Y-CAT. I reached out to the Y-CAT team leading the process and learned about the community engaged research and various pilot activities taking place to connect to youth between the ages of 10-25 to study effective climate engagement.

I joined the team as a Research Assistant and was encouraged to explore possibilities for an additional pilot activity. After consultation with Y-CAT researchers, and the Eco-Schools team at the Toronto School Board District (TDSB), a concept note was developed to host a two-part structured dialogue or workshop process with 13–18 year-old students. An application form was developed and open to any student between these ages residing or studying in Toronto and 45 applications were received from students representing 25 schools across the city. Venue and catering constraints, along with need to ensure group size dynamics, meant that 25 students were selected (one per school) and an additional waitlist was created. Where multiple applications were received from the same school, further consideration for selection was done on the basis of participant responses to application questions, mainly why they wanted to be part of the Leadership Group, and also for getting greater representation around age and gender. Due to timing and other scheduling conflicts, 17 were able to join the first in-person session at City Hall. Additional participants from the waitlist were invited to allow for as much participation as possible, even those coming from the same school. Two additional participants later joined the informal virtual discussions, and nine participants joined the last in-person session, with others providing additional inputs on a Google form as well as submitting project profiles and stories on key initiatives they were involved with or studied. This research will focus on what has since become the Leadership Group and involves 21 student participants (13-18), and additional interviews with two CSO representatives, two academic researchers, and one city staffer. Through the course of the Toronto research, two in-person workshops took place, with three additional informal virtual meetings.

As with the other case study, the interviews with CSO representatives and academic researchers were recorded live on a virtual platform and the city staff member submitted their responses over email. Noting Ørngreen and Levinsen’s framing of a workshops methodological framework and “workshops as a research methodology”, the in-person workshops were designed to be both “authentic” to meet the participants’ expectations to be part of a youth participation process and were equally designed to be used to gather data to “fulfil a research purpose” (Ørngreen and Levinsen, 2017, p.72).

3.3 Approach to Analysis and Representing Research Findings

Upon review of the data that began to emerge from the research activities, it became clear that there were potential links to the categories of the P7 Thinking Tool (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018). As Cahill and Dadvand note, the intent of the tool “is to illustrate the ways in which a thinking-with-theory through the P7 framework can assist people to engage with the ways in which positioning, power, and privilege can influence participatory opportunities” (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018, p. 247). As a method to begin analysis, both case studies were evaluated through the application of a modified P7 Thinking Tool table, as demonstrated in Table 1. Cahill and Dadvand (2018) did not provide a table, but did provide thinking questions under each explanation of the P7’s domains. Those questions were used to create a table that allowed for a side-by-side comparison and reflection for the Johannesburg and Toronto case studies using data gathered. At the completion of this table, which can be fully seen in the Annex, the data was further coded through an iterative process around basic themes that spoke to reasons for participation, voice, approach and process, and impact. In each case study there were also unique findings specific to that group that were further highlighted.

Table 1

Adapted P7 Thinking Tool Table

THEME	APPROACH	
	Johannesburg	Toronto
Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What does the program aim to achieve?</i> • <i>What opportunities can be constructed to enable young people to play an active role in shaping or evolving program objectives?</i> 		
Positioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How are young people positioned within the wider cultural discourses, and how might this limit what is initially imagined to be possible?</i> • <i>How are young people positioned within the program itself, and how do they in turn position others?</i> • <i>What processes might work to interrupt limiting assumptions about the capacity of young people?</i> 		
Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Whose perspectives and voices are included, excluded, or privileged in the program?</i> • <i>What methods are used to invite diverse perspectives?</i> • <i>Who remains marginalized or is rendered 'voiceless' in the process?</i> 		
Power Relations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How are roles and responsibilities assigned, adopted and enacted in the program?</i> • <i>How are relationships managed to ensure equity and respect is enacted between all parties?</i> 		
Protection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is the balance between practices used to promote protection and those used to enhance participation?</i> • <i>What measures are needed to protect young people's political, social and material access and safety?</i> • <i>How can young people themselves play an active role in ensuring the safety of their peers and those affected by their programs?</i> 		
Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the social, physical, and virtual spaces in which participation can take place?</i> • <i>How does place or context affect what is possible or desirable in relation to participation?</i> • <i>What mediates access to particular spaces and places?</i> • <i>What strategies might be needed to create reach and access to the spaces of participation?</i> 		
Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How will the methods structure and enable participatory exchange, and critical and creative thought?</i> • <i>Which methods will best foster practices of inclusion, respect, and support for others?</i> 		

Note. Adapted from Cahill, H., & Dadvand, B. (2018). Re-conceptualising youth participation: A framework to inform action. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 95, 243-253.

Campbell, B., & Laheij, C. (2021). Introduction: Urban Precarity. *City & Society*, 33(2), 283–302.

3.4 Ethics and Interview Questions

The University of Toronto's Research Ethics Board has approved the research through two different protocols that cover my Johannesburg work and the Toronto Y-CAT work. In addition, approval was also granted from the TDSB External Research Committee to involve students between the ages of 13-18 in the Leadership Group process. All participants were informed of their participation and participants under 18 were further required to get permission from their parents or guardians to take part in the research. All data gathered has been securely saved and protected. Participant information does not include signifiers like age or gender to help maintain anonymity.

As the primary consideration of the focus group discussions, workshops, interviews, and reflections has been around engagement and participation, language that links to the research's theoretical concepts and framing of co-production were not the central focus of the interview questions. Questions were designed to be accessible for research participants and to be open enough that responses could ultimately support answering the research questions. While participants had some sort of link to climate policy processes, no formal definition of climate change was presented. Some participants felt more comfortable answering the questions more generally and incorporated comments related to work done on areas they felt were interconnected, such as gender, transportation, employment, and food security.

3.5 Positionality Statement

As highlighted above, this research is informed by my personal experience and previous work. I utilize reflexivity as part of my methodology (Pillow, 2003) and acknowledge my positionality as having an influence on my research. Work and general day-to-day life in a country like South Africa forces continuous reflection and the need to grapple with cross-cutting issues of race, gender, religion, culture, ability, and socio-economic divides. Eventually finding work in the NGO/Think-Tank space also further forced me to confront my positionality, my whiteness, my foreignness, and to be confronted by what Pierre describes as the "authoritative power of whiteness within the context of aid" (Pierre, 2013, p.88). This is a journey I am still on as I have come to Toronto, and it cannot be separated from my research.

I note that there were different dynamics between the research participants from Johannesburg and Toronto. The South African participants are people I have worked with and have built relationships with over many years. While I am no longer in the same professional role, I do acknowledge the potential impact these relationships and experiences could have on our discussions and interviews. I came directly from South Africa to study at the University of Toronto and have grappled with a shifting positionality of full-time professional to full-time student at an institution based in the Global North and situated on land part of the Dish with One Spoon territory. As discussed earlier, my work with the Toronto participants was through my role as a student researcher on the Y-CAT project and I tried to enter my work with them as a co-learner.

Chapter 4

4 Analysis

4.1 Johannesburg Context

South African policymakers, from the local to the national level are grappling with the challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment (Petrie et al., 2018). Cities throughout the country are characterized by spatial inequalities that were created by apartheid planning and arguably upheld by a type of “residual governance” or the “waste” or “byproducts” of colonial, racist and neoliberal structures, that continues to reinforce minimalistic and incremental actions to address societal challenges (Hecht, 2023, p.6). Johannesburg’s population of over 5.5 million (City of Joburg, n.d.) is young, with 65.2% of the population being defined as children and youth (0-34 years), while 42.5% are between the ages of 15-34 (City of Joburg, n.d.). Job prospects and future planning can be difficult for youth, even those with post-secondary education and training, and the unemployment rate for 15–35 year-olds outpaces the national average of 32.9%, currently standing at 45.5% (Statistics SA, n.d.).

Spatial inequalities continue to compound these existing challenges and are exemplified most in locations like Johannesburg’s Sandton City and Alexandra Township. In a space that is divided by just a highway, there is Sandton, the ‘richest square mile in Africa’, and Alexandra, one of the poorest townships in the country. Moreover, the way these challenges manifest at the municipal level continues to be a barrier in urban planning, especially around climate mitigation and adaptation, since the majority of people migrating into urban areas in cities like Johannesburg move into informal settlements around the periphery and are not always considered or part of formal planning processes (Rugunanan and Xulu-Gama, 2022).

Urban hubs are meant to serve as drivers of socio-economic development that address historic inequities while providing new and inclusive strategies for future growth and resilience. While climate priorities might have been seen as secondary to dealing with other issues related to poverty and jobs, the reality is that climate change is already exacerbating preexisting difficulties in meeting basic services (Petrie et al., 2018). Loadshedding power cuts, water supply, and aging infrastructure are made worse by heat waves, drought, and flooding. While the South African national government is advancing climate priorities put forth in South Africa’s NDCs, the National Adaptation Plan, and through the recently signed Climate Change Act, there remains

uncertainty about the realization of roles and responsibilities of provincial and municipal governments. This has created a challenge for better vertical integration and more effective multi-level governance (Petrie et al., 2018). Starting in 2019, South African cities have been working to update previous climate strategies and have created their own Climate Action Plans or CAPs to define municipal level climate priorities. Like national policies these municipal policies are meant to clearly articulate their alignment with global commitments and position themselves as important climate actors.

4.2 Summary of Key Findings from Johannesburg

In August 2020, I sat at my computer readying myself for a city-wide virtual engagement with officials from the City of Johannesburg (CoJ), C40, academics from the Global Change Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand, high school educators, and youth between the ages of 13-24. Like other practitioners in South Africa, I found myself manoeuvring the macro, meso, and microlevels (Herbert et al., 2022) of the climate policy space, and recent opportunities for localizing global policy were manifesting more on municipal level action. It was the height of South Africa's continued COVID-19 related restrictions, and in-person meetings, especially those involving school children, would not be a reality for many months yet. The CoJ was working towards a new CAP with the support of C40, and stakeholder groups were being consulted about possibilities for the new plan. Working with schools and organizations from across the city, we had called for a youth focused session set apart from other consultations planned with business and CSOs.

From the first meeting, youth of Johannesburg had expressed their desire not to simply handover another submission for consideration by policymakers, they wanted to work with the City and further advocated for an independently written section of the City's plan. What resulted was a youth written section of the final CAP, a youth foreword, and youth inputs throughout the document. The collaboration between youth, supporting organizations and institutions, and the CoJ received global attention through the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group. Many of the stakeholders shared how the process felt more "real" and that while there was a lot more to do, they could see something coming from the international level down to their own community.

4.3 Johannesburg Group

Focus group discussions for the Johannesburg case study took place virtually in May and June 2024. The focus group participants were divided into two sub-groups, one group of five and one group of six. They were a mix of currently active youth activists, youth leaders, and younger people who have transitioned into professional life. The group is still linked through their own national informal network, and they created a WhatsApp group for organizing the discussions. The interviews with CSO, academic, and donor representatives took place one-on-one and were held between April and July 2024. As previously noted, the official from the City of Johannesburg submitted their responses to the interview questions in a written response. All participants were provided an Informed Consent Form prior to engagement. The data is further informed by my own experience as being one of the organizational leaders involved in the youth work for the CAP and subsequent SA YCAP that was inspired by the CAP process. While elements of specific climate content are touched on, the focus of this case study and this research is not on what youth wrote but rather on the methods, processes, and lessons learned that can further inform program design and more meaningful forms of participation. It should also be noted that more specific detail of the 2020/2021 workshops and the content of the JYCAP are the subject of Vogel et al., (2022).

While the CAP process started in 2020, there is ongoing youth action and engagement around implementation of the CAP and the SA YCAP. The Johannesburg group youth participants began their discussions with a greater reflection on what led them to be part of the youth participation process in the CAP, and later the creation of the SA YCAP.

4.3.1 Exploring Reasons for Participation

A general theme that emerged at the start of each of the conversations was around initial uncertainty about entering the youth participation space. They spoke about questioning their level of knowledge and expertise, but then eventually seeing the value of their voice through their experiences and interaction with other young people. Youth participant 2 shared:

“I didn't have the academic knowledge, but what I had was my lived experience to share. I think that's what engaging in youth participation became about for me at that time. It was that I'm the expert of my own reality and I got to share that, and it taught me the importance of adding my voice.”

Youth participants also highlighted feelings of being an imposter or having “imposter syndrome”. They addressed how they were able to overcome these feelings through participation and through finding others who wanted to take action to address issues around them. Youth participant 3 described their journey this way:

“I remember just having such intense imposter syndrome getting there, but then seeing and hearing how everyone else in there sounded like me, in the sense that everyone is passionate about what was going on around them... and being very much frustrated and upset and wanting to do something and then having a space where I could not only voice out my frustrations, but actually work together with other likeminded kids to want to change something about it.”

4.3.2 Role of a Backbone Organization

Youth participants described the importance of established programs and being together with other youth through the Youth Programmes at the South African Institute of International Affairs (Youth@SAIIA). They discussed being supported by the Institute's staff and academic mentors at Global Change Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand. Youth@SAIIA has served as a type of 'backbone organization' (Poland et al., 2021) that provides skills building programs and has been a central connector, between youth, schools, policymakers, academia, business, and civil society to engage with young people around policy and decision making.

CSO representative 1 explained their work as follows:

“We convene a space where there's experts and people like actual scientists in a setting where youth get to interact with them and make that available to them. The other thing that we do a lot of is negotiation simulations which also introduces certain topics, especially around the climate crisis. This gets introduced to youth within high school and out of out of high school as well. And it gives them an idea or gives them a chance to look at that topic, get information on it, do their own research and then bring it back to a dialogue or a negotiation setting where they get to speak about it and then take that into an action, or statement.”

Many of the participants had previously participated in school programs like Model United Nations and/or in drafting youth statements and inputs for United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COPs), the South African Climate Bill, and other local, provincial, national, regional, or global policy processes. Because of this, youth leaders were able to serve as peer leaders, role models, and mentors to other youth that were new to policy processes. They were also able to see that other young people were doing work they were excited about.

Youth participant 11 explained their experience of going from debate programs in high school to finding their footing in activism and advocacy:

“The institution obviously did more than just Model UN and sort of created a pipeline of putting young people into policy and political spaces. So that's what brought me into activism and advocacy. And from there I stepped into climate change work, specifically having found my niche and having been able to explore all of the different opportunities then, I was able to find which area I was passionate about and I found that working in advocacy and more specifically in climate change.”

Youth participant 9 highlighted the role of not only program staff, but of other youth and their role in encouraging more participation:

“For me it really stemmed from yes, having the structures in place of programs... but also having other young people actively involved and almost campaigning for the benefit of these programs to boost further youth involvement.”

4.3.3 Being Heard

South Africa, and Johannesburg in particular, has a significant history of youth activism. The impact that youth and children (high school students) have had is evident in the historical fabric of society, spanning from the 16 June Soweto Uprising of 1976 to the more recent #FeesMustFall student protests. Many officials were themselves once a youth activist during the struggle against apartheid and this can influence how current decisionmakers might see and understand youth participation and activism. Youth participant 10 described an interaction with a policymaker as follows:

“The government official was saying, ‘but where’s your people like when we protested against apartheid, there was thousands of us.’ It’s also their mindset and government’s mindset that there has to be numbers for us to be taken seriously, which is quite sad because, I mean, many of us do have really important stories and many important things to say.”

Even with this historical legacy of youth as actors who steer change, there is a dominance of older voices in decision-making spaces. Because of the lack of youth representation there might not be an immediate understanding of what youth are capable of or what they bring to a process. Speaking specifically to what has been witnessed in the climate policy space, academic researcher 1 explained:

“I think people are not 100% sure of what added value the youth can bring... I think there is amongst especially municipal bureaucracy types, this way of seeing and youth are sort of sometimes seen as very tokenistic in the engagements and are not really respected for being equal partners and equally coming with some good ideas to the table. So, I would say that’s the biggest obstacle. It’s also almost kind of seen to be trendy now to be working with young people rather than seeing what they can bring to the table in terms of their agency and what they’ve got to offer.”

Addressing what youth can actually bring to the table, youth participant 7 stated:

“We bring fresh perspectives to the table. You know, perspectives that often people currently that are in power might not have. So, for example, when we come in as young people, we talk about intersectionality. We come representing other groups that might be marginalized, you know, issues relating to gender issues relating to people in underprivileged communities. We bring a very diverse perspective that is often missing in spaces of decision making.”

This was substantiated by city staff 1 that told of the following experience in the CAP process:

“At the beginning of our CAP development process, we didn’t specifically consider the youth as a key focus group. This oversight wasn’t limited to the youth; we also lacked the time and resources to engage with external stakeholders adequately. However, when the youth expressed interest in our CAP towards the end of the development process, we readily welcomed their involvement. Their enthusiasm was invaluable, as they suggested concepts and ideas that had not been previously considered, such as the importance of addressing intersectionality in climate change efforts.”

4.3.4 Approach and Process

As part of the CAP process, a Google registration form was created and open to any young person between the ages of 13-24 residing in or from the City of Johannesburg. While city-wide invites were emailed and posted on social media targeting schools, organizations, and youth, reach was limited to those that might be on certain mailing lists or that followed the key groups (e.g., the City, Youth@SAIIA, the Global Change Institute, etc.) on social media. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that a large part of this process was started during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, meaning the first phase of the process was almost exclusively virtual. The virtual platform has limitations and can mean people might be excluded due to the digital divide and/or lack of desire to participate virtually. Forty-two participants formally participated in the workshops process.

CSO representative 1 unpacked how they work with youth to try and mitigate the challenges of logistical barriers and stated:

“If it’s (engagement) in the virtual space, we make sure that there’s data systems and that youth are able to actually get onto that call, if it’s actually an in person situation, then we make sure that transport assistance is available in either organizing the transport or making cash available for students to actually get to a meeting so they can actually engage with policymakers...Because it’s great to convene this space, but the challenge that we have here in SA is that there is a digital divide. So, making data available is critical to actually get youth to that table or to that session, making sure that cash is available for transport; to get even get them transport. It’s not just about inviting them. It’s also creating a space and making sure they’re able to get to that session.”

The framing of participation was left open by the organization's staff and academic supporters. The first workshop had a simple structure that started with a question around what youth wanted to see for the future of their city. Academic researcher 1 stated the following on their role:

"At workshops and other things, it's a range of engagement activities so that people aren't just passively sitting and listening. There's quite a lot of, you know, your usual kind of approaches, participatory approaches that are used, but we were being very responsive to what young people wanted to do because it was essentially their program. We were regularly pivoting to respond to their interests and desires."

Youth@SAIIA provides topic packs, guides, and resource materials to participants prior to attending an event. Materials to support preparation can lead to more meaningful discussion and engagement when activities take place as they lessen the feelings described earlier about their uncertainty of knowledge and understanding, making them feel like an imposter. Youth participant 1 stated that:

"I think the resources that were provided in terms of how to put together a position paper helped me to unpack this climate situation very simply, and then even further the guiding questions in topic packs. That was really instrumental in the way I started to unpack what the climate crisis is, how it's relevant to me, and starting to understand the language."

Youth leaders also spoke a lot about how participation has helped them and others build their skills, their confidence, and realize that even at a young age they could become "experts" on climate and sustainability issues. Youth participant 4 reported:

"I want to say we became like experts on the topic so much so that we're able to write about these things and we're able to engage with these topics. You learn a lot about the topic, and you don't even realize how much you know about the topic until you sort of go into other spaces. For a lot of us, we sort of just take that as yeah, this is what we need to know. So, we're gonna study it, and we're gonna know it to its entirety."

Feeling safe and feeling valued emerges as an aspect needed for more meaningful participation. This is a feature that can be built into the design of a program, but it was noted that it might not always be something that can or should be initiated by adult organizers or mentors. Youth supporting youth was a central thread that was raised in various ways through both focus group discussions. There was a framing around a culture of support and representation. This was especially important in the way that older or more experienced participants can encourage younger or newer participants. Youth participant 6 spoke about being in one of the sessions and recalled the following:

“I remember one of the delegates that was a couple years older said to me that I was a bit quiet in sessions. I was like there's university students like, who am I? I don't know anything. And then someone had said you must speak up in these sessions, like you have really good ideas. Like you must raise your voice. And I think that's probably something we've all had that keeps us going, we looked up to someone that was maybe a couple of years ahead of us in these participation processes.”

As the process continued, youth leaders were able to determine the level of engagement they needed from adult staff and academic mentors and were able to call upon them to provide logistical (transport, data, etc.) and technical (climate content, links to experts, etc.) support as needed and desired. Relationships, experience, and time did play an important role in the structure of this process and many youth leaders knew each other and/or the organization. Youth@SAIIA continued to serve as the connector between youth participant networks, academic mentors, and City officials to convene a platform. Through youth facilitated discussion, there was a shift in approach from seeing their work as a type of submission to be considered, to advocating that they write their own section of the CAP in what was later known as the JYCAP. After the initial workshop, youth met in many informal drafting sessions to create the JYCAP and further inputs into the CAP as a whole.

Even though it has been few years since the writing took place, one story that came up in both focus group discussions, that was also referenced in work by Vogel et al. (2022), was when youth presented their work in a meeting with the City officials, C40 representatives, and academic mentors. When first presented, the City officials had assumed that the document had been written by the academic mentors, and not the youth participants. Youth participant 7 highlighted their memory of the meeting in the following way:

“Doing all these edits, meeting several nights a week, we put together this document... You guys (organization staff and academic mentors) had given input and then we presented to the City and basically the City's like, oh, that's a great document Prof, like, great job. Prof said 'I didn't write this. They wrote it'. It's kind of a slap in the face of like, OK, it's so great that they thought a professor wrote this document. It's kind of like I think someone that experienced wrote it when it was actually us. It's kind of like, but then you couldn't have written it because, it's obviously of such a high level.”

Youth participant 10 further expanded on this:

“I think what really flipped the switch a lot for the City is when we called them out on that. They were like, oh, OK, these young people really did write this. They really do know what they're doing. And they were able to get the Joburg YCAP into the City of Johannesburg CAP. We haven't seen that again, like, I haven't seen another city do that model and have young people and stakeholders contribute to it. There was something that went so right with that process. Us and the relationships we had and I think it was a large part of having that relationship with the city, but also the output that we had being so great and so powerful and like being very clear on what exactly we want and very specific that we were able to basically write a part of a policy document that we can now actually hold part of government to account.”

4.3.5 Perspectives and Representation

Johannesburg youth participants highlight that events and processes like this “tend to attract a certain type of young person” that might already be interested in climate topics, public speaking or debate, politics, and/or current and global affairs. While the process was opened to any young person in the age group, many ‘self-reject’, thinking they do not have the right skills, or as youth participant 1 put it, they simply “don't care” about the issues. Because of this, it is important to note that the views and experiences of these other groups of young people might not be as represented in the work. This realization of who was in the room and who was not, was something raised often and in different ways by the Johannesburg group. Youth participant 10 noted that “it's not as accessible every time when they host any stakeholder consultations... Many are excluded from participating in such processes... you can't argue that actually some people are more privileged.”

Speaking about their own personal experiences with young people outside of the advocacy space, youth participant 1 noted that:

“We do have amazing cohorts of young people that do know processes or do know languages and stuff, but there's also actually a larger amount of young people that don't...There is a level of apathy amongst young people. They don't wish to care about climate change. They're not seeing how elements of climate change or GBV (gender-based violence) or any social justice issue really has an impact on their lives, and I think that's also very alarming. This speaks to participation because a lot of the people in the spaces that are doing the work is because they've seen how these issues directly impact them, or they've seen how these issues may have an impact in one's life and they care to address it. But they're also large amounts of people that don't have that.”

Youth participant 10 built on this point and spoke about the need for localizing or making the language more accessible, especially in different South African languages and contexts. “I mean looking just at the JYCAP and SA YCAP... we try to make it accessible in the language that we use to other young people. It still very much uses a lot of policy talk and a lot of people don't even understand what those words mean...So trying to localize even the work we do, I think is also still just a challenge that we have.”

4.3.6 Getting to Impact

For participants in the Johannesburg group, the impact of being part of the process to create the JYCAP and SA YCAP were seen as both personal and institutional. Youth participant 4 stated that “I've seen personal growth in myself, in the people who I navigate the space with. We have launched amazing documents and we're also able to take this work into the various places we have branched out into.” Youth participant 7 noted that they have seen more young people and youth groups finding their way into policy participation and commented that:

“With regards to the impact on the process, there's been a growing movement of young people in policy, a lot of different new groups with new people that are coming from outside of the space and maybe not having participated at high school level like some of us might have. So, I think we've had a very big impact on the process of climate change decision making.”

Even though it has been a couple of years since the Johannesburg CAP was formally launched, many commented on the continued relevance and uniqueness of youth writing directly into the City's policy document. Academic researcher 1 noted that:

"The fundamental fact that the youth led by Youth@SAIIA and others were enabled to craft, through COVID, a very thoughtful and carefully structured document that could land in a climate policy document in the city, written by the youth, and then even being invited to write the forward to that document for me was, I would say, it's the first of its kind. I don't think I've ever seen something like that. And then having it carry all the way up to the national level."

While most participants spoke about what they saw as the importance of the work, they also acknowledged limitations and echoed sentiments similar to those shared earlier about wanting to have had even more voices and people participating. A former youth participant and current climate CSO representative provided a deeper reflection. CSO representative 2 reported on the creation of the JYCAP and later SA YCAP as follows:

"The process itself was very co-creative. It wasn't a top-down approach. I know that we had various structures, and we tried to engage as many people as possible to the extent that we could. We were also very cognizant of what we could and couldn't do. I think that everyone that was part of the process had a vision of what they wanted it to look like and they all got their bits of information in there. I think my ideas and thoughts were there and I think a lot of young peoples' ideas and thoughts were there. Even today, even though I'm in a different space, people still talk about it. When they speak about what do young people want, it's always in that reference document. Now I think about that whole process and trying to work in the spirit of co-creation... It was such a beautiful process to go through also looking back and reflecting on how we always think about, like I didn't feel like anyone was left outside of the room, even when there were issues of some of the languages too technical, and we didn't understand. We'd workshop it together and we'd always hold each other's hands through the process. I really just wish that we could get more young people involved... It's very ambitious, but I really do wish that we had more. Obviously, we couldn't. We tried everything we could. But yeah, that is the process I literally still hear about today, and people always make reference to it."

Participants also addressed the question around what happens next. Youth participant 7 spoke about impact on the ground and stated:

“As much as we have the capacity to create these decisions or to create these policies, which we have demonstrated that we can, it is equally important to see the impact of those sort of decisions. It is important that we are prioritising, making sure that we create this buzz around climate change and participation in climate change of young people and other groups. But also, just sort of thinking about how that translates into impact, and this is something that I have sort of been sitting with as a young person being in this space. As time goes on, looking back like, we have this amazing progressive document, but then, what is the impact that we're having on the ground? Because it's one thing to have us participating in those processes. And it's a different thing for that to translate into action...I think we have a really long way to go.”

The answers around what comes next and how to translate policy into action is not easy, even for seasoned policymakers. This is compounded in a city like Johannesburg that is operating with limited resources and revolving leadership. Since Mayor Geoffrey Makhubo launched the CAP in 2021, there have been four subsequent mayors (City of Joburg, n.d.), and with each new administration there comes varying support or commitment to climate action. This has prompted civil society, including youth and youth-supporting organizations to consider a role in policy implementation. Demonstrating the potential for evolving youth participation from a focus on getting heard or joining the decision-making table to eventually becoming part of the policy implementation process, a CSO representative 1 described that:

“We now have a program that does a micro grant seed funding for youth to do implementation on a local level within their communities...From the reports that we've got back from this year's projects, we can see that they've taken certain parts of the SA YCAP or certain points in the Johannesburg CAP and started to go back to their communities and actually implement. Doing a food garden or doing workshops on food security and the climate crisis or doing actual clean ups in what was previously known as a dumping zone, and around waste management. So, all of those kinds of things, they've literally taken what's in those action plans and implemented change in their community and that's been the impact we've started to see on local level.”

Finally, the participants of the Johannesburg group demonstrated a deeper understanding of the complexities of public participation and a realization that policy work and sustained activism takes time. Youth participant 2 noted towards the end of one of the focus groups that:

“We don't always see our results immediately. Policy takes very long for us to see results...but when you see people starting to converse about these topics you know it's starting to become something, and you know you planted a seed here.”

4.4 Toronto Context

Due to its demographic diversity, Toronto is often described as one of the world's most diverse cities (City of Toronto, 2019). Of Toronto's roughly 3 million inhabitants (City of Toronto, n.d.), 52% are visible minorities and 51.4% were born outside of Canada (City of Toronto, 2019). It is a city of many daily lived experiences, and the varying realities of residents can be further understood in Hulchanski's framing of Toronto from 1970 – 2005 as comprising of three cities, each defined by varying levels of income (high, middle, and low) and access to services (Hulchanski, 2010). Hulchanski (CBC News, 2015) later cautioned that a reduction of middle-income areas has been leading to even greater disparity in Toronto with high income areas becoming wealthier, and a marked growth of more marginalized lower income areas. To mitigate this trend, he advocated for more affordable housing, increased access to services like reliable public transport, and retrofitting existing aging housing and infrastructure to mitigate the increasing polarization (Hulchanski, 2015).

In each of these different Toronto's, there are young people. Children and youth, defined as 0-24 years, make up roughly 25% of the total population of Toronto, with youth between the ages of 15-24 making up 11.4% (City of Toronto, 2024). How young people see and experience their Toronto has been less appreciated by researchers as the city is often viewed as “backdrop” rather than as a crucial influencer on the lives of young people (Sriskandarajah, 2017). Youth perceptions and daily realities of the city are different than older generations (Sriskandarajah, 2017), and this is being further exacerbated by the impacts of global change on the city. For youth, their Toronto must be contextualized in social disconnection compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, distrust of political institutions, increasing climate anxiety, and uncertainty about their futures (Balt, 2022).

When exploring what Toronto is doing to address climate change, there is a need to understand the City as functioning as part of and not separate from the federal and provincial levels of government (Slater et al., 2022). TransformTO, the City of Toronto's climate strategy was approved in 2017 (City of Toronto, n.d.) at a time of increased political will and alignment at all levels of Canadian government for more ambitious climate action (Slater et al., 2022). Arguably influenced by the youth climate strikes of 2019, the City then declared a climate emergency in October of that year (City of Toronto, n.d.) and later developed and eventually approved TransformTO Net Zero Strategy in 2021 to build on TransformTO. As part of TransformTO Net Zero Strategy, the City of Toronto and the University of Toronto are co-developing a strategy with the city's youth through a project called Youth Climate Action in Toronto (Y-CAT) (City of

Toronto, n.d.). The goal of the Y-CAT is to work with young people and supporting organizations to create a new Youth Climate Action Engagement Strategy for youth ages 10 to 25 to form part of the city's climate policy.

4.5 Summary of Key Findings from Toronto

In April 2024, I sat in the lobby of Toronto City Hall eagerly awaiting the arrival of the city staff, Y-CAT researchers, and students from across the city. I had organized the workshop, but I didn't really know what to expect. Stepping back into studies meant that I came to the space not as the representative of an organization or the manager of a program, but as a student researcher, and it was a role I was still trying to navigate. While my appearance and accent allowed me to blend in, I felt my foreignness and was reminded of the label of "newcomer" used to describe newly arrived immigrants to Canada. I was an experienced practitioner, but I certainly felt like a newcomer at that moment. Young people arrived and faces were put to names I had seen in application forms, but I knew real connections and relationships would take time. As a researcher, I grappled with what level of involvement and support to provide, and I attempted to adapt to the varying levels of experience and expectations. Youth participants were able to share their stories, create profiles and develop recommendations for the YCAES linked to Toronto's TransformTO Net Zero Strategy, but I know more would have been possible if timing had allowed. The process is still evolving, and I hope that connections created flourish. I hope that youth participants know that they are seen, and that their voices and realities matter...

4.6 The Toronto Group

As of the writing of this research, the YCAES is set to be completed by the end of 2024. Several pilot activities were held and led by the Y-CAT team to get input and feedback from and with youth for the strategy. Through work with the Y-CAT team, an activity that would specifically engage schools and students was identified as a desired area of participation. The Toronto Schools Youth Climate Leadership Group or Leadership Group was one activity of the Y-CAT project that serves as the main focus of this research.

As the youth participants were between the ages of 13-18, heightened attention was paid to ensuring their well-being. All participants were provided an Informed Consent Form that formed part of the Y-CAT project and was approved by the University of Toronto ethics protocol and TDSB. For participants under 18, parent/guardian permission was required for participation. Participants also asked for a Slack group to allow for more informal communication. This group was created with further permission required from parent/guardians to participate and the group was monitored by researchers to ensure safeguarding.

The data used for the Toronto group includes individual responses from: Google forms (application and final reflection form); group notes compiled by youth participants on flipchart paper and later transcribed on a shared Google doc; Google doc running notes; discussions at the sessions; observations; and my own reflections from the April to June 2024 engagement period with the Leadership Group. Some of the youth recommendations raised for the YCAES that linked to context, process, and program design are reflected. More of their recommendations about specific initiatives or climate content were brought forward in their group notes and submission to inform the YCAES for the City. Additional data was gathered through interviews with CSO and academic representatives that were held between June and July 2024. Like the official from the City of Joburg, the city staff member from the City of Toronto submitted their responses to the interview questions in a written response that was emailed.

4.6.1 Exploring Reasons for Participation

It was explained in the application form that the Y-CAT team was looking for interested middle and high school students that would work in a leadership group that would create and lead a process for a possible city-wide schools dialogue with students to draft, design, and contribute to the final YCAES that will be presented to the City of Toronto. As described, recruitment for the leadership group happened through a Google form application process that was open to 13–18-year-olds residing and studying in Toronto and that was shared through the TDSB, Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), and on social media platforms (Y-CAT and City of Toronto accounts). When exploring their reasons for participation, the main reasons centered on their concerns about the impact of climate change on the future, wanting a platform and a safe space for youth voices, and finally around leadership skills development.

Most responses spoke about being worried about climate change and described the immediate and urgent action needed. Youth participant 23 described:

“I care a lot about climate change, and climate related issues because they are becoming a bigger part of everyone's lives, and we can't wait any longer to take action. If I want my children and grandchildren to be able to live on this planet, if I want them to be treated in an equitable way, then I have to be a part of the solution, rather than sitting back and letting other people do the work.”

Another central theme was around participation, platform and voice, and the role of young people in determining their futures. Youth participant 17 declared, “I strongly believe that youth deserve a seat at the decision-making tables. We will inherit the planet from the older generations, and therefore, we deserve the right and power to determine and build the future that we would like to see.” The focus on platforms and voice was a central driver for participation. Youth participant 19 explained that “by providing a platform for youth to advocate for the environment, I believe that it will be able to dissipate the myth that youth's voice has no real influential power and encourage more youth to speak out and fight for what they believe is right.”

Finally, another influencing factor for participation was around desire to build skills and connect with other young people. Youth participant 27 reported that they “believe this would also be a great opportunity to work on my leadership skills and could also create a path for me to further my knowledge”.

4.6.2 Struggling to Be Heard and Acknowledged

Youth activism on climate change is noted by research participants as having an important role in influencing city-level action, especially after the 2019 climate strikes led by young people in Toronto. Even with existing examples of youth climate activism, youth, especially younger youth not old enough to vote, are noted by city staff 2 as often “being dismissed by adults” or having their work and actions seen as “unimportant or unnecessary”. City staff 2 also stated that, “I feel that adults/older populations tend to not take youth voices seriously. Even though youth are the ones who will be dealing more and more significantly with the climate crisis.”

The climate strike was raised by different participants as an important demonstration of youth action in the city. People noted how powerful it was to see the numbers of youth take to the streets, but not everyone was able to understand or appreciate what the longer-term impacts have been. One CSO representative 3 described what they saw come from the strike and the difficulty around getting acknowledgment and attribution from decisionmakers for this activism. They explained:

“Estimates vary, but that rally got between 50 to 100,000 out on the streets of Toronto. One of the results of that massive climate strike was that the city declared a climate emergency and increased the ambition of their climate action plan. The Toronto District School Board then endorsed the City's declaration of a climate emergency, and that provided some of the institutional ties that could then be used to increase the ambition of the Toronto District School Board's climate plan...one other thing I will say about the climate strikes is that the students who participated in them, they came out on mass... and I don't know if anyone ever really told them how that massive strike was really influential.”

Youth participant 28 spoke about their experience and a feeling that their work and their messages were still not being heard and how this has influenced youth participation and action. They reported:

“I've been working in climate justice for a while, and currently, many youth groups are struggling with membership. This isn't because my generation doesn't care. We've been shouting in the streets for a long time! But for a few years, it felt like our voices were falling on deaf ears – that the systems of power were not extending any hands to us, were not giving us a way to take action and to work on climate justice. I think young people feel a bit disillusioned and isolated.”

City staff 2 also noted the difference in youth climate action as compared with the broader population. According to a City staff 2, they see the urgency and passion young people have and how they “express higher levels of concern on climate and more pressing urgent desire to

take action than older populations.” They also corroborate the feelings described by civil society and youth leaders. The same city staffer stated that they:

“Have observed that youth are more (and increasingly!) frustrated/angry with lack of action (especially from government) than other demographic groups – as I’ve established relationships and direct dialogue in some youth spaces, I’ve experienced some anger directed at me as a government representative.”

CSO representative 4 also described their experience as both a young person and a practitioner who works in policy and decision-making spaces and explained that “from speaking to the youth, they do feel tokenized. Their voices are not really heard in a way that they feel that their voices are being considered.” Youth in the Leadership Group also raised that while that there is a fixation on education on climate change as a way to reach young people, one of the bigger reasons youth are not involved in climate action is linked more to what they described in joint recommendations as “the concern/feeling that we don’t have voices, can’t make a difference” (Leadership Group, 2024, Section from In-Person Final Session). While the research participants represent one group in a much larger context, having this appreciation of potential youth frustration, disillusionment, and anger towards systems of power is important when considering how young people currently see their voice and avenues for meaningful participation in Toronto.

4.6.3 Approach and Process

After meetings with the Eco-Schools team at the TDSB, and after permission to work with students was granted, a Google form application was created to join the Leadership Group. While efforts were made to disseminate the application form widely, most students found their way to the opportunity via their teachers. Timing was a challenge as the activities were only approved for commencement in late March, due to ethics and TDSB permission needed to safeguard children.

The idea for the Leadership Group was that they could lead their own process to create recommendations for the YCAES with more of their peers from across the city. All participants were asked to come prepared with an opening statement answering guiding questions that were provided in a basic guide emailed prior to the first workshop at City Hall. The opening session took place in the council chambers and were presented from the council seats. In addition to the youth participants, the event included city staff, a supporting educator, a supporting CSO representative, members of the Y-CAT research team, and representatives of the Eco-Schools team at TDSB. The goal was to ensure that everyone was heard at the start of the process.

City staff 2 described being impressed by the statements of the youth and their unique perspective of youth, stating that:

“The most interesting part for me in participating in youth climate activities is that it appears that youth more easily recognize/understand that climate action is so closely tied to social justice, and often their ideas for solutions and action are more holistic and even get at addressing some systemic societal issues.”

After their initial statements and presentations, the discussion around ideas for a city-wide consultation was led by the youth. This presented some challenges as the group was new to each other and many participants were less comfortable in the space and/or in speaking. It is important to note the influence of a space like City Hall, not only for the reasons and perceptions of power structures raised above, but also for the evolving understanding and appreciation of what such spaces represent. Before starting the more formal part of the program, the group participated in a tour of City Hall. As we walked the halls, it was apparent that not everyone was experiencing being there in the same way. For some there was a sense of excitement and being in the space signalled that they were doing something important. For others, especially those representing certain marginalized communities and/or those who had previous experience engaging with government, the feelings were more complex. For them the space was also a representation of an historical legacy of colonialism, of a genocide of Indigenous peoples, and a space that continues to perpetuate systems and structures that maintain the status quo.

Noting the formality of the council chamber, the group was eventually encouraged by adult supporters to move to a more informal space. Two breakaway groups were formed in an effort to bring in more perspectives. Participants were encouraged and reminded to try to include all voices and ensure different viewpoints were heard and appreciated. They adopted methods in group discussions to try to listen and capture different views. Some voices dominated the discussion and while everyone maintained a level of respect, some participants were quieter. For some, being quiet was because they felt nervous about sharing due to age, experience, or comfort in public speaking. For others, they were quiet because they felt their views were not being understood. This was especially true for participants coming from less represented communities or backgrounds. Had time allowed, more could have been done to ensure even greater reach to more schools, youth groups, and organizations. The group included young people from various socio-economic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, but even more representation from some of the city’s more marginalized communities would have benefitted the process.

The initial thinking for this process was to start with the Leadership Group and eventually find ways, led by the group, to involve other interested high school students from across the city through an open virtual event to accommodate more participation. The virtual option was also due to budget limitations and the idea that with less constraints due to physical venue or catering, more young people might be able to participate. During the first workshop, many ideas were shared but there was no consensus about having a larger city-wide process as originally proposed as part of the design process. Many of the youth participants advocated for alternative approaches, like a Google form survey rather than having a joint live session with other high school students. The Leadership Group highlighted challenges of bringing more people into the process as they navigated differing levels of experience, comfort, and feelings around their voice being heard and appreciated in the group. In their group notes, they also wrote that the reasons and trepidation for having a city-wide session “include social anxiety and youth having to take time out of their day to attend the virtual session” (Leadership Group, 2024, Section from Running Notes).

Students agreed to the creation of a Slack group to build on the first session and discuss next steps. After the first session, efforts were made to further involve anyone who had applied (the initial 45) as the constraints of venue and catering costs were eliminated for virtual engagement. Information on the Slack group was emailed to everyone. The group had no set roles as it was assumed that the group would determine their own roles and take greater ownership of a process to create a submission for the YCAES. After the first workshop, participants were encouraged to take on key responsibilities (e.g., notetaking, facilitation, etc.) where they felt comfortable, and the hope was that they would eventually determine their own structure moving forward. There was hesitancy amongst the group to assign roles and self-organize. Much of this had to do with the fact that the group was navigating academic commitments, new relationships, representation, comfort in the group, understanding of the group’s mandate, and varying degrees of experience in both climate topics and advocacy. Additionally, an observation was that the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic environment had greatly negatively impacted young people’s relationship with using virtual platforms. As a result, the process was adapted away from having a larger city-wide event and refocused on possibilities for the existing group. This forced a change in the timing and format for the work of the Leadership Group.

Due to the context and factors mentioned above, movement in the group was mixed. It was apparent that not everyone wanted or expected the same thing. After an informal virtual session, a Leadership Group Submission Guidelines document was created to provide more structure.

Two options were outlined to create and support a submission into the YCAES that was based on the feedback, discussion, and ideas circulated. Option 1 encouraged participants new to climate action and less interested in working in the group, or in the formal writing of points, to focus on gathering stories, profiles, and experiences. This was done because several participants raised a desire to explore key areas of climate action or to reach out and work with specific marginalized groups. Participants were then asked to use the guiding questions previously shared, their own lessons learned, and reflections to create a short written and/or visual profile or story. They could use photos, videos, artwork, poems, etc. It was hoped that participants could later present their stories and profiles and that this could lead to a reflective and iterative discussion allowing for the possibility of creating additional points and engagement ideas for a group submission into the YCAES. A second option was designed for those that wanted to either work with the group, a group at their school or club, or as an individual to create a direct submission into the YCAES writing process. As with the first option, they were asked to use the guiding questions to develop a piece of work that could be written, visual, and/or artistic, and in a format of their choosing. Other members of the Y-CAT research team developed an additional offering of mentorship and/or networking support to link interested participants to organizations and initiatives in Toronto.

One youth participant saw an opportunity to build their organization's work and asked if it was possible to use their organization's existing resources to convene another in-person session to develop a direct submission. In early June, a final youth-led in-person session was convened at the Centre for Social Innovation in Toronto. Due to timing and exams only nine participants were able to join. The session combined elements of both submission options, including an intergenerational dialogue with representatives from various climate organizations, and set aside time for drafting key recommendations. Ideas and points were handwritten and later transcribed into a Google doc so that those that missed the session could add further input. Two story profiles were also shared by the end of June, but as the earlier session had developed recommendations that were shared with the group, a further session was not planned. The group recommendations and profiles have been reviewed by Y-CAT team and now form part of the input being used to create the YCAES. The Slack group remains active and while there is no further formal programming planned by Y-CAT, participants have expressed a desire to continue building a network and their relationships with each other.

The Leadership Group focused on several points directed towards the City of Toronto. Areas most relevant for this research were around engaging young people, development and

communication around opportunities, building networks, and climate education. A continuous thread in the Toronto group is the way that youth are seen and treated. One of the points states that young people need “to be treated as full humans, not a *minor inconvenience* (pun intended) who are invited to speak and then whose opinions are ignored and decisions made that arbitrarily oppose that input” (Leadership Group, 2024, Section from In-Person Final Session). The Leadership Group further emphasizes the need to act on input and demonstrate action in a timely manner. They highlight the difficulty of engagement in city parliament and other spaces because these meetings happen during school times, as well as the impact of their engagement not always being obvious.

Building on this desire to be seen and appreciated as ‘full humans’ is a call to shift messaging and program design from telling young people what they should be, rather than providing platforms and spaces for them to develop their own skills. The youth stated that the “City shouldn’t tell us to directly become activists, rather they should provide us with more opportunities that empower us to become activists” (Leadership Group, 2024, Section from In-Person Final Session). CSO representative 3 made comments linked to this and described what happens when young people are more involved, using an example of giving a deputation. They spoke about times they had witnessed youth in action, saying, “I think it’s incredibly empowering because you know they’re there in the seat and they’re telling councilors what they want. And councilors definitely pay attention.”

The youth participants also described the need to establish a “youth-based climate network” to better connect young people to each other, the City, educators and organizations. They discussed educational programs and activities needing to adapt to be less “superficial”, especially around days like Earth Day, and to ensure that there is “climate education beyond elementary schools so that it’s not seen as a childish thing.”

4.6.4 Reflecting on a Process Within a Process

This research has provided a unique opportunity to observe a process within a process. The Leadership Group served as one component of a larger process and these reflections are linked directly to the work with this specific cohort of 13–18 year-old students from across Toronto. At the end of June an honorarium was made available to all participants who had attended at least one session (in-person or virtually), and a final reflection form was shared.

One of the potential challenges of participatory project design is what Del Gaudio et al. (2017) describes as a “temporal misfit”, where the timing norms for participants and researchers differ. Temporal misfits were an underlying factor that impacted the work of the Leadership Group. As previously raised, the start of the activities was only possible once both the safeguarding of children and ethical clearance could be demonstrated. This meant there was less time for the Leadership Group process to take place before the end of the academic year. As part of signing up for the Leadership Group, youth participants were given basic parameters for the work and were asked to lead their own process to create recommendations for the YCAES with more of their peers from across the city. In addition to the timing of the activities, there were also temporal misfits based on timing needed for relationship building, understanding and creation of the group’s mandate, and in the ultimate desired format and creation of a submission into the YCAES.

Participants raised timing, group size, and structure as key areas that could be better addressed for future engagements. While some participants, especially those with more experience in climate activism, expressed a greater desire for autonomy and youth-led organizing, others, especially those newer to the climate and public participation spaces, expressed a need for greater structure. Youth participant 13 highlighted this duality and stated that “it felt like the process had a foot in two worlds: one of a structured process to accomplish a specific outcome determined from above, and one of getting a bunch of like-minded youth together and letting them create their own structure and outcomes. I believe the process would have been much more effective if it leaned further into either one of these sides.” As mentioned, group size was also a factor and while it was assumed there would be a greater desire to involve more young people, a temporal misfit might have once again been a reason for group trepidation around increasing participant numbers. Developing a comfort level around skills, knowledge, connections, and shared vision needs more time than what was available. As youth participant 22 put it:

“For me personally, since it was unlike anything I've ever done before, it was definitely difficult for me to open up, especially because it was a big group, and it felt like there were so many people who were more extroverted than me... Furthermore, I think the timeline was a bit hard to work with.”

4.6.5 Getting to Impact

Given the timing of this process and the fact that the YCAES is still being completed, it is hard to discuss any longer-term impacts for participation, however there are observable and articulated shorter-term impacts discussed by the Toronto group. For most participants, the greater immediate impact relates to skills development and building relationships. Youth participant 22 said they:

“Have learned so much from taking part in this leadership group, not only about climate action, but also about how to hold discussions in diverse, larger groups and take notes on the things we discuss...Listening to all of the young climate activists around my age, I feel that I have a newfound inspiration to initiate more and engage more in climate action around the city, which I was hesitant to do before because I didn't know where to start, especially at my age where it seems like we have no power in big decisions.”

Other participants described changing perceptions about access and ability to participate. Youth participant 26 explained they:

“Have learned much from taking part in the youth climate participation process, namely I've gotten to view the world of climate action from a lens in which I had not seen it before. This includes seeing how easy it is to get involved in climate action, what different initiatives are going on at the moment, and how youth can involve themselves in climate action.”

Youth participants also touched on their feelings about being part of a city-level process, perhaps further demonstrating the framing of the municipality as the highest level of engagement for many citizens. Youth participant 24 declared that:

“Participation meant I could, with help, create a plan with other people who also had a knack for the subject. Toronto is pretty big, making it really exciting to create such a large-scale change. Change that could inspire or go on to an even larger scale issue, climate change.”

CSO representative 3 further summed up their observation and shared that:

“I think when young people do have an opportunity to speak to power and in the halls of power, that has an impact on them, and they realize that they can do it. I know that.”

Chapter 5

5 Lesson Learned and Recommendations

Overall, through exploring the research questions with the Johannesburg and Toronto case studies, key areas emerge for greater consideration for climate engagement, program design and execution, policy creation, and implementation with young people. It is a continually learned truth that you cannot simply replicate one activity, method, or strategy and expect the same outcomes, but there are lessons that can be shared. What follows is some of the lessons learned from working with young people in municipal climate policy processes.

5.1 How can shared mutual dependence and collective responsibility foster more meaningful youth participation in climate decision making and policy processes?

5.1.1 Acknowledging the Need for Connection, Relationships, and Community

“I’ve learned about how many people actually do care about this issue. Usually I feel as if I’m alone with my feelings about climate change in terms of actually doing something. I’ve learned different ways to think about climate change and ways to engage people in talking about and coming up with solutions for it and different ideas for how to solve it.”
– Youth Participant 27

“You see life differently when you participate. That’s it. It’s not just you, it’s the community that you’re representing. It’s the impact that you have for others.”
– Youth Participant 3

Both groups highlighted the importance of feeling connected and building relationships with other people. When challenged to work in a group, there appears to be a greater understanding of mutual dependence to create solutions and explore work that can contribute to a longer-term vision (Okyere-Manu, Morgan, & Ssebunya, 2019). After working with youth from across their city, young people discussed how their perspective on what is possible began to shift. They acknowledged the complexities of policy participation and climate activism, and the role of connection in keeping people motivated. As previously stated, connection takes time, and processes can be designed with greater appreciation for relationship building, both intra youth and youth groups, and well as between youth and supporting adult partners and mentors.

5.1.2 Fostering Collective Responsibility and Mutual Dependence

“Climate change education, as it is currently presented in many classrooms, just goes to recycling and it's just really depressing to me...to talk to kids about this kind of thing...it goes back to fossil fuel funding of climate change education and corporate funding...it's very clearly aimed at reverting down to that individual action thing and your role as a consumer rather than citizenship education or your role as an actual agent who can affect change.”

- CSO Representative 3

When thinking about youth participation programming and design, one can consider methods that centre on connection, collective responsibility, and a shared understanding of mutual dependence for better outcomes. As described by youth participants, a key reason for participation centres around a desire to find community and space for collaboration. More meaningful youth participation can challenge a more prevailing climate action and sustainability paradigm that tends to focus on individual action or individual achievement, and better demonstrate how successful initiatives are not built or sustained on the shoulders of one person or even one group alone. Fostering collective responsibility and mutual dependence welcomes individuals and encourages them to find their own entry point for participation where they can see and appreciate the value of their voice, understand their evolving role, and explore possibilities for growth with other young people, and adult mentors and supporters. It challenges us to appreciate who came before and who will come after.

5.2 How can youth participation support alternative meaning and knowledge production outside of the metropole?

How can youth participation support new meaning making that draws in knowledges, experiences and understanding from the periphery?

5.2.1 Centering the Periphery

“There is an impact that I've seen... of actually having had other high school kids or even like varsity kids, like young black girls and women who've come to me and said to me that, hey, I can see myself taking up space in this area, in climate, or in any other form of activism because I see you at the podium. I see you doing this activism and because I see you doing this, I feel like I can see myself doing it too.”

- Youth participant 2

Both groups highlighted the importance of voice and representation to ensure other knowledges and experiences are brought into participation processes. While desired group size was impacted by experience and relationships that relate to points of 5.1., both case study groups touched on deeper issues related to full inclusion that caters to differing needs and context.

Perhaps to build on the P7 domains (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018) is to further encourage thinking about ways to decentre the metropole and to rather start by centring the periphery. Based on the research, centring the periphery for youth participation is about challenging our perceptions, our assumptions (Cooper et al., 2019), and a culture that sees barriers and daily realities as logistical problems while promoting tick boxing and unrealistic timeframes. Participants from Johannesburg and Toronto addressed many similar cross-cutting issues that might be seen as less important in the metropole where access, resources and comfort in spaces is assumed. By centring the periphery, the most basic elements and components of program design become required components for participation. Both groups spoke of the importance of language (jargon and/or medium of discussion), planning for daily precarities, safety, representation, relationship to spaces and places, and time. This further means that organizers (be them youth or adult supporters) should constantly question who is in the room and who isn't, and to explore possibilities for greater participation while respecting the needs of youth. Finally, centring the periphery is about acknowledging that the status quo is not working and that through the inclusion of more stories, experiences, and ways of thinking, there are more possibilities for normalizing and actioning sustainability.

5.2.2 Appreciating Moving Between the Streets and the Decision-Making Table

"We know that there's different ways of entering policy and you can break the system from the inside. You can break the system from the outside."

– Youth participant 7

Perhaps another way to decentre the metropole is through better appreciation for fluidity and the way that youth, especially Southern youth are adapting, hustling, and making a plan (Cooper et al., 2019). Perception and definition for what constitutes youth participation, policy participation, advocacy and activism is often dependent on context, entry points for participation, and views of power structures. Whether groundswell or authorship (Terry, 2023), youth climate action can be fluid, moving between the streets and the decision-making tables to influence policy and implementation. Youth participants in both Johannesburg and Toronto have been part of multiple initiatives, activities, organizations, and forms of actions. Programs and participation processes need to be designed with an appreciation for the differing ways young people and civil society can and/or choose to engage from both outside and within power structures. Academic institutions and CSOs can further support youth by brokering access to and with decisionmakers, providing support (logistical or technical), and supporting young people with skills and capacity building to understand structures.

5.3 How can a transdisciplinary knowledge co-production (TKC) approach lead to meaningful youth participation in municipal climate decision-making and policy processes?

5.3.1 Advocating for Backbone Organizations

“We maintain those relationships and we hold those relationships for our networks so that doesn't fall away as the youth constantly change. That somebody is holding that space for them constantly and maintains those relationships and building relationships and establishing lasting connections.”

– CSO representative 1

One difference between the two case studies was the role of non-academic partner organizations. Both the Johannesburg case study and the Toronto case study involved youth and youth-supporting organizations, but only the Johannesburg study had the involvement of a backbone organization (Poland et al., 2021) serving as a central partner for co-production. University and CSO partnerships can be fraught (Israel, 2006), but as demonstrated with the Johannesburg Climate Action Plan process, they can also be a crucial element to more meaningful youth participation and possibilities for TKC. Universities and consulting groups are often selected to serve as implementing partners for the creation of government reports and to run policy participation and public consultation processes. These entities might lack established relationships with larger groups of young people, youth groups, or networks, and are often reliant on existing organizations to make links and connections. This process can take time, impacting collaboration and co-production, and potentially creating less buy-in for the final outcomes documents. To be clear, each project is unique and each context is different, but CSOs and youth groups need to be considered as lead or at least full implementing partners with their own budget and articulated respected vision.

5.3.2 Seeing Youth as Collaborators and Partners

“Sometimes when I'm working with young people, I'll have to tell myself to stop being surprised at how competent and how good young people are. I have to talk myself down from coming at this place of like, oh, I'm really surprised that young people have really smart, nuanced things to say... I think that the ways that we often view young people... it's kind of patronizing and also really underestimates their capacities. That enables us to be surprised and to be impressed when they actually just show up as they are. And so, learning for me has been like just trying to enter a space and know that these are experts that I'm talking to. I wouldn't be surprised if I was sitting with the policymaker, and they were like telling me some nuanced thing about a policy. So why am I so surprised if a young person is telling me something and they're adding a lot of nuance to it?”

– Academic researcher 2

Both case studies demonstrate possibilities for TKC with youth, but also highlight the difficulties faced on the ground during implementation. This was especially true for the Toronto group as more reciprocal approaches to knowledge production (Robison, 2024) were hampered by timing and lack of cohesion around goals. In both case studies, city representatives and other adult researchers and supporters discussed their continued surprise around the contribution and abilities of young people. In Johannesburg this was more greatly demonstrated by the city officials confusing the work of youth for the work of academic researchers. Moving towards more meaningful youth participation means that policymakers, academics, civil society, donors, the diplomatic community, and the private sector all need to start reframing their relationship to and with youth. Youth need to be seen as potential collaborators and partners in climate policy participation and implementation. In practical terms, this means that practitioners, policymakers, and academics need to confront their assumptions about what youth are capable of and explore ways to build relationships, trust, and skills like they would with other partners. While processes and activities are initiated in different ways and with different constraints, more can be done to advocate for time, budgets, and embedded youth engagement experts within the climate policy processes. As with any constructive partnership, consideration for timing, safety, inclusion, and barriers to collaboration need to be addressed and respected. Non-youth partners can think about their potential value-add to a process and consider entry points for their participation that fosters co-production, youth authorship (Terry, 2023), and greater appreciation for the knowledge and experience of young people. Youth need greater attribution for their work in the policy space, and non-youth actors should consider ways to centre youth while acknowledging the support and time needed to do so.

Chapter 6

6 Final Remarks

This research started with a Southern example that led to a Northern context for comparison, with a goal of better understanding what strategies are most effective for developing more meaningful youth participation approaches in municipal climate decision-making and policy processes. Time constraints and temporal misfits impacted what was possible to do with young people, but despite the challenges, there were many important insights and reflections shared and observed.

On the surface, the Johannesburg and Toronto case studies could be described similarly. Both case studies involved groups of young people in predefined age groups working on city-related climate policy processes that were further supported by academic and community partners. However, while there are important similarities, there are also notable differences that further demonstrate the need for context and greater nuance in the way we describe youth (Bessant, 2021; Cooper et al., 2019) and how we approach youth participation (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018). Both groups described a desire to address societal challenges and climate change, but there were different starting points, expectations, and assumptions for both youth participants and for adult supporters/collaborators. This was most demonstrated by the fact that the Johannesburg participants were led by an experienced group and developed a clear desire and expectation of authorship (Terry, 2023). The Toronto group demonstrated the importance of time and relationship building for youth to be better able to develop shared goals and articulated actions. Perhaps linking to Rizzini, de los Angeles Torres, & del Río Lúgo's comparison of youth participation Rio and Chicago (2009), it is also possible that historical legacies in South Africa and Canada influence youth perception of community connection, communal approaches, and views of public participation. More research would be needed to specifically explore these areas.

An overlap from both case studies was around the importance of youth participation in bringing in issues of social justice and intersectionality into decision-making and policy processes. City representatives from both Johannesburg and Toronto explicitly highlighted the impact of youth in these areas. While it is often more generally stated that young people bring different perspectives, at a deeper level, youth participation has challenged policy makers to incorporate cross-cutting areas that might normally fall outside of their focus area in government

departments. This is especially important for climate work and the shifting understanding of what is required for greater societal shifts that goes beyond mitigation targets.

As described earlier, it was apparent from both groups that connection, community, and collaboration are central driving forces for youth participation and sustained action and work. More can be done to foster understanding of mutual dependence (Chemhuru, 2022; Okyere-Manu, Morgan, & Ssebunya, 2019) for more meaningful youth participation. It is not just about getting the microphone or a seat at the table. Existing youth participation frameworks like the P7 Thinking Tool (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018) can be tested and applied to more research and programs, together with youth and practitioners, to further develop and evolve. Youth are ready to collaborate and should be respected as equal partners for developing pathways to a more sustainable future. More research can be done to explore what happens after the protest, after the policy is created, and to delve deeper into implementation with young people.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Questions

Project attributes & reason for participant's involvement in [insert project name]

- How did you come to be involved in [insert program/organization name]?
- What is your role in the organization/program?
- How long have you held this role or been involved in this program?
- What does your program aim to accomplish?

Questions to Youth Participants*

- What have you learned from taking part in youth climate participation processes?
- How have you participated in the climate related policy process?
- What does participation in the process mean to you?
- What impact or results have you seen through your participation?
- What barriers or challenges have you encountered?

Questions for NGO Staff/Practitioners

- What methods or approaches do you use to teach, organize, or run climate policy related activities?
- How have you participated in the climate related policy process?
- What does participation in the process mean to you?
- What impact have you seen through your participation or work?
- What barriers or challenges have you encountered?

Questions for Policymakers

- What have you learned from taking part in climate related consultations or activities with youth?
- What does the process or activity mean to you?
- What impact have you seen from youth participation and your work?
- What barriers or challenges have you encountered?

*Toronto participants were provided these questions in their final reflection form.

Appendix B. Interview Participant Table

Designation	Number	City
Youth Participant	1	Johannesburg
Youth Participant	2	Johannesburg
Youth Participant	3	Johannesburg
Youth Participant	4	Johannesburg
Youth Participant	5	Johannesburg
Youth Participant	6	Johannesburg
Youth Participant	7	Johannesburg
Youth Participant	8	Johannesburg
Youth Participant	9	Johannesburg
Youth Participant	10	Johannesburg
Youth Participant	11	Johannesburg
CSO representative	1	Johannesburg
CSO representative	2	Johannesburg
Academic Researcher	1	Johannesburg
City Staff	1	Johannesburg

Designation	Number	City
Youth Participant	12	Toronto
Youth Participant	13	Toronto
Youth Participant	14	Toronto
Youth Participant	15	Toronto
Youth Participant	16	Toronto
Youth Participant	17	Toronto
Youth Participant	18	Toronto
Youth Participant	19	Toronto
Youth Participant	20	Toronto
Youth Participant	21	Toronto
Youth Participant	22	Toronto
Youth Participant	23	Toronto
Youth Participant	24	Toronto
Youth Participant	25	Toronto
Youth Participant	26	Toronto
Youth Participant	27	Toronto
Youth Participant	28	Toronto
CSO representative	3	Toronto
CSO representative	4	Toronto
Academic Researcher	2	Toronto
Academic Researcher	3	Toronto
City Staff	2	Toronto

Appendix C. Completed Adapted P7 Thinking Tool Table

THEME	APPROACH	
	Johannesburg	Toronto
<p>Purpose</p> <p><i>What does the program aim to achieve?</i></p>	<p>Working together with the Global Change Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand and the youth of Johannesburg through the Youth Programmes at the South African Institute of International Affairs (Youth@SAIIA), the program focused on ensuring formal youth participation and input into the Johannesburg Climate Action Plan (CAP).</p>	<p>As part of TransformTO, the City of Toronto and the University of Toronto are co-developing a strategy with the city's youth through a project called Youth Climate Action in Toronto (Y-CAT). The goal of the Y-CAT is to work with young people and supporting organizations to create a new Youth Climate Action Engagement Strategy (YCAES) for youth ages 10 to 25 as part of TransformTO. Several pilot activities were held and led by the Y-CAT team to get input and feedback from and with youth for the YCAES. The Toronto Schools Youth Climate Leadership Group or Leadership Group was one activity of the Y-CAT project that serves as the main focus of this thesis.</p>
<p><i>What opportunities can be constructed to enable young people to play an active role in shaping or evolving program objectives?</i></p>	<p>Young people took part in a virtual workshop to put forward recommendations for the CAP, but were not satisfied with producing a statement or recommendations and advocated for their own section of the Johannesburg CAP. The City responded to this request and youth were able to shift the purpose and ultimate goal of being contributors to co-authors of the policy.</p>	<p>The goal of the Leadership Group was to create and lead a process for a possible city-wide Schools Dialogue with students between the ages of 13 to 18 to draft, design and contribute to a submission to the final YCAES that will be presented to the City of Toronto.</p>
<p>Positioning</p> <p><i>How are young people positioned within the wider cultural discourses, and how might this limit what is initially imagined to be possible?</i></p>	<p>At 65.2%, over half of the population of Johannesburg are defined as children and youth (0-34 years), with young people between the ages of 15-34 making up 42.5%. Johannesburg and South Africa have a history of youth activism. The impact that youth and children (high school students) have had is evident in the historical fabric of society, spanning from the 16 June Soweto Uprising of 1976 to the more recent #FeesMustFall student protests. Even with this presence and historical legacy of youth and youth as actors of change, there is still a</p>	<p>Children and youth, defined as 0-24 years make up roughly 25% of the total population of Toronto. Youth between the ages of 15-24 make up 11.4%. Youth voice and youth activism, especially on climate change is noted by research participants as having an important role in influencing action, especially the Climate Strikes that many argue led to the City eventually declaring a climate emergency.² Even with activism, youth, especially younger youth not old enough to vote, are noted by City staff, youth leaders and civil society leaders as often "being dismissed by adults" or having</p>

² CSO Representative 3 interview

THEME	APPROACH	
	Johannesburg	Toronto
<i>How are young people positioned within the program itself, and how do they in turn position others?</i>	<p>dominance of older voices in decision-making spaces.¹ Young people were invited to participate in 2 virtual workshops that were co-designed with staff and youth leaders in the Youth@SAIIA program with the support of academics and the City. The youth participants involved were young people between the ages of 13-24 from across the city. Many of the participants had previously participated in programs like Model United Nations and/or in drafting youth statements and inputs for UN Climate COPs, the South African Climate Bill and other local, provincial, national, regional or global policy processes. Because of this youth leaders were able to serve as peer leaders and mentors to other youth that were new to policy processes.</p>	<p>their work and actions be seen as “unimportant or unnecessary”.³ The dialogue sessions were proposed as being co-designed and co-created educational and advocacy experiences for young people who were interested in and engaged in climate change and cross-cutting issues connected to sustainability. A Leadership Group of 13–18-year-olds was created with the idea that they could lead their own process to create recommendations for the YCAES with more of their peers from across the City. While some of the participants knew each other, most had no previous connection. There were immediate challenges to the proposed model. This was mainly due to the fact that most of the participants were new to decision-making processes and were confused about their mandate.</p>
<i>What processes might work to interrupt limiting assumptions about the capacity of young people?</i>	<p>The framing of participation was left open by the organizational staff and academic supporters. The first workshop had a simple structure that started with a question around what youth wanted to see for the future of their city. Youth leaders facilitated discussion and there was a shift in approach from seeing their work as a type of submission to be considered to advocating that they write their own section of the CAP.</p>	<p>The process was created with greater assumptions about how the Leadership Group would want or be able to work. During the first workshop there were many ideas shared, but there was no consensus about having a larger city-wide process as originally proposed as part of the design process. Many of the youth participants advocated for alternative approaches like a google form survey rather than having a joint live session with more high school students from across the City. This forced a change in the timing and format for the work of the Leadership Group.</p>
Perspective <i>Whose perspectives and voices are included, excluded or privileged in the program?</i>	<p>A google form registration form was created and opened to any young person between the ages of 13-25 residing or from the City of Joburg. While city-wide invites were emailed and posted on social media targeting schools, organizations and youth, reach was limited to those that might be on certain mailing lists or that</p>	<p>A google form application was created to join the Leadership Group and was shared on social media and through the TDSB and Toronto Catholic Schools network. The form was open to any student between the ages 13-18 residing or studying in Toronto. 45 applications were received from students representing 25 schools across the City. Venue and</p>

¹ City Staff 2 interview and Youth Participant 10 interview

³ City Staff 2

THEME	APPROACH	
	Johannesburg	Toronto
	<p>followed the key groups (e.g. the City, Youth@SAIIA, the Global Change Institute, etc.) on social media. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that a large part of this process was started during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. This meant that the first phase of the process was almost exclusively virtual. The virtual platform has limitations and can mean people might be excluded due to the digital divide and/or lack of desire to participate virtually. 42 participants formally participated in the workshops process.</p>	<p>catering constraints, along with need to ensure group size dynamics, meant that 25 students were selected (one per school) and an additional waitlist was created. Due to timing and other scheduling conflicts, only 17 were able to join the first in-person session at City Hall. 2 additional participants later joined the informal virtual discussions. 9 participants joined the last in-person session with others providing additional inputs on a google form and submitting profiles of key initiatives. While efforts were made to disseminate the application form widely most students found their way to the opportunity via their teachers, and it is possible that many teachers did not see the opportunity or did not share the form with their students. Timing was the primary challenge as the activities were only approved for commencement due to ethics and TDSB permission the latter part of the academic year. Had time allowed more could have been done to ensure even greater reach to more schools, youth groups and organizations. The group did include young people from various socio-economic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, but even more representation from some of the city's more marginalized communities would have benefitted the process.</p>
<p><i>What methods are used to invite diverse perspectives?</i></p>	<p>As the workshops were virtual, and there were less constraints for the number of participants due to not having venue or catering costs. All participants that registered were able to join. All participants were given a briefing email prior to the event and were asked to come prepared to join a discussion and contribute their thoughts and ideas for youth input into the CAP. As mentioned above participants of Youth@SAIIA and other youth networks with previous climate and public participation experience tended to dominate the discussion and process. Other younger participants were also part of the Youth@SAIIA's Model United Nations or other provincial debate programs and were comfortable sharing. While this leadership helped</p>	<p>All participants were asked to come prepared with an opening statement that answered guiding questions emailed to them prior to the first workshop at City Hall. The goal was to ensure that everyone was heard at the start of the process. After their initial discussion the process was led by the youth. This presented some challenges as the group was new and many were less comfortable in the space and/or in speaking. The group eventually was encouraged by adult supporters to move to a more informal space as the start of the activities happened in the City Hall Council Chambers. Two breakaway groups were formed in an effort to bring in more perspectives.</p>

THEME	APPROACH	
	Johannesburg	Toronto
<i>Who remains marginalised or is rendered 'voiceless' in the process?</i>	<p>guide the greater group it is also possible that their voices were privileged above newer participants.</p> <p>Youth participants highlight that events like this “tend to attract a certain type of young person” that might be already interested in climate topics, public speaking or debate, politics, and/or current and global affairs.⁴ While the process was opened to any young person in the age group, many “self-reject”, thinking they do not have the right skills, or are as one youth participant put it simply “don’t care” about the issues.⁵ Due to this, it is important to note that the views and experiences of these other groups of young people might not be as represented in the work.</p>	<p>The initial thinking for this process was to start with the Leadership Group and eventually find ways to involve other interested high school students from across the city. In the end the cohort was comprised of only the Leadership Group members. After the first session, efforts were made to involve anyone who had at least applied (the initial 45) as the constraints of venue and catering costs were eliminated for virtual engagement. The Leadership Group highlighted challenges of bringing more people into the process as they navigated differing levels of experience, comfort and feeling of voice in the group. As a result, the process was adapted.</p> <p>The group had representation across many dimensions— age, culture, ethnicity, gender, language, immigration status, sexuality, age, and socio-economic backgrounds. Even with the diversity of the group across these different dimensions due to the recruitment process and eventual group size there was not equal representation across these different areas. This meant that some participants might have felt they were the only person representing a certain view or identity.</p>
Power Relations <i>How are roles and responsibilities assigned, adopted and enacted in the program?</i>	<p>Existing relationships and experience played an important role in the structure of this process as many youth leaders knew each other and/or the organization. Youth@SAIIA staff and academic mentors organized the event with youth leaders and provided a basic structure for the first workshop. Youth@SAIIA additionally served as a type of broker or intermediary between youth participant networks, academic mentors and City officials. Youth@SAIIA also provided access</p>	<p>The Leadership Group had no set roles as it was assumed that the group would determine their own roles. From the first workshop participants were encouraged to take on key roles and responsibilities (e.g. notetaking, facilitation, etc.) where they felt comfortable, and the hope was that they would eventually determine their own structure moving forward. There was hesitancy amongst the group to assign roles and much of this had to do with the fact that the group was navigating new relationships, representation and comfort in the group, and varying degrees of</p>

⁴ Youth Participant 7 interview

⁵ Youth Participant 1 interview

THEME	APPROACH	
	Johannesburg	Toronto
<i>How are relationships managed to ensure equity and respect is enacted between all parties?</i>	<p>to virtual platforms, speakers and overall mentorship support. As the process continued, youth leaders were able to determine the level of support they needed from Y-APs as and were able to call upon the staff and academic mentors to provide logistical (e.g. data, virtual meeting links, etc.) and technical (climate content, links to experts, etc.) support as needed and desired.</p> <p>Older youth leaders signed guidelines provided by the Youth@SAIIA program that described rules, rights and responsibilities for themselves and each other. Underpinning their guidelines were a commitment to inclusion and the right for everyone to be heard and respected.⁶The adult staff and academic supporters tried to remain available but did not interfere unless needed or requested by the group. In group discussions, especially virtual ones, some voices tend to dominate more than others. To mitigate this the youth leaders tried to encourage breakaway rooms and small group discussions to allow for more voices to be heard.</p>	<p>experience in both climate topics and advocacy. There were a number of challenges with the model as some participants described wanting to have more structure while others wanting more autonomy.⁷</p> <p>Participants were encouraged and reminded to try to include all voices and ensure different viewpoints were heard and appreciated. They adopted methods in group discussions to try to listen and capture different views. Some voices dominated the discussion and while everyone maintained a level of respect, some of the participants were quieter. For some being quiet was because they felt nervous about sharing due to age, experience or comfort in public speaking. For others they were quiet because they felt that their views were not being understood. This was especially true for participants that were coming from less represented communities or backgrounds.</p>
Protection <i>What is the balance between practices used to promote protection and those used to enhance participation?</i>	<p>Youth@SAIIA required parents/guardians to sign indemnity forms for virtual and in-person workshops and events. A WhatsApp group was initiated by the participants and Youth@SAIIA staff and academic mentors joined the group to assist with communication needs and to also ensure the safety of participants.</p> <p>Youth research participants of this thesis study were all over 18 and completed an Informed Consent Form that was approved through a University of Toronto ethics protocol.</p>	<p>As the youth participants were 13-18 heightened attention was paid to ensuring their well-being. All participants were provided an Informed Consent Form that formed part of the Y-CAT project and was approved by the University of Toronto ethics protocol and the TDSB. Additional consideration for transportation and access were a factor as youth participants joining the in-person sessions mainly arrived on their own through public transit. Another form was created for parents/guardians to indicate the way in which they would be coming and leaving. Participants asked for a Slack group to allow for more informal communication. This group was monitored by researchers to ensure safeguarding.</p>

⁶ CSO Representative 1 interview to be entered

⁷ Youth Participant 28 interview to be entered

THEME	APPROACH	
	Johannesburg	Toronto
<p><i>What measures are needed to protect young people's political, social and material access and safety?</i></p>	<p>Youth participants in the process could remain anonymous or decide to share their name. Most were and are public about their participation as this is something that was and is viewed as a valuable area of advocacy and a chance to build and demonstrate skills. Youth@SAIIA, academic partners promote safeguarding of participants and often serve as an intermediary to the policymakers, the public or media. A number of youth leaders in this process have since spoken publicly, published work and won awards.⁸</p>	<p>Due to the nature and timing of this process all participant information will be confidential, and any information drawn from their participation will be anonymized.</p>
<p><i>How can young people themselves play an active role in ensuring the safety of their peers and those affected by their programs?</i></p>	<p>Participants over 18 were aware of the additional safeguarding needed for under 18s and checked in with Youth@SAIIA staff to ensure parent/guardians knew of high school participants. The participants w</p>	<p>The role of ensuring safety was done more by the researchers than by the participants. Informally participants spoke to each other and tried to create safe and open spaces for sharing. This might have developed further had timing of the process been longer.</p>
<p>Place</p> <p><i>What are the social, physical and virtual spaces in which participation can take place?</i></p> <p><i>How does place or context affect what is possible or desirable in relation to participation?</i></p> <p><i>What mediates access to particular spaces and places?</i></p> <p><i>What strategies might be needed to create reach and access to the</i></p>	<p>Events took place virtually during the main part of the process.</p> <p>Youth@SAIIA provided data to support participants, but the realities of the digital divide and access to computers and decent Wi-Fi means that there were young people that experienced the process differently and that were excluded because of their lack of digital access.</p> <p>Even though efforts were made to bridge the digital divide, many youth did not hear or gain access to the process.</p>	<p>The first event took place at City Hall, that were then followed by virtual meetings and a final session at the Centre for Social Innovation.</p> <p>It is important to note the influence of a space like City Hall, not only for perceptions of power structures, but also for the evolving understanding and appreciation of what such spaces represent. The virtual meetings presented a challenge from some due to study conflicts and an expressed tiredness with virtual platforms. The last session was held close to exams and presented a challenge for some to attend. In all three instances efforts were made to try and accommodate as many people as possible, but it is apparent that the overall timing caused difficulty.</p>

⁸ Focus Groups 1 and 2

THEME	APPROACH	
	Johannesburg	Toronto
<i>spaces of participation?</i>		
<p>Process</p> <p><i>How will the methods structure and enable participatory exchange, and critical and creative thought?</i></p> <p><i>Which methods will best foster practices of inclusion, respect and support for others?</i></p>	<p>Youth leaders facilitated the discussion and drafted their ideas in an “discursive, emergent and dialogical” approach (Vogel et al., 2022, p. 11).</p> <p>As the process continued, youth leaders were able to determine the level of engagement they needed from adult staff and academic mentors and were able to call upon them to provide logistical (e.g. data, virtual meeting links, etc.) and technical (climate content, links to experts, etc.) support as needed and desired. Relationships, experience, and time did play an important role in the structure of this process and many youth leaders knew each other and/or the organization. Youth@SAIIA continued to serve as the connector between youth participant networks, academic mentors, and City officials to convene a platform. Through youth facilitated discussion there was a shift in approach from seeing their work as a type of submission to be considered to advocating that they write their own section of the CAP in what was later known as the Johannesburg Youth Climate Action Plan or JYCAP. After the initial workshop youth met in many informal drafting sessions to create the JYCAP and further inputs into the CAP as a whole. Even though it has been few years since the writing took place one story that came up in both focus group discussion was when youth presented their work in a meeting with the City officials, C40 representatives and academic mentors. When first presented, the City officials had assumed that the document had been written by the academic mentors and not the youth participants.</p>	<p>The initial thinking for this process was to start with the Leadership Group and eventually find ways, led by the group, to involve other interested high school students from across the city through an open virtual event to accommodate more participation. The virtual option was also due to budget limitations and the idea that with less constraints due to physical venue or catering that more young people might be able to participate. During the first workshop there were many ideas shared, but there was no consensus about having a larger city-wide process as originally proposed as part of the design process. Many of the youth participants advocated for alternative approaches like a google form survey rather than having a joint live session with other high school students. The Leadership Group highlighted challenges of bringing more people into the process as they navigated differing levels of experience, comfort and feelings around their voice be heard and appreciated in the group. In their notes they also wrote that the reasons and trepidation for having a city-wide session “include social anxiety and youth having to take time out of their day to attend the virtual session.”</p> <p>It was apparent that not everyone wanted or expected the same thing. After an informal virtual session, a Leadership Group Submission Guidelines document was created to provide more structure. Two options were outlined to create and support a submission into the YCAES that was based on the feedback, discussion and ideas circulated.</p> <p>A youth participant saw an opportunity to build their organization’s work and asked if it was possible to use their organization’s existing resources to convene another in-person session to develop a direct submission. In early June, a final youth-led in-person session was convened at the Centre for Social Innovation in Toronto. Due to timing and exams only nine participants were able to join. The session took place and</p>

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		<p>combined elements of both submission options with an intergenerational dialogue with representatives from various climate organizations and set aside time for drafting key recommendations. Ideas and points were handwritten and later transcribed into a google doc so that those that missed the session could add further input. Two profiles were also shared by the end of June, but as the earlier session had developed recommendations that were shared with the group a further session was not planned. The group recommendations and profiles have been reviewed by Y-CAT team and now forms part of the input being used to create the YCAES. The group Slack remains active and while there is no further formal programming planned by Y-CAT, participants have expressed a desire to continue building a network and their relationships with each other.</p>