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“You have to talk to those who were there (Utøya)...”

Promoting children’s participation – A case of expert meetings and groups within the ombudsman in Norway



Author

Polycarp Musinguzi

Erasmus Mundus Master’s Programme in Social Work with Families and Children

Supervisor

Ass. Prof. Ingunn T Ellingsen

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate expert meetings and groups as a distinctive approach to promoting the participation of children and young people within the context of the children's ombudsman in Norway. To achieve this broad objective, specific questions revolving around the rationale, character, significance and bottlenecks of expert meetings and groups were formulated. Premised on the findings of this investigation, the study would then draw implications for policy and practice within the field.

A qualitative approach, in particular case study design was selected to facilitate collection of data and analysis of the resulting findings. This included collecting data about the case using in-depth / qualitative interviews and analyzing relevant documents. Coding and analysis of primary data drew inspiration from a constructivist grounded theory approach, while in analyzing secondary data, this approach was complemented with qualitative content analysis. The entire coding and analysis procedure was facilitated by NVivo's powerful analytical tools. In general, the choice of a qualitative approaches for this study was informed by their ability to deliver a thick understanding of the research phenomena, and describe the findings giving due consideration to the relevance of the context

The findings of this investigation have revealed that expert meetings and groups have a clear premise; essentially as a fulfillment of children's fundamental and democratic right to actively participate in society as competent citizens, in accordance with evolving capacities. At the same time, these initiatives are intended to provide a powerful empowerment force through which to underscore the plight of children, so that predominantly adult run systems can take conscious child sensitive precautions, both those required to alleviate present indignity, and prevent future reoccurrences. The study observes that the character of expert meetings and groups celebrates a firm grounding in the basic principles required for achieving an effective and ethical participatory ethos. The findings further point to an array of individual, organizational and wider system benefits accruing from these initiatives. Outstanding benefits include; providing a platform for the realization of children's rights, propelling active empowerment for participants, and learning outcomes for adults; while consciously challenging the system to effect quality and more child friendly services.

Amidst such gains, the ombudsman acknowledges that the promise of participation lies in the power to inculcate within society an all-round value system; that both celebrates children's competency, and demonstrates genuine commitment to engage with them respectfully as equals. Such a model of participation should not be restrictively interpreted in view of tokenistic information giving and collaborative engagement; when the fundamental premises for according children and young people an equal opportunity to influence the agenda for consultation or other forms of participation largely remain an adult monopoly. Even more pertinent is that participation should not be constructed as a magic wand wielded by adults to exterminate problems in particular situations where the wellbeing of children is threatened. To the contrary, participation must be visibly seen, felt and robustly encouraged in natural settings within which both adults and children are in constant interaction. It must be a norm which all

children everywhere can experience for a right, anytime, anywhere. Nevertheless, practical realization of a participatory ethos of this nature in many contexts presents real, conflicting and daunting dilemmas with which both children and adults must collaboratively grapple.

In conclusion, this study draws on the pool of benefits reported, to argue the case for establishing independent national human rights institutions for children; and for concerted efforts among duty bearers to develop pragmatic solutions for realizing their participation rights within the diversity of natural settings. This study raises the question on possible mechanisms and responsibility centres to follow-up on the uptake and redress of recommendations by the ombudsman, ensuing from expert meetings and groups. A complementary question is how to achieve a participatory culture described above. Satisfying these dilemmas lay outside the scope of this study, but will nevertheless be important for maintaining the institution's relevance as a credible voice and watchdog for children's rights. More importantly, it is a question to which children everywhere merit valid, honest, quick, respectful and uncensored accountability from across civilizations world over.

Title: “You have to talk to those who were there (Utøya¹)...” Promoting children's participation - A case of expert meetings and groups within the ombudsman in Norway

Author: Polycarp Musinguzi

Key words

Child Participation, Consultation, Children's ombudsman; Expert meetings, Expert groups

Cover photo: Post it messages from the expert group on violence and sexual abuse, illustrating who children consider significant in their lives

¹ A largely forested island situated in the Tyrifjorden Lake; Buskerud County, Norway. It is also the scene of the July, 2011 massacre in which 69 people (33 under the age of 18) were brutally murdered and several wounded, while attending the Norwegian Labour Party's Workers' Youth League (AUF) annual summer youth camp.

Abbreviations and acronyms

AASWG	Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CEF	Common Wealth Education Fund
CPA	Centre for Performing Arts
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ENOC	The European Network of Ombudspersons for Children
FFP	The Organization for Families and Friends of Prisoners
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
JNNE	Japan NGO Network for Education
KDG	Kigulu Development Group
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender Labor and Social Development
NHRI	National Human Rights Institutions
NSD	Norwegian Data Protection Official
RBA	Rights Based Approach
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education

Definition of key words

Child participation

“It is an ongoing process of children’s expression and active involvement in decision-making at different levels in matters that concern them” (O’Kane, 2003, p. 13; Ponet, 2011, p. 9)²

Consultative participation

It is “a process in which adults seek children’s views in order to build knowledge and understanding of their lived lives and experience” (Lansdown, 2011, p. 147)

Children’s Ombudsman

This is a public office or secretariat responsible for representing the interests of children in a particular country or society

Expert meetings

These are relatively short one-off consultative meetings with children and young people organized around an issue of particular concern to the ombudsman

Expert groups

These are comprised of children and young people with experiences in a particular area; and who work for a period of time on important issues together with ombudsman’s staff

² Definition from Save the Children UK OSCAR (Office of South and Central Asia Region)

Chapter one

Introduction

1.1 Background

In the last three decades, the notion of independent rights for children has gained unprecedented prominence; increasingly drawing attention of different actors at local, national, regional and international contexts. One possible explanation for this positive surge is the quantum leap in our increasing understanding and appreciation of the problems that have historically faced children in their everyday living environments. In many communities world over, children have often been relegated to the status of second class citizens, and denied enjoyment of the same set of rights as their adult counterparts (Burke, 2010; Cloke and Davies, 1997; Lansdown, 1997). This has left scores, particularly in the developing world exposed to numerous vulnerabilities, most of which have been widely documented.

The State of the World's Children Report (2014a) for instance shows that even after 25 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter CRC), young people's rights in many respects continue to be violated often with impunity. The report calls to mind that in 2012 alone, 6.6 million children under the age of five died from preventable causes; adding that world over 15 percent of children continued to engage in some form of exploitative labor. A previous report (UNICEF, 2009) had indicated that in that year, 1 billion children were deprived of one or more services essential to their survival and development, 101 million children were not attending primary school, 37 million children were not receiving iodized salt to protect them from iodine deficiency, while 22 million children were not protected from diseases through routine immunization. Other evidence indicates that compared to adults, children are at a greater risk of abuse, violence, exploitation, harmful labor, trafficking, and various other problems associated with combat, HIV, AIDS and poverty (UNHCR, 2012; Wessells, 2009).

On the one hand, the situation above is evidence of the nature and magnitude of problems affecting children. On the other, it depicts the increasing pressure on both formal and informal mechanisms for protecting children (Eynon and Lilley, 2010; Kostelny et al., 2014; Wessells, 2009). Complementary, it reiterates a call to accelerate efforts aimed at promoting children's

rights and improve their wellbeing. Of the various legislative and policy initiatives, the CRC remains a long lasting landmark given its role in galvanizing the position of children as holders of rights to provision, protection and participation; commonly referred to as the “Three P’s” (Mayall, 2000; Wringe, 1996). Most importantly, the CRC recognizes children as independent and active citizens, and urges state parties to take practical steps aimed at promoting young people’s democratic and civic participation.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Of all the rights enshrined within the CRC, the right to participation has been particularly distinguished both for its direct benefits to children, but also as an indispensable channel through which they can realize other rights (Lansdown, 2010, 2001a). This is against the recognition that although children have rights, adults in most cases possess the ultimate decision making responsibility. Thus by listening to children and expanding their opportunities to participate, adults provide the means through which children can have a voice in matters affecting them. While the CRC emphasizes children’s rights to participation, reservations particularly to this article by some state parties clearly indicate difficulties in realizing these rights in practice (Sandberg, 2003; Smith and Lødrup, 2004; Verhellen and Weyts, 2003). Besides, the CRC does not suggest any practical approaches to achieve child participation. The responsibility for fulfilling these rights remains an obligation of relevant stakeholders; and depending on contextual realities, the approaches used may vary across societies.

In Norway, the expert meetings and groups represent an initiative by the children’s Ombudsman to promote young people’s participation rights. This approach is premised on the understanding that no matter their age, background or capacities, children are competent individuals, and that with appropriate support; they can influence decisions affecting their situations. This positive conception notwithstanding, there is inadequate scientific knowledge of the expert meetings and groups’ approach to the multifaceted issue of young people’s participation. Similar or related initiatives continue to be implemented elsewhere, but with little academic investigation of their character, effectiveness or the challenges they face. This has implications on the availability of and prospects for exchanging best practices in the field. Hence, there is a glaring need to ensure that where such practical approaches to child participation exist, they are carefully studied, their impact assessed, challenges understood,

lessons learnt and best practices documented to inform further initiatives in the field (Lansdown, 2011; Tisdall et al., 2008).

1.3 Purpose and objectives

1.3.1 General purpose

The overriding purpose of this study is to understand the position and role of expert meetings and groups in promoting child participation within the Norwegian children's ombudsman

1.3.2 Objectives and Research questions

The objectives of this study have been categorized under three main themes, each addressing specific questions;

To understand the rationale of child participation for the Ombudsman; and the position of expert meetings and expert groups in that respect

- 1) Of what relevance is child participation to the Ombudsman?
- 2) What is the expert meetings and groups' approach to child participation?

To examine the practical influence of expert meetings and expert groups; and the bottlenecks to their establishment

- 3) How relevant are expert meetings and groups in achieving the objectives of child participation?
- 4) What challenges affect the effective functioning of expert meetings and groups?

Capitalizing on the experience of expert meetings and groups; to draw implications for policy and practice regarding children's rights in general and participation in particular

- 5) What messages derive from the example of expert meetings and groups; and how can these benefit the global children's rights agenda?

1.4 Significance of the study

This research seeks to interrogate a particular approach to child participation. A study of this nature therefore carries significance in many ways. Foremost, the findings add to the existing body of knowledge about participation in the broadest sense; and specifically in terms of methodology for engaging children and young people. Further on, and since many studies have focused on secondary data analysis, these findings contribute a methodological approach for investigating child participation.

The findings are also envisaged to benefit a broad spectrum of actors involved in child rights work, independent and public alike; particularly those working with participation or promoting the idea. Although the context for the study is specific to Norway and the Ombudsman in particular, and while recognizing that effective child participation takes cognizance of the contextual specificities (Healy, 1998), nevertheless the study provides an opportunity for documenting the Norwegian experience. By drawing key lessons, the study also provides a platform for possible adaptation of the best practices elsewhere in a contextual relevant manner.

For the Norwegian children's Ombudsman, the study offers an invaluable opportunity to reflect on issues of methodological and ethical performance, as well as practical value addition from an etic perspective. In countries without an established children's Ombudsman, the Norwegian experience can benefit stakeholders at community, organizational and national levels on possible approaches to engage children and young people on various issues. And for organizations like Save the Children, advocating for the establishment of Ombudsmen institutions in other countries, these findings can inform processes and a possible methodological approach for eliciting children's views on what shape such institutions might take or what issues they should be responsible for.

Chapter two

Review of Literature

2.1 Defining child participation

Although encompassed in a growing body of literature, the concept of participation has not been clearly defined (Calder, 1995, p. 753; Morrison, 1996, p. 133) and in many instances, this term has been used differently to mean different things depending on the context within which it is applied. Definition of the term becomes even more complex when it is applied to children, perhaps because traditionally in many societies around the world, the very idea of child participation was considered rather uncultured or at least it was not accorded the same significance it commands today. Despite its rather loose definition, the notion of participation tends to be associated with ideals of social justice (Healy, 1998), service user control and leadership (Ryburn, 1991a); trust and respect (Ryburn, 1991b); equality between professionals and service user (Mittler, 1995); and mutuality (Shemmings and Shemmings, 1995). In other literature, participation has been often associated with processes of information sharing, collaborative or shared decision making, citizenship and democracy.

In the introduction to General Comment No. 12 (United Nations, 2009) on the right of the child to be heard, the Committee of the Rights of the Child considers the meaning of participation;

A widespread practice has emerged in recent years, which has been broadly conceptualized as “participation”, although this term itself does not appear in the text of article 12. This term has evolved and is now widely used to describe ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes.

This understanding of child participation appears to be in agreement with definitions found elsewhere. O’Kane (2003, p. 13) for instance defines child participation as "an ongoing process of children’s expression and active involvement in decision-making at different levels in matters that concern them. It requires information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults, based on mutual respect, and full consideration of children’s views in the light of their age and maturity”. Such is the spirit in which child participation is commonly understood in everyday usage.

2.2 Development of child participation

The need to involve children in decision making on issues that concern them has a long history. While the need to involve children is up swinging in many societies, participation has a record of struggle to elevate it to the rather distinguished status it commands today. One possible explanation for this slow development is that in most societies across the world, children have traditionally occupied a weak and secondary position to that of adults (Lansdown, 2011, 2010, 1997; Malone and Hartung, 2010; White and Choudhury, 2010); and as such they have been perceived as young and generally incompetent to form independent views or participate in a wide range of activities. Besides, children are often perceived vulnerable, hence requiring adults' protection (Van Bijleveld et al., 2014). Although it might be true that children because of their age, maturity and physical weakness are especially vulnerable, rigid perceptions of this nature are often restrictive and in many instances limit young people's opportunities for participation (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010; Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006).

Perceptions of childhood in many communities have also constrained the very idea of children participation. Childhood is often viewed as a period of innocence and play in which children should whenever possible be protected from the vagaries of life. To allow children opportunities for participation is therefore seen to confer responsibility, which in turn is interpreted as an intrusion into this period, a burden to the innocent child;

For many adults, childhood is imbued with a rather romanticized notion of innocence – a period free from responsibility or conflict and dominated by fantasy, play and opportunity; hence any attempts to offer children greater control over their lives is seen as an intrusion into this period, denying them the right to enjoy their childhood (Lansdown, 1997, p. 22).

With such a restrictive perspective of children embedded in the traditions and ways of life of many societies, it took quite some time for the idea of independent rights for children, and particularly for the right to participation to come to the centre stage on the international scene, later on permeate domestic legal and policy circles. Early initiatives included the adoption by the League of Nations of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1924, which became the first international treaty concerning children's rights.

The revolution in children's rights reached the pinnacle in 1989 when full text of the CRC was unanimously adopted by the United Nations (hereafter UN) General Assembly; making it the

world's first legally binding instrument on the rights of the child. Within the CRC, children's right to participation are specifically addressed in Article 12; while the rights to freedom of expression, access to information, freedom of thought and conscience, and freedom of association - the other complementary aspects of participation are addressed in the subsequent articles 13, 14 and 16. Article 12 states that:

State parties shall ensure 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.
(United Nations, 1989)

This revolutionary article not only makes child participation a right, but also recognizes that children are competent citizens who when supported in a manner considering their age and maturity, are able to influence their lives. Complementary, Article 12 of the CRC requires all stakeholders working with children to listen to their views and take them into consideration when making decisions that affect children. This is against the evidence that child participation breeds benefits for children, organizations and society at large (Lansdown, 2011). Such a convention therefore imposes on various stakeholders primarily the state; "obligations to respect, to protect, and to fulfil" the rights of the child (UNFPA, 2010, p. 47).

To date, the CRC remains the most widely ratified human rights treaty world over with a total 114 ratifications from member states of the United Nations. Somalia and United States, the other two UN member countries have only signed the convention, but not ratified it. Nonetheless, for the convention to achieve optimum effectiveness, the onus is on ratifying countries to ensure that their respective domestic legislative and policy frameworks are in harmony with the provisions enshrined in the CRC (United Nations, 2003; Willow, 2010). On her part, Norway incorporated the CRC within her national Human Rights Act in September 2003. According to Kjørholt and Lidén (2004, p. 63), "this incorporation means that national legal Acts affecting children have to be reconstructed in order to be in line with the framework and the different articles in the CRC.

2.3 Ombudsmen institutions for children

Albeit a popular concept, 'ombudsman' derives traces in ancient Scandinavia where "Ombud originally meant 'ambassador' or 'delegate', used commonly to imply a messenger from the king to the people" (Flekkøy, 2002, p. 404). Its contemporary usage, and in this study implies

not just a person occupying the position, but rather the collective institutional establishment (Miljeteig, 2006, 2005) responsible for representing the interests of a vulnerable group of people who are thought to face particular challenges, and whose issues therefore need particular attention. Such therefore is the spirit in which the idea of a children's ombudsman was first implemented in the democratic state of Norway in 1981; even though the initial idea was conceived by Save the Children in neighboring Sweden (ENOC, 2009). Following Norway's precedence, ombudsmen for children institutions were established in many other countries. In Costa Rica and New Zealand, fully fledged institutions were established, while in others, they were established either at the state or city level as was the case in South Australia or at the city level in Vienna and Jerusalem (Flekkøy, 2002; Lansdown, 2002). Therefore whereas ombudsmen institutions exist in many countries today, there are variations in their shape and the manner in which they operate.

2.3.1 The ombudsman for children in Norway

In Norway where the idea was first actualized, other ombudsmen institutions for; Public Administration (1962), Consumer Affairs (1972), and Equal Status of Men and Women (1979) had been established prior to the children's. Despite mounting evidence justifying its need, the proposal to establish an ombudsman for children was initially opposed on the basis that;

- i. The ombudsman might undermine the authority of parents
- ii. Other institutions might renege on their own responsibilities in relation to children
- iii. The ombudsman would be too expensive
- iv. The office could be bureaucratic (Flekkøy, 2002, p. 407)

Considering such resistance, it wouldn't be surprising that even when the law establishing the ombudsman was passed in March 1981, the decision followed a narrow majority by the Storting (Parliament). There is strong reason suggesting that the successful establishment of the institution partly owes credit to the active promotion of the idea by an international nongovernmental organization; Save the Children following the International Year of the child in 1979. Since the first ombudsman took office in September 1981, Norway has until now seen five people occupying that position. Initially, the ombudsman could hold office for a period of four years, with the possibility for reappointment to second and last term in office. Pursuant to the existing Act however, he or she can only sit for 6 years with no provision for reappointment.

The overriding mandate of the Norwegian ombudsman is to “promote the interests of children vis-à-vis public and private authorities and to follow up the development of conditions under which children grow up”³. This includes among others: ensuring that authorities comply with the provisions of the CRC; proposing measures that can strengthen children’s safety under the law; and most importantly ensuring that children are heard and their views taken into account when authorities make decisions. The institution’s mandate however does not include: handling conflicts within the family; intervening in legal processes of the court; or handling cases belonging to the jurisdiction of other ombudsmen. Similarly, the office cannot reverse decisions that have been made by other governmental authorities such as child welfare services, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, schools or courts of law. Because the ombudsman lacks decision making authority, Flekkøy (2002, p. 408) writes that, “advocacy via the spread of information and documented case presentation is therefore its principal weapon”

2.3.2 Ombudsmen institutions and child participation

Wherever they have been established, the primary goal of ombudsmen institutions is “to be a voice for children and nothing else” (Flekkøy, 2002, p. 411). More specifically, ombudsmen institutions perform a number of functions among others; advocacy, monitoring and oversight. In addition to the above, a fundamental task of the ombudsman is to facilitate children’s participation by expanding spaces through which they can express their voices in matters that affect them (Miljeteig, 2006, p. 27). Indeed in many countries, the ombudsman has been involved in activities to facilitate children's participation either by involving them in actual decision making; seeking their views through consultative processes or by facilitating their interaction with relevant decision makers.

The role of the ombudsman to promote children and young people’s participation is clearly elaborated in the General Comment No.2 (United Nations, 2002); and in many countries where the institution exists, there is a legal requirement for the ombudsman to promote child participation, both in its activities and in other areas where decisions affecting children are made; such as in social and welfare services, judicial hearings, marriage arbitration etc. Results of a study commissioned by the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (hereafter ENOC) in 2008 indicated that existing statutes in Denmark, Lithuania, Austria, Cyprus, England and Wales among other countries require the ombudsman to consult and involve

³ See Act No. 5 (March 6, 1981) Relating to the Ombudsman for Children

children in her activities or at least promote children's rights to be heard by others. In Scotland, the law categorically states that "the children's commissioner must encourage the participation of children and young people in the work of the commissioner" (Hodgkin and Newell, 2008, p. 7). In most of the countries surveyed, ombudsmen institutions reported that they were actively involving children in their activities or willing to do so.

2.4 Child participation in practice

For the CRC to be effective, ratifying countries are required to ensure that it is fully incorporated in their respective national legislation. Thus in countries like Norway where it has been domesticated into national law; this provides a landmark for realizing children's participation rights in practice. Several examples from all over the world have been documented of children participating in various ways; including participation in research and evaluation, consultative for a, health promotion and community development. In Sri Lanka, The Centre for Performing Arts (CPA) has been instrumental in facilitating children to express themselves and share experiences related to trauma and war through dance, drama, poetry and cultural activities (O'Kane, 2006). Case studies in Uganda (MGLSD, 2008) documented the experiences of children's participation through a project initiated by a local association - Kigulu Development Group (KDG) with support from the Common Wealth Education Fund (CEF). Supported by their teachers, children were able to prepare and present their findings as part of the bottom-up approaches to assess the implementation of the government's Universal Primary Education (UPE) Programme. In South Africa, Moses (2008) reports about examples of children's participation through demonstrations and other forms of civil disobedience against various forms of mismanagement particularly in school settings.

There is evidence in other countries around Europe of children participating through various initiatives including; children's councils, youth fora and advisory panels. In the ENOC study, the children's Commissioner in Ireland reported involving children by means of a Standing Youth Advisory Panel whose activities include; "advising the office on strategies for communicating with young people, communicating issues from children and young people as well as co-facilitating workshops and making presentations at conferences" (Hodgkin and Newell, 2008, p. 10). Empirical cases of children and young people's participation have also been documented both in England and the United States. In the latter, a youth commission was constituted in San Francisco to advise the mayor and other political players on legislative,

policy, budgetary and programme issues affecting children and young people (Checkoway et al., 2005). In England, Franklin and Sloper's study (2006) investigated the participation of disabled children and young people in decision making within the social services and reported a positive engagement of children in care planning by majority municipal authorities. Disabled children were however "least likely to be involved in child protection conferences or their own health plans" (Franklin and Sloper, 2006, p. 729).

In Norway, the domestication of the Children's Convention opened a new chapter within the country's children's rights discourse and practice especially regarding initiatives to involve children and young people in planning and decision making. Significant changes worth mentioning include: legislative amendments in the Children Act, the Adoption Act and the Child Welfare Act; to include provisions requiring concerned practitioners to not only inform children, but also listen to them and take their views into consideration when making decisions that directly or indirectly affect them. Subsequent initiatives to promote children's participation rights included The Norwegian Council for Children and Cultural Affairs' funded project – "Try Yourself"; through which children were supported to develop innovative projects in various fields such as culture, leisure, entertainment, sports and entrepreneurship 'on their own terms' (Kjørholt and Lidén, 2004, p. 68). More contemporary initiatives in Norway include youth councils; mainly established at the municipal level to enable and lower the threshold so children below the voting age can participate in political and democratic decision making.

Elsewhere, the Norwegian ombudsman has established expert meetings and expert groups to give children an opportunity to suggest ways in which their living conditions can be improved. This method is closely related to the one used by ChangeFactory; a local organization dedicated to promoting the participation in decision making of children especially those with experience of the child welfare and related service systems. Evidence of related approaches has been found in other countries. In Sweden for instance, "Young Speakers" represents an initiative through which the children's Ombudsman facilitates young people both to report their experiences and forward them to important decision makers (Barnombudsmannen, 2011). Common in these initiatives is a recognition that young people possess valuable experiences upon which adults can draw to improve decision making, in the best interest of children; thus underscoring the notion of the 'competent child'.

2.5 Requirements for effective child participation

While cultures, practices and attitudes previously averse to the idea of independent rights for children; particularly the right to participation have gradually slackened, concerns about the effective and proper way to realize this right in practice remain prevalent (Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006). Indeed concerns that effective child participation is for many a formidable venture have been confirmed by research evidence in which children themselves expressed dismay about the processes used to engage them; adding that they did not feel valued, listened to or their views taken seriously (Lansdown, 1997; Sinclair, 1998). This has influenced the development of practical suggestions on possible ways to improve participatory engagement with children. These suggestions encompass ways of working that are envisaged to make the process of child participation not only effective, but also meaningful and ethical.

As a rule of thumb, recognition of a child's capacity to participate is a key ingredient of any initiatives to involve children, and it determines the effectiveness of the entire process. Only when adults have appreciated that children have the capacity to construct their individual meanings, and that their ways of doing so need not resemble those of adults can anyone claim to point in the direction of meaningful and ethical child participation (Kirby et al., 2003; Malone and Hartung, 2010). Thus, Sommer et al (2010) explanation that "children are remarkable people that interpret what they hear, see, feel, and smell and they experience situations in ways that not necessarily will be compatible to the ways adults construe their world" clearly exemplifies this stance. But while recognizing that children have the capacity to participate is an essential step towards achieving their effective participation, several authors have written about the need to provide adequate, age appropriate information to enable children make an independent informed decision on whether or not to participate in any activities (Cloke and Davies, 1997; Lansdown, 1997; Sinclair, 1998; Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006). The contents of such information might include among other things: what rights children have (Cloke and Davies, 1997); the possible consequences of the decisions that are ultimately made (Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006); or how the information they provide will be used.

In addition to recognizing children's capacity to participate and providing them age appropriate information, children must be allowed to participate on their own terms (Cloke and Davies, 1997; Nordenfors, 2010; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). Using Antonio Gramsci's concept of the 'organic intellectual', Malone and Hartung (2010, p. 25) describe this as "Organic

participation” alternatively “child initiated participation” where children themselves have an opportunity to participate in society in truly authentic ways as ‘active citizens’. Such a conception of participation demands that adults desist from setting the stage for children or fitting them in predefined structures; but rather that they allow young people the discretion to decide what ways they themselves consider appropriate to participate.

Other essential elements of effective child participation often mentioned include: the need for adults to let go their power, promote a democratic engagement with children as equal partners, while recognizing children’s agency; and to rethink their roles in terms of facilitating rather than directing the process (Hart, 2008; Healy, 1998; Lansdown, 1997). Complementary strategies involve; providing children with feedback on the outcome of their participation and allowing them an opportunity to appeal decisions made (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010; Sinclair, 1998), monitoring and evaluating the process (Lansdown, 2011), promoting a context relevant participatory ethos (Healy, 1998; Malone and Hartung, 2010; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010; Velayutham, 2006); as well as the need to appreciate that children are individuals with different experiences which require individualized support (Cloke and Davies, 1997; Lansdown, 2011; Smith and Lødrup, 2004).

Lansdown (2011) elaborates on the essentials of participatory engagement; without which children risk being manipulated, exploited or even put at risk. Participation according to these standards must be: transparent and informative; voluntary; respectful; relevant; facilitated with child friendly environments and working methods that take cognizance of children’s individual capacities and lived experiences. It must also be inclusive of all groups of children with special attention to the views of marginalized, often neglected children; must be supported by a comprehensive training programme; safe and sensitive to risk and above all, it must be accountable. Unlike other authors, Lansdown emphasizes that for participation to be complete, these standards ought to be interpreted in view of the principles enshrined within the CRC: "recognition for the age and maturity of the child; consideration of their best interests, child protection and ensuring that children are not discriminated against in any way" (Lansdown, 2011, p. 152).

2.6 Benefits of child participation

When the above requirements are fulfilled, there is evidence suggesting that child participation breeds benefits not only for children themselves, but also for communities, organizations, and the wider society. According to the United Kingdom's Department for Children, schools and Families (2009);

The active promotion of participation of children and young people should lead to change. This can be done by ensuring more involvement and opportunities for them to have a real say in decision making. It also creates benefits to organizations, the young and to the community.

At the individual level, child participation nurtures confidence, a sense of self-esteem and the ability to take on everyday challenges (Burke, 2010; Ciara, 2010; Malone and Hartung, 2010). Children develop self-control, autonomy, greater sensitivity and where necessity calls, they are able to make responsible decisions, giving equal consideration to the views of others. This in turn grooms them into responsible citizens, able and competent to contribute to the development of their communities (Hart, 1992). For specific groups of children especially those affected by discrimination, marginalization or similar disempowering processes, participation can help promote empowerment (Healy, 1998) by acting as a powerful channel through which to make public their predicaments, and challenge deep-rooted oppressive and exploitative tendencies. In this way, child participation becomes an important instrument in realising other rights (Lansdown, 2010). Participation therefore becomes for children an important ingredient in the quest for equality and social justice and also contributes to initiatives to alleviate child poverty (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010).

Beyond the individual level, participation of children has been linked to processes of civil society development, democracy, accountability and service improvement (Cloke and Davies, 1997; Lansdown, 2011). Against the evidence that children have different considerations from those of adults, and that they have a better understanding of their situation, it becomes undeniable that when genuinely involved and supported in an age appropriate way to voice their concerns, the result is a system that responds to the unmet needs of children. This not only ensures efficiency gains in terms of service enhancement, but it is also associated with positive learning outcomes for organisations and their professionals which enhances both personal and institutional development (Burke, 2010).

2.7 Barriers to child participation

Despite the widely documented benefits of child participation, and although the CRC has achieved a record 194 ratifications, it goes without saying that to date, many individuals, organizations and nations are grappling to effect genuine child participation in their work (Sandberg, 2003; Smith and Lødrup, 2004; Verhellen and Weyts, 2003). And while it is possible to identify challenges related to contemporary difficulties facing children agencies including; the increasing number of service users vis-à-vis workers and heavy case backlogs, it is also clear that most of these challenges lie elsewhere.

Without discounting that slow progress appreciating independent rights for children is an obvious challenge (Cloke and Davies, 1997), an even greater impediment to achieving child participation is the controversy between child protection on one hand, and respecting children's autonomy and independence on the other (Lansdown, 1997; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010; Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006). It therefore follows that in fulfilling their duty to protect, adult 'life-savers' often underestimate children's capacities to explore the world around them, and in many ways block their opportunities to experience participation. However, this protectionist premise has been refuted on the grounds that although it might be true that children because of their particular circumstances need protection, this should not be a valid excuse to deny them opportunities for participation (Lansdown, 1997; Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006).

At other times, children have been denied opportunities to participate on the pretext that they do not possess the requisite competences (Lansdown, 2011, 1997) or that they cannot assume responsibility accruing from exercise of those rights. However as in the previous scenario, some scholars have openly critiqued this argument as biased, misguided and uninformed. Hart (1992, 2008) for instance argues that in many developing countries, children learn to participate at a very tender age even without adults; thus the view that children cannot participate because they lack competency and experience is simply biased and unfounded. Similarly Lansdown (2011) argues that if adults could develop strategies of working with children that take cognizance of their age, experience and problem situation, concerns about competency would gradually disappear, as children respond better to methods that appreciate their evolving capacities. Other authors caution that adult involvement is not necessarily detrimental to child participation so long as it does not overshadow the views and initiatives of children (Ciara, 2010; Hart, 2008; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010).

Within an organizational setting, challenges to child participation are related to case backlogs because of the inadequate number of workers (Cloke and Davies, 1997; Healy, 1998); power differences between children and professionals (Burke, 2010; Healy, 1998); as well as lack of both technical as well as emotional support for professionals (Healy, 1998). Additional challenges include; lack of proper communication and language skills to engage children (Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006), lack of legal provisions and clear structures for involving children, coupled with financial constraints (Hodgkin and Newell, 2008). In addition to these, Hart (1992) and Healy (1998) identify that other challenges originate from service users own deficits and underdeveloped capacities on one hand; and on the other, workers' inadequacy to attend to these in ways that empower children and young people experiencing difficulties, to participate in meaningful ways.

Malone and Hartung (2010) discuss bottlenecks to child participation resulting from importing participatory methods developed from and for other fields; a concern that was earlier extensively discussed in Healy (1998). It is further argued that imported models can often turn out to be detrimental to the very ideal of child participation since they presuppose predefined ways of work that may not necessarily fit the practice demands of a field like child protection (ibid). Thus for child participation to be meaningful, it is crucial to take into account the specificities of the field within which practice is happening or intended to.

2.8 Evidence from the literature

The unfolding literature has uncovered significant information central to the notion of child participation, both in terms of its development; requirements for effective practice; benefits accruing from its realization; and challenges in its implementation. This review has shown that child participation influences benefits not only to children and organizations but also to communities within which they live. Against the benefits of participation, individuals and organizations have involved children through various initiatives among others; Children's Councils and Youth Forums (Hodgkin and Newell, 2008); participation in conferences (Woodhouse, 2003); and research activities (Hodgkin and Newell, 2008; Lansdown, 2011).

For such initiatives to succeed, and for participation to be meaningful and ethical, it has been suggested that the entire process should be premised on some fundamental elements. Essentially practitioners need to recognize children's capacity to participate (Malone and Hartung, 2010), and in a manner that recognizes their individual differences (Cloke and Davies,

1997; Lansdown, 2011; Smith and Lødrup, 2004). They need to engage with children in respectful and democratic ways (Hart, 2008; Healy, 1998; Lansdown, 1997); while at the same time providing age appropriate information to facilitate children's informed decision making. The role of adults as partners and process facilitators, rather than leaders or directors has been strongly emphasized (Hart, 2008; Healy, 1998; Lansdown, 1997).

While the requirements for effective and sustainable participatory engagement with children are known, it goes without saying that actual practice is marred with daunting challenges, making it for many a rather elusive agenda. Common challenges identified in this review include perceptions that childhood is a period of innocence and play, and that participation is an interference to this responsibility-free period (Lansdown, 1997). There are also concerns that children lack the competences and experience upon which to draw for participation; coupled with a deep rooted participation versus protection controversy (Lansdown, 1997; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010; Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006). Within institutional settings, constraints to children's participation pertain to: case backlogs (Cloke and Davies, 1997; Healy, 1998); power differences between professionals and children (Burke, 2010; Healy, 1998); not to mention lack of clear guidelines and structures for participation (Namegni, 2012).

2.9 Identified knowledge gaps

The above literature indicates a growing understanding of the notion of child participation in terms of its evolution; practical significance; and challenges to its effective realization. However, and notwithstanding calls for participatory approaches to adhere to contextual specifics (Healy, 1998; Malone and Hartung, 2010), the bulk of existing literature provides a more general picture; with little regard to the setting. Where existing, the bulk of contextual adapted literature derives from individual organizational work; hence lacks the kind of scientific rigour necessary for a thorough academic discussion. Nagegni's study (2012) of child participation within NGOs moves to address this gap; but as hitherto mentioned, it broadly addresses these issues with very little focus on practical approaches and the nitty-gritty therein. The previously alluded ENOC study (2008) investigated child participation issues in select ombudsmen institutions in Europe. Whereas methodological issues, benefits and challenges to child participation were addressed in that study; these appear to have been more broadly considered, perhaps because a survey design was adopted for the assignment. Besides, the Norwegian institution which this study focuses on was not represented in the ENOC study.

This raises concerns regarding the deficiency of detailed academic investigation into the effectiveness of particular approaches to participation and the context within which they are implemented; despite the growing body of literature on the subject.

2.10 What this study addresses

The preceding review of literature has shown that not only is the field of child participation marred by daunting difficulties, but that there is also a glaring gap in terms of academic investigation of the varied approaches used to effect it in practice. Indeed, Lansdown (2011) suggests a study of already existing initiatives with the objective of understanding how they function, identifying lessons and documenting the best practices. Against that background, this study moves to investigate and understand the purpose, character and value addition of expert groups and meetings in relation to children's participation rights.

Chapter three

Theoretical Perspectives

Theory constitutes an important aspect of the overall process of qualitative research; and various authors have written emphasizing its desirability and contribution in organizing and interpreting social and cultural realities. Yin (2014) explains that theory initially integrates within the researcher's questions and into the analytical framework, ultimately enabling one to draw logical connections between emerging concepts and interpret resulting findings. Theory not only provides a windows for viewing the world, but also draws back to allow the world provide the researcher with uninterrupted meaning. Hence, "without a theory, such phenomena as 'death', 'tribes' and 'families' cannot be understood" (Silverman, 2010, p. 100). This study has been informed by a number of theoretical premises.

3.1 Empowerment Theory

While it has been largely adopted and is increasingly informing practice in social work, the notion of empowerment originates from other academic disciplines within social sciences. "An important source is political science and political sociology..." (Payne, 2014, p. 297). Beyond these fields, the concept empowerment in contemporary practice is applied in several fields and has therefore attracted several definitions. Stevenson & Parsloe, (1993, pg. 6 cited in (Trevithick, 2005, p. 219) use the term to denote both the 'process and goal'; but common usage of the term connotes the process through which people are given 'meaningful choice' and 'valuable options' (Clark, 2000, p. 57) in order to 'gain greater control over their lives and their circumstances' (Thompson, 2002, p. 91). Most of these conceptions denote activities and processes through which people as individuals or groups acknowledge or are helped to recognize their undeserving situation, and therefore act to eliminate circumstances hindering their progress and enjoyment of a worthwhile life. It embraces a wide range of activities exemplifying the struggle against oppression, discrimination, marginalization and other forms of unjust treatment of one (some) against the other (others).

According to Lee & Hudson (2011, p. 163), there are three main motivations of the process of empowerment: 1) "the development of a more positive and potent sense of the self; 2) the construction of knowledge and capacity for more critical comprehension of the web of social

and political realities of one's environment; and 3) the cultivation of resources and strategies, or more functional competence, for attainment of personal and collective social goals, or liberation". To effectively realize these dimensions, Braye and Preston (1995, p. 118) propose various strategies among others: flexible, voluntary and inclusive involvement; tangible goals; coupled with provision of honest and transparent information; as well as clear channels of representation and complaint. These propositions reflect key issues pertaining to self-determination, informed consent, and respect of people, and are congruent with the requirements for achieving effective, meaningful, genuine and ethical participation.

While approaches to empowerment can be applied to work environments involving individuals as well as communities, there is mounting evidence of effectiveness when applied to different types of groups, such as mutual aid groups (Adams, 2008; Gitterman and Shulman, 2005). "Groups can provide support for the individual, reduce the risk of isolation, offer a context in which personal skills can be developed and practiced, and a means by which an individual, whose consciousness has been raised, can work towards fulfilling heightened personal expectation" (Adams, 2003, p. 77). It seems therefore that given an enabling environment grounded in Braye and Preston (1995) propositions, empowerment activities have potential for success regardless of the context within which they are applied. This should entail a "collaborative relationship that encompasses mutuality, reciprocity, shared power and shared human struggle" Payne (2014, p. 166).

The relevance of empowerment theory in this study can be summarized thus: It recognizes the vulnerability of some groups and seeks to elevate their status by giving them both a voice and the necessary resources to influence their circumstances. And because children are among society's most marginalized groups, often lacking power (Lansdown, 1997), adopting an empowerment approach ensures that priority is focused on addressing their plight, and that they themselves take part in activities to improve their wellbeing. The quest for participatory initiatives therefore should be to empower children especially those facing particular difficulties (Cloke and Davies, 1997).

3.2 Rights Based Approach

"A rights based approach (hereafter RBA) is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and

operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights” (United Nations, 2006, p. 15). “It seeks to analyze inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress” (ibid). A core premise of the rights based approach contained in ‘Common Understanding⁴’ is that the RBA must be interpreted and therefore implemented in view of the principles of human rights namely: 1) universality 2) indivisibility; 3) interdependence and interrelatedness; 4) equality and non-discrimination; 5) participation and inclusion; and lastly 6) accountability and rule of law ” (UNFPA, 2010, p. 76).

When consciously applied to the programming process, the rights based approach grounded in the above principles has potential to achieve a wide range of benefits. Essentially it offers a framework to address the problems of vulnerable populations, and recognizes both the micro and macro source of problems. It also stresses the accountability of stakeholders, focuses on and seeks to redress the impact of power imbalances by incorporating a full range of inalienable and indivisible rights. In addition, the rights based approach enhances empowerment by building accountable relations between state structures, social groups and the individual. It promises positive changes in people’s lives by focusing on injustice, inequality, discrimination, exploitation and denial (Kirkemann and Tomas, 2007).

The case for adopting a rights based approach is informed by two rationales - the intrinsic and the instrumental. The former is premised on the view that “a human rights based approach is the right thing to do both morally or legally”; while the instrumental rationale appreciates that “a rights based approach leads to better and more sustainable human development outcomes” (United Nations, 2006, p. 16). Within this study, the rights based approach brings forward invaluable significance, initially by explaining key concepts pertaining to child participation and their relationship to each other; but also arguing that the case for promoting a participatory engagement with children is primarily an issue of rights.

3.3 Strengths perspective

Baker (2003: 420 cited in (Trevithick, 2012, p. 349) considers the strengths perspective as “an orientation in social work and other professional practices that emphasizes the clients’

⁴ See United Nations (2006, p. 36): Frequently asked questions on a human rights-based approach to development cooperation

resources, capabilities, support systems, and motivations to meet challenges and overcome adversity”. While this perspective might be relatively new in social work compared to the more traditional theories, its contribution to contemporary practice is highly regarded; and although originally “developed in social work for social work” (Trevithick, 2012, p. 350), it is being used to inform practice in other fields. Contrary to traditional deficit leaning approaches, the strengths perspective comes in with a different orientation by emphasizing the resources, capacities, energies and survival skills of people, instead of stressing pathology and problems (Payne, 2014; Saleebey, 2006). “Rather than focusing exclusively on problems, your eye turns to the possibility”, (Saleebey, 2006, p. 1). Thus, the strengths perspective is premised on the belief that all people, even the most abused have inherent capacities to transform their lives. Central to this approach is that people have suffered abuse, oppression and exclusion which could have shuttered their hopes. However, if helped to recognize and tap resources within their environment, people possess innate ingenuity and creativity to address even what seems like the ugliest situations.

Saleebey (2009, pp. 16–19) identifies four main principles of the strengths perspective namely: 1) “every individual, family, group and community has strengths; 2) troubles may be injurious, but they are an opportunity to grow; 3) assume that you do not know the limits of people’s ability to grow, and take their aspirations seriously; and 4) people are best served by collaboration”. Applied to practice situations, these principles require the practitioner working with particular client populations to follow through a number of steps towards a defined goal. Initially, it is incumbent upon the worker to “energize the dialogue and narratives of resilience and strength” (Saleebey, 2011, p. 481) by not only recognizing people’s capacities, but also empowering them to overcome their fears and appreciate their own agency. Further on in the process, the worker engages clients in a collaborative and democratic manner to define goals, and leap towards their effective realization. During this process and where necessary, the worker is obligated to support and encourage clients to harness their assets, resources, strengths and resilience. In the final stages, both the worker and clients work collaboratively to consolidate the results achieved; for instance by accounting to each other, sharing lessons learned and celebrating successes (Saleebey, 2011).

Whereas there have been criticisms that "it is over optimistic and unrealistic to the severe adversity and social exclusion affecting people" (Payne, 2014, p. 269), the strengths perspective is still associated with positive contributions and it remains essential in

contemporary social work practice. Not only is it embedded in key social work and human rights principles such as: participation; equality and non-discrimination; respect for diversity; inclusion and social justice, it also “encourages the worker to adapt to the client’s way of doing things, thus respecting the unique individual, cultural, and ethnic traits that each client brings to the situation” (Berg and Kelly, 2000, p. 17). This clearly indicates its relevance as a theoretical premise within this study which seeks to appraise the complex issue of participation.

3.4 Participation Theory

While there have been a number of theoretical attempts within the field of participation, Sherry Arnstein’s community participation model remains a ground breaking initiative, upon which the works of successive authors have drawn inspiration. Thus Hart’s (1992) eight rungs ladder of child participation was an adaptation of Arnstein’s (1969) degrees of citizen participation model (Burke, 2010; Malone and Hartung, 2010). In this model, the first three rungs: manipulation, decoration and tokenism represent models of “non-participation” (Hart, 1992, p. 9); while the succeeding rungs represent different degrees at which children might participate; from those jointly initiated by children and adults to those initiated by children who see a need to share responsibility with adults (Hart, 1992; Malone and Hartung, 2010).

Whereas Hart’s ladder has been revolutionary in the field, it has been critiqued by several authors. Most argue that the ladder seems to suggest that child participation occurs in form of a hierarchical sequence (Treseder, 1997, p. 7); with the upper rungs perceived to be superior to the lower ones (Burke, 2010). Responding to these critiques, Hart (2008) has clarified that his ladder metaphor was only meant to initiate some kind of dialogue and critical reflection on possible ways to involve children. The ladder was not to be interpreted as a yard stick to measure children participation; emphasizing that “different children at different times might prefer to perform with varying degrees of involvement or responsibility” (Hart, 1992, p. 11).

Critique of Hart’s model has seen the emergence of alternative models to theorize child participation, most of which have tried to improve on his own model. Notable contributions have been made by Westhorp 1987; Rocha 1997; Jensen 2000; (cited in (Malone and Hartung, 2010). Harry Shier’s (2001) pathways to participation is also a significant contribution. This study has adopted Treseder’s (1997) ‘circles of participation’ to explain the engagement of children in expert groups and meetings. Choice of this model is premised on various arguments.

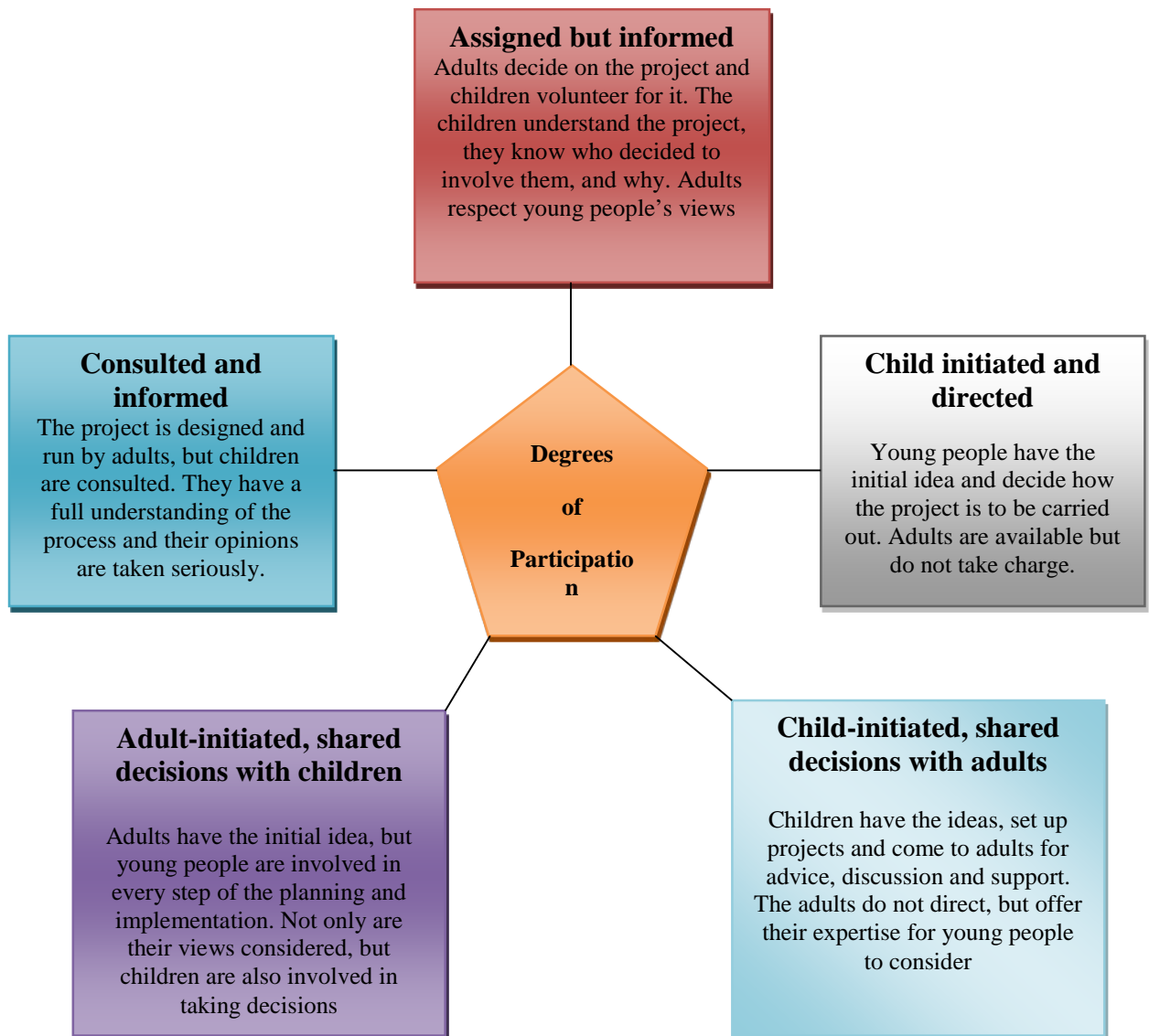
Firstly, Treseder himself has critiqued Hart's model for not paying due attention to issues of cultural context (Kellett, 2011); and accordingly provided an alternative cyclical model thereby addressing the criticism that Hart's ladder tended to suggest a hierarchical order of the forms of child participation (Willow, 2010). By presenting the degrees of child participation in a cyclical form, Treseder's model indicates that "they are different, but equal forms of practice" (Kellett, 2011, p. 4; Treseder, 1997, p. 8). It also demonstrates that choice of a particular level recognizes that it is the most suitable for the specificities of the context (Enquire, 2008; Treseder, 1997, p. 8). Eventually, choices of a particular form should ensure that children are accorded a deserving level of control that will propel empowerment outcomes (Burke, 2010). Besides, the model appreciates that adult-led consultation may be suitable in some instances; while in some others, child led initiatives provide better results (Fajerman and Treseder, 2004). The Carnegie UK Trust report (2008) used Treseder's model to investigate child participation and found very resourceful.

Within contemporary participation literature, two concepts: child perspectives and children's perspectives are commonly differentiated to illustrate different but important conceptions on children (Ellingsen et al., 2012; Nilsson et al., 2013; Sommer et al., 2010; Thulin and Jonsson, 2014). Superficially, the distinction between these two concepts may seem quite obvious, but a critical view often brings to the surface tacit meanings, with gross implications on how matters affecting children are approached in everyday life. As such, Coleyshaw (2012, p. 9) understanding of the child perspective to embrace notions of "child consultation, participation, children's voice and listening to children" may not do justice if our interest is to draw a clear conceptual, theoretical, ethical and practical implication of the two terms. Thus in the interest of unravelling this impasse, the following distinction can be made;

Child perspectives direct adult's attention towards an understanding of children's perceptions, experiences and actions in the world. By contrast, children's perspectives refer to the perception of the non-adults subject themselves (Sommer et al., 2010, p. 22).

In the above definitions, we see on the one hand adults who are very keen on understanding children's views and lives experiences (child perspective); and even though there is a conscious interest to see the world from the same lens as children, this doesn't represent young people's own subjective view. The contrasting view (children's perspectives) represents children and young people's own, true, authentic and non-directive understanding of the world as they see it and live it within their natural settings.

Figure 1 Degrees of participation (Treseder 1997)



Chapter four

Approach and Methodology

This chapter discusses the approach used in executing this study and covers among other things; the design, context and research participants. It also discusses methods and instruments of data collection, and analysis strategy, ethical considerations, challenges during the process.

4.1 Research design

Considering its qualitative nature, this study therefore adopted a case design. The significance of qualitative approaches, cases in particular is seen in their ability to not only present a detailed understanding of the research phenomena (Bryman, 2012; Neuman, 1994); but also uniquely appreciate the importance of the context within which they are happening; as well as an emphasis on the participants' subjective perspectives and experiences. (Natasha et al., 2005; Yin, 2014, p. 4). "The basic idea is that one case (or perhaps a small number of cases) will be studied in detail, using whatever methods seem appropriate... and the general objective is to develop as full an understanding of that case as possible" (Punch, 2005, p. 144, 1998, p. 150). Choice of the case design within the framework of this study therefore was purposive; intended to investigate and report on expert meetings and groups as an approach to promote children and young people's participation rights.

Although case studies take on different forms namely: 1) the intrinsic; 2) instrumental; and 3) collective (Punch, 2005, 1998; Silverman, 2010; Stake, 2008, 2003, 1998, 1994), this study is deemed an intrinsic case because expert meetings and groups constitute a distinctive approach to child participation. Intrinsic cases studies best suit situations where phenomena presents a particular aspects that warrant investigation. As such, "the researcher at least temporarily subordinates other curiosities so that the stories of those 'living the case' will be teased out (Stake, 2008, p. 122, 2003, p. 136).

Yin (2014, p. 29) has delineated five distinct components within the broad framework of case study design namely: 1) a case of study questions; 2) its propositions; 3) its unit (s) of analysis; 4) the logic linking the data to the propositions; and 5) the criteria for interpreting the findings. The first and the second components have already been addressed in the introduction and literature review sections respectively. Although the fourth component has partially been

tackled in the introductory sections, this together with the criteria for interpreting the findings will be further considered in the analysis section. The ‘unit of analysis’ on the other hand will be addressed in this chapter.

4.2 Study context and participants

As in most other qualitative research, both the setting and participants in this study were purposively selected, on the basis of their extensive involvement with the case of interest; either as participants or adult facilitators. Such a technique has been variously called purposive or deliberate sampling, as opposed to probability sampling common in quantitative research (Bryman, 2012; Punch, 2005, 1998; Silverman, 2010). And while it is common and where appropriate recommended that sampling in qualitative research follow convenience and accessibility (Silverman, 2010, p. 142), no such considerations were made in this study. Far from that, accessibility to the research setting was exemplified by negotiation, and the whole process involved significant financial implications.

4.2.1 Context – ‘the case’

This study was primarily conducted within an institutional setting; the children’s ombudsman in Norway. The study also benefitted from the insights of ChangeFactory; another organization implementing innovative methods of child participation, closely related to the ombudsman’s meetings and groups. The interaction with ChangeFactory provided a first glance at the practice of child participation in Norway, provided an opportunity to refine the interview guides. It also influenced a critical outlook during subsequent interviews at the Ombudsman.

A fundamental question that all researchers using case study design are often challenged to resolve concerns what the unit of analysis will be; and in the interest of clarifying the research strategy, Silverman (2010) advises on the importance of defining the unit of analysis at the very inception of the research in question. Importantly, such a decision saves the researcher unnecessary ambiguities when preparing research questions, identifying prospective respondents or when reviewing documentary sources (Yin, 2014). Thus within the context of this study, expert meetings and groups as a solid approach form the unit of analysis.

4.2.2 Participants and their recruitment

Within the context elaborated above, respondents comprised people whose involvement was closely connected to the research issue. At the Children’s ombudsman, four staff (two male

and two female) with experience conducting expert meetings and groups were identified in liaison with the participation officer, and consented to participate in the study. At ChangeFactory, a total nine participants were involved in the study. These comprised a mix of seven pros (five female and two male); and two adult staff (both female) identified through a contact person there. The pros fell within the age category seventeen and twenty-two. Before conducting the interviews, all participants received information on the purpose of the study and their attendant rights to; informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and protection from harm.

4.3 Methods and instruments of data collection

Data for this study were garnered using qualitative methods and instruments; elaborated below.

4.3.1 In-depth interviews

Interviews are a common method in qualitative research (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006; Miller and Glassner, 2011; Punch, 2005, 1998; Silverman, 2010; Yin, 2014). The most common type of interview pervasive in this field is the semi-structured interview; sometimes referred to as in-depth or qualitative interview (Bryman, 2012). This type of interview is best suited for use when the researcher is interested in obtaining a vivid or detailed perspective of a research issue, and people's experience of it (Natasha et al., 2005). Commenting about the consistency of in-depth interviews in the study of social realities and people's experience of it, Milner and Glassner (2011, p. 131) argue that "interviews reveal evidence of the nature of the phenomena under investigation, including the contexts and situations in which it emerges...". Premised on the above arguments, in-depth interviews were thought to add value to this study whose main objective was to interrogate a particular method of child participation within a definitive context. The nature of these interviews was relatively short, but open ended, as opposed to the alternative survey or prolonged type of interviews common in case study research (Yin, 2014, p. 111). This was accomplished using an interview guide; which was initially pretested on a colleague given the lack of access to the prospective participants. The draft guide was later discussed with, refined and approved by my supervisor before actual field data collection.

Number of interviews conducted

Using the approved guide, I conducted a total five interviews (three at the ombudsman, and two at ChangeFactory). The interviews at the ombudsman constitute primary data material for this study. On the other hand, those at ChangeFactory are a complementary source. Although

participants at the ombudsman were four, the interviews reported here are three because in one, and as a tactical approach to adapt to the participants' situation, I interviewed two participants together. Even with a prepared guide, it was rather necessary and appropriate to adapt the interview setting and flow to suit the presenting reality. With the consent of the respondents, all the five interviews were digitally recorded; making it possible to have a full account of the discussions (Bryman, 2012; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Punch, 2005, 1998; Silverman, 2010). Although there are some concerns that alone, audio recording may fall short of paying attention to social processes, unspoken action or the use of artefacts (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 148), such were not the object of interest for this study. In any case, audio recording was complemented with short written notes to reduce the possible consequences of a recording failure. Overall, the use of in-depth interviews and choice of participants has been valuable in illuminating the research questions and accomplishing this study's objectives.

4.3.2 Focus group discussion

Focus group interviewing, sometimes called group interviewing is a method of qualitative data collection in which several participants are brought together to discuss issues where they have particular knowledge and experience. Their strength lies in the ability to elicit a breadth of information in a short time (Natasha et al., 2005); help generate group consensus; and bringing forward varying perspectives on a specific topic (Bryman, 2012). As part of this study, I conducted one focus group comprising four ChangeFactory pros. The participants (all female; between ages seventeen and twenty) were identified through ChangeFactory. Like the individual in-depth interviews, this discussion was recorded so as to capture a true account of participants' perspectives, in case these were to be incorporated in the discussion (Silverman, 2010, p. 200). The group discussion was organized at the University of Stavanger and explored issues regarding the respondents' involvement in the participation work of ChangeFactory. Although I had not initially planned to conduct such a group, the insights and perspectives of the pros are relevant in providing young people's prompt views and experiences of participation in a method closely related to the expert meetings and groups.

4.3.3 ChangeFactory presentation

As part of this study, I attended a one day presentation, where ChangeFactory Pros shared with students at the University of Stavanger about their experience of participation within the organization. For most of the time during this presentation, I took on the role of a field

researcher taking notes, but I was also keen to observe the social processes and dynamics. Unlike the in-depth interviews with staff and group discussion described above, I did not record the proceedings of this presentation essentially due to lack of participants' consent. In addition, the assorted constitution of the audience would have made the recording process difficult; and perhaps the output unusable. Instead, I took short but targeted notes considering difficulties associated with detailed note taking (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 142). During this presentation, I seldom asked questions, benefitting instead from relevant asked by other participants. Although attending such a presentation was not part of this study's proposed methodological approach, it nevertheless brought forward first-hand information and participants' subjective perspectives about the nature and significance of participation.

4.3.4 Documentary evidence

Documents are an important source of data in social research (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Punch, 2005, 1998; Silverman, 2001). Bryman (2012, p. 551) for instance suggests that reviewing documents can complement the work of researchers using alternative methods such as participant observation and qualitative interviews to study organizations; while Yin (2014, p. 107) argues that within the framework of case study research, one can use documents both to find new data, verify information from primary interviews, and corroborate evidence from other sources. These accordingly are some of the arguments supporting the choice of document review as a methodological approach in this study.

The range of documentary sources reviewed include: existing handbooks and manuals on the organization of expert meetings and groups; a report on the ombudsman's experience involving children in policy and other areas of decision making; a report on a children's hearing organized as part of the civil society's alternative reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; as well as the actual alternative report to the UN Committee in which children's participation in the reporting process was documented. In addition, this research reviewed over five reports documenting the ombudsman's experiences conducting particular expert groups. These reports were on expert groups involving children with a family member in prison, those who had experienced incest, children in municipal housing, children of deported parents, those with experience of domestic violence and children who survived the massacre at Utøya.

The manuals and handbooks on expert meetings and groups illuminated on the nature and shape of children and young people's participation, hence supplementing information obtained from in-depth interviews. Collectively, the other reports on particular expert groups and other participation initiatives served as an assessment of the performance of expert meeting and groups. Majority also included the voices of children which have been incorporated to blend this study with a children's perspective. All the documentary material reviewed as part of this study was recommended and availed by the participation officer. In some cases, the content of these reports had been alluded to during the in-depth interviews. During the course of this study, there was no material from ChangeFactory available for the research to review.

4.4 Data management and analysis

There is a plethora of approaches for handling and making sense of data generated through the use of qualitative methods such as focus groups and individual interviews. These include; "content, thematic, ethnographic, phenomenological, narrative, experiential, biographical, discourse or conversational analysis" (Wilkinson, 2011, p. 169). Choice of which method to use ultimately depends on the type of data collected and how the researcher intends to use it. Within the framework of this study, a grounded theory informed approach has been used in coding, analyzing and interpreting data garnered from primary sources. Data from secondary sources has been partly analyzed using grounded theory informed analysis, complemented with "qualitative content analysis" (Bryman, 2012, p. 557; Schreier, 2012).

4.4.1 The grounded theory approach

Several authors (Charmaz, 2008, 2003; Charmaz and Bryant, 2011; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006; Punch, 2005; Seale, 1999; Silverman, 2010; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Yin, 2014) have written about the development, application and limitations of grounded theory in qualitative research; but the origins of the method are attributed to Glaser and Strauss 1965; 1968 (cited in (Punch, 2005, p. 156; Seale, 1999, p. 91; Yin, 2014, p. 138). In Charmaz and Bryant (2011, p. 292) grounded theory is defined as; "A method of qualitative inquiry in which researchers develop inductive theoretical analyses from their collected data, and subsequently gather further data to check these analyses." The same authors however appreciate that in contemporary social research, there are alternative ways of practicing grounded theory; although the basic considerations still hold. These include: going back and forth between data collection and analysis; constant comparison; and maintaining a

rigorous approach to coding (Charmaz, 2003, p. 251). The original approach involved a string of rigid steps including theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation (Seale, 1999, p. 92), open, axial and selective coding (Punch, 2005; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1998); with an ultimate goal to generate theory from the data (Charmaz and Bryant, 2011). Contemporary practice of grounded theory may involve several adaptations, but without straying from the general principle of iterative working and developing a thick description of research phenomena. A feature common both to the traditional and adapted practices of grounded theory is that the researcher engages in a constant comparison between the data, codes and categories (Charmaz and Bryant, 2011, p. 292; Punch, 2005, p. 204; Seale, 1999, p. 96)

This study has adopted a Chicago school leaning constructivist grounded theory approach (see (Charmaz, 2008, p. 204, 2003, p. 250). Constructivist grounded theory departs from objectivist grounded theory by appreciating the role of theoretical assumptions in the research process. “Constructivist grounded theorists view research as occurring within specific social conditions, and thus attempt to learn how these conditions influence their studies” (Charmaz and Bryant, 2011, p. 292). Advocates of objectivist grounded theory on the other hand “avoid being influenced by existing theoretical assumptions, and thus direct researchers not to study extant theoretical and research literatures on their topics (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012, p. 355).

The use of grounded theory within the margins of this study is not intended to generate theory, but rather as a systematic approach to code data and obtain context sensitive meaning, considering that the practice and study of child participation requires sensitivity to the context (Darlington et al., 2010; Healy, 1998). In any case, the purpose of intrinsic case studies, is not necessarily theory building; although that might as well happen (Stake, 2003, p. 137). Therefore, although an objectivist grounded theory approach hasn’t been followed, the researcher is confident that the alternative constructivist method has achieved its purpose; which was to provide a systematic framework within which to organize and identify meaning from the collected data. This is because the other key features of grounded theory such as, memoing (Charmaz, 2003, p. 261; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006, p. 308), constant comparison (Charmaz, 2008, p. 205, 2003, p. 259; Punch, 2005, p. 204; Seale, 1999, p. 96), as well as open and selective coding have all been adopted in this study.

Using screenshot illustrations, the following section explains the practical steps involved in the coding and interpretation of data for this study. This has been virtually accomplished using

Nvivo; one of the commonly used computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). There is a growing use of such software like NVivo and Atlas-ti in qualitative research, considering their associated advantages (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006; Schreier, 2012; Seale, 2010, 1999; Yin, 2014). These include; being able to increase the speed and rigour for organizing and coding large volumes of data (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 219). Such software also assist in identifying emerging themes, recurrent patterns and relationships within the data (Bazeley and Kristi, 2013, p. 217; Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 219; Charmaz, 2003, p. 267).

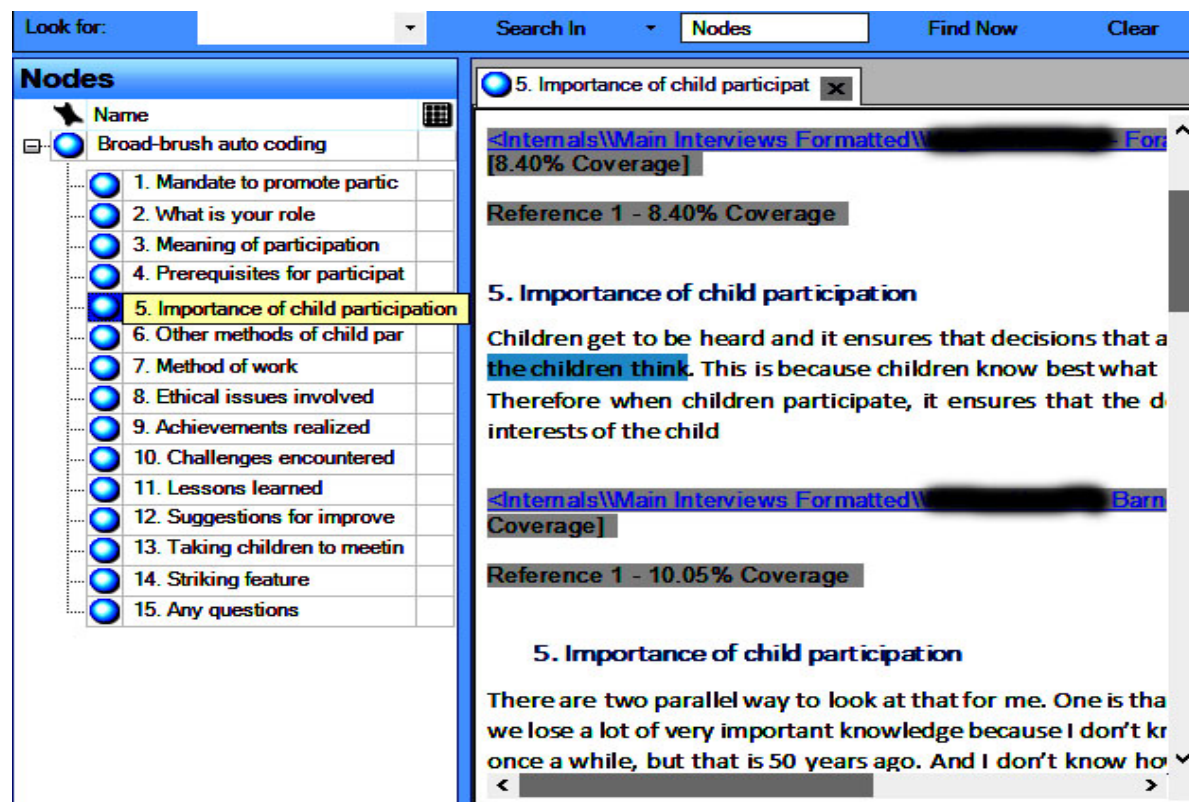
4.4.2 Coding and analysis of primary data

The approach to coding in grounded theory essentially proceeds through two main steps – initial / open coding followed by further / focused coding (Charmaz and Bryant, 2011; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006; Punch, 2005; Seale, 1999); alternatively referred to as complete and selective coding respectively (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 206). Adapting this framework to suit the use of Nvivo, this study has added a third preparatory step known as broad brush coding as described below.

Step one: Broad brush coding

I conducted initial broad brush auto coding of all four of the interviews (all three at the ombudsman, and one from ChangeFactory) that seemed to have a similar flow. This was done by initially preparing the transcribed interviews in Microsoft word using paragraph styles and then imported into Nvivo. Using these paragraph styles, it was possible to code the interviews using the Nvivo auto code command. The purpose of this first attempt at coding was to organize all responses by the different respondents to a particular node representing that question (see figure 2). Because NVivo's auto coding command only works with questions asked and recorded the same way, I used the phrase N/A (not applicable) where one or more respondents were not asked particular the question.

Figure 2 Output of broad-brush auto coding



Step two: Open coding

Open coding aims to identify and group together related aspects within the data by using a concept – indicator technique (Punch, 2005, p. 206); often resulting from “scrutinizing the field notes, interview or other document very closely: line by line or even word by word” (Strauss, 1987, p. 28). This implies a search for different often related texts (indicators) that might infer an abstract, less analytical term (the concept). It is such categories (concepts) and the properties (indicators) within them that build the foundation for the selective or focused coding. In its own right, initial line by line coding “helps us to remain attuned to our subjects’ views of their realities, rather than assume that we share the same views and worlds” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 259). Within this study, open coding capitalized on the success of the previous auto coding and it involved three steps. Using the output of the initial broad brush coding, interviews were opened up for deeper scrutiny. The initial attempt involved reducing and rearranging the output of the auto coding process from a question-like format, to a definitive but still abstract thematic format, representing the research questions (see figure 3). Note that these themes were not necessarily informed by interview data, but by the research questions.

Figure 3 Output of level one open coding

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































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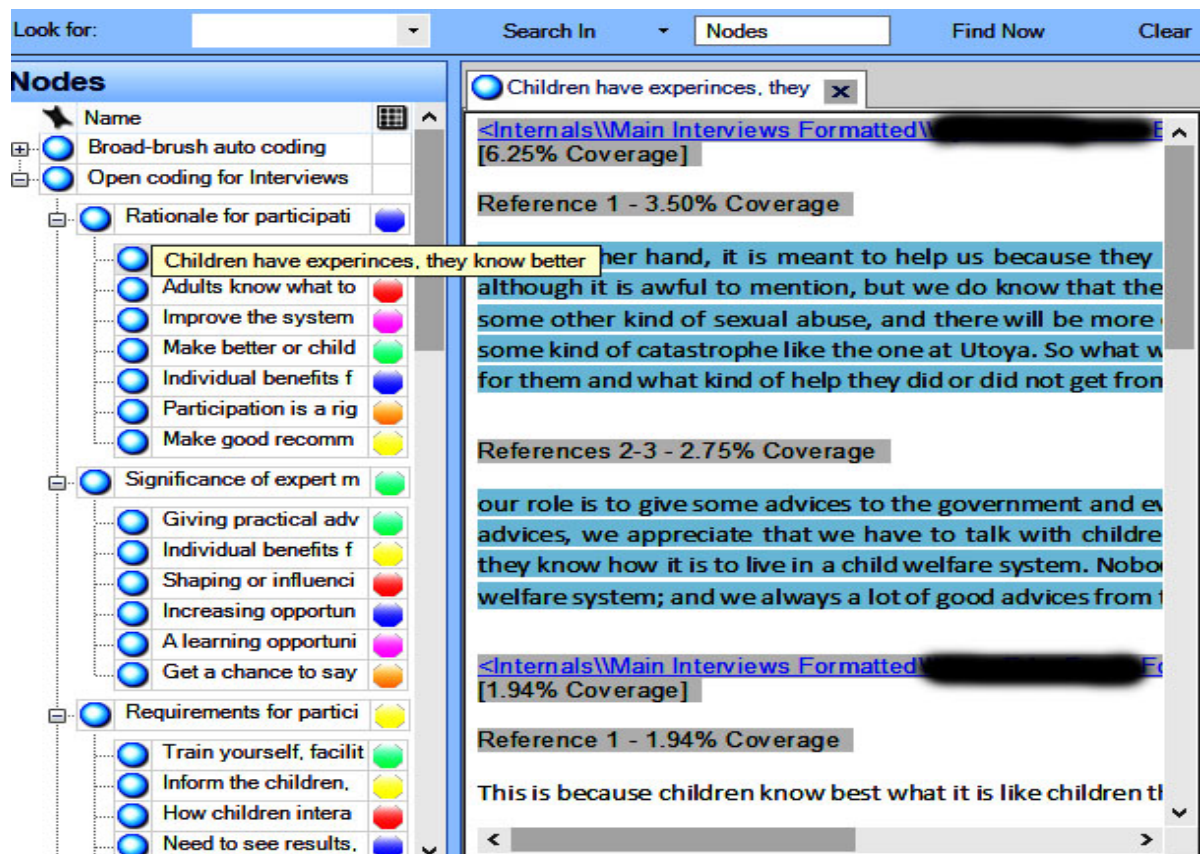
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Nodes

	Name	 Sources	Referen /	Created	Created B	Modified	Modified	
	 Open coding for Interviews	0	0	2/11/201	PM	3/4/2015	PM	
	 Rationale for participation	0	0	2/11/201	PM	3/4/2015	PM	
	 Significance of expert meetings & grou	0	0	2/11/201	PM	3/4/2015	PM	
	 Requirements for participation	0	0	2/12/201	PM	3/5/2015	PM	
	 Other participation methods	0	0	2/12/201	PM	3/6/2015	PM	
	 Meaning of participation	0	0	2/12/201	PM	3/4/2015	PM	
	 Challenges & bottlenecks involved	0	0	2/12/201	PM	3/5/2015	PM	
	 Organization of participation methods	0	0	2/13/201	PM	3/5/2015	PM	
	 Lessons learnt	0	0	2/13/201	PM	3/5/2015	PM	
	 Child Welfare Pros	0	0	2/17/201	PM	3/6/2015	PM	
	 Broad-brush auto coding	4	60	2/27/201	PM	3/6/2015	PM	

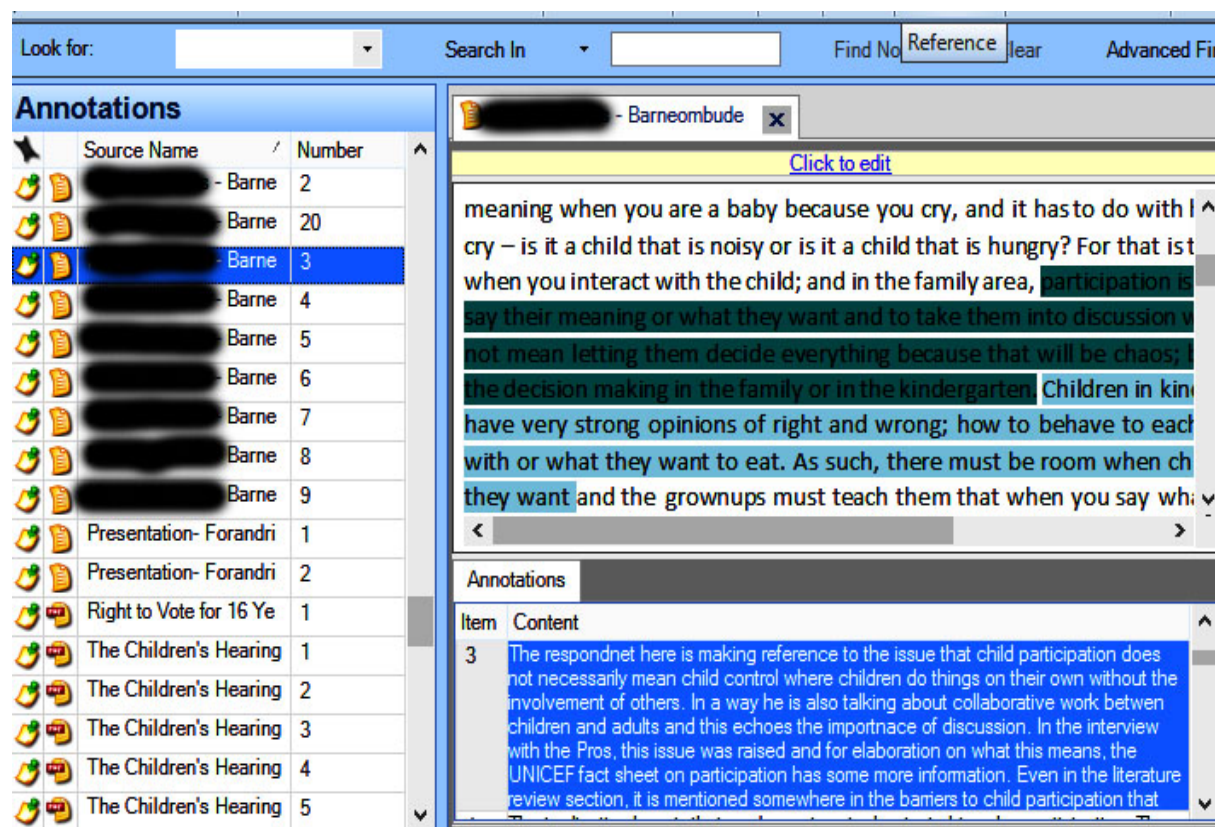
The second step under open coding involved reading through material under each auto coded question with the aim of identifying data and classifying it into subcategories representative of the main theme (see figure 4). Under the main themes, the coded text therefore became properties within the generated categories, hence representing Punch (2005, p. 206) concept indicator model.

Figure 4 Output of level two open coding



Note at this point that these categories only included data from the four auto coded transcripts. To bring in data from the other three transcripts (second respondent at ChangeFactory, focus group and the presentation), I embarked on reading through each of them and accordingly coding data under matching categories already developed. By the end of this process, I had three important accomplishments: one I had developed from the data themselves categories on which to conduct further analysis; and secondly, I had successfully coded data under each of these categories with which I could support my arguments later in the discussion. Third and perhaps most important, during this whole process, I used the NVivo inbuilt annotating function to create a string of memos. These annotations set the foundation both for constructing analytical reflections on the data and establishing connections within different categories, and between individual respondents. Additionally, this approach to memoing enabled me to develop connections between the empirical data, theoretical assumptions, and other secondary literature. These memos were also used to compile a journal for documenting and keeping track of the entire project; for instance which codes to merge, collapse or delete. Figure 5 below illustrates memoing process, with the help of NVivo's annotating function.

Figure 5 Example of an annotated interview text in open coding



The process of memoing in grounded theory presents a handy tool for expounding and developing analytical ideas on the data. It helps the researcher to reflect, comment on and establish relationship and connections within the data or the already formed categories (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006, p. 308). Charmaz (2003, p. 261) suggest that memo writing helps to “elaborate processes, assumptions, and actions that are subsumed under our codes...; it aids us in linking analytic interpretation with empirical reality”. Thus “memos can contain hints, clues and suggestions that simply put into writing any preliminary interpretation of any part of your data” (Yin, 2014, p. 135).

Step three: Selective coding

As the analysis progresses, the researcher settles to examine repeatedly the different properties within individual categories, teasing out the similarities, differences and interactions that exist between them. This process leads to selective coding which takes grip of the groups or categories resulting from the open coding and begins to extract recurrent codes / properties or those that stand out within each category (Charmaz, 2003, p. 260). These are compared with each other, ultimately enabling the researcher to generate yet another high level analytical, as opposed to descriptive category; which then becomes the main code along which a theory may

be constructed (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006, p. 311; Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 143). “To code selectively, then means that the analyst delimits coding to only those codes that relate to the core codes...” (Strauss, 1987, p. 33)

Selective coding in this study was achieved by opening up the previous categories, comparing and contrasting the content coded under each of them. Through this process, it was possible to identify and merge together redundant codes; while at the same time identifying and correcting material that was coded either under erroneous or multiple codes. For instance, under the main category requirements for participation, three redundant codes (be honest about the intention; open and ready to change; informing children) were merged under one representative code – provide honest and transparent information (See figure 6). Considering that the open coding utilized the participants own words to develop categories, another task during focused coding was to elevate those codes to a more analytical level, but without compromising the participants’ own representations. As in the previous steps, whatever changes were effected at this step were recorded in the main project journal so as to keep track of the entire progress.

Figure 6 Output of selective coding

Look for:	<div></div>	Search In	<div>Nodes</div>	Find Now	Clear	Advan		
Nodes								
	Name	Sources	Referen	Created On	reated	Modified	Modified	
<div></div>	Selective-focused coding	0	0	3/9/201	PM	3/10/20	PM	
<div></div>	1. Meaning of child participation	0	0	3/9/201	Created On	3/10/20	PM	
<div></div>	Collaboration, partnership with adults	2	2	3/9/201	PM	3/9/201	PM	
<div></div>	Consideration of children's perspectives	3	8	3/9/201	PM	3/9/201	PM	
<div></div>	Expressing children's perspectives	4	7	3/9/201	PM	3/9/201	PM	
<div></div>	Involvement in decision making	3	3	3/9/201	PM	3/6/201	PM	
<div></div>	2. Rationale for children's participation	0	0	3/9/201	PM	3/10/20	PM	
<div></div>	Children have a right to participate	6	12	3/9/201	PM	3/13/20	PM	
<div></div>	Individual benefits for children	2	4	3/9/201	PM	3/5/201	PM	
<div></div>	Learn from children; make good recommend	7	14	3/9/201	PM	3/13/20	PM	
<div></div>	Quality-children sensitive decision making	11	17	3/9/201	PM	3/9/201	PM	
<div></div>	Recognise competences, harness children's	12	18	3/9/201	PM	3/9/201	PM	
<div></div>	System change, service improvement	10	15	3/9/201	PM	3/9/201	PM	
<div></div>	3. Requirements for child participation	0	0	3/9/201	PM	3/10/20	PM	
<div></div>	Collaborative and democratic engagement	6	13	3/9/201	PM	3/10/20	PM	
<div></div>	Experience relevant for child articipation	2	4	3/9/201	PM	3/9/201	PM	
<div></div>	Facilitate an enabling participatory environm	10	22	3/9/201	PM	3/10/20	PM	
<div></div>	Provide feedback and accountability	4	6	3/9/201	PM	3/10/20	PM	
<div></div>	Provide honest and transparent information	6	14	3/9/201	PM	3/9/201	PM	
<div></div>	Recognise and trust children's competences	5	6	3/9/201	PM	3/9/201	PM	

4.4.3 Coding and analysis of secondary data

The management of data from secondary sources was accomplished in part using grounded theory, largely complemented by "qualitative content analysis (Bryman, 2012, p. 557; Schreier, 2012, p. 1). The role of grounded theory in this part was only restricted to providing a coding frame to support qualitative content analysis. This coding frame was inspired by categories derived from the management of interview data. In its own right, qualitative content analysis is marked by "searching out underlying themes in the materials being analyzed" (Bryman, 2012, p. 557), and is suitable for application to the analysis of a wide range of verbal and visual data as well as information collected from other sources such as documents and the internet (Schreier, 2012, p. 3). Considering that this study has also drawn information from secondary sources such as documents, qualitative content analysis becomes quite relevant and handy in the management of this data. Besides, the success of the method is hugely premised on interpreting material using core categories contained in a coding frame; which in the context of this study developed from coding primary data. As and when appropriate, qualitative content analysis allows flexibility to refine the main coding frame to include any subsequent categories that may not have been included in the initial frame. The above therefore forms the premise for adopting qualitative content analysis in the management of data for this study.

Capitalizing on the categories developed from primary data using grounded theory, qualitative content analysis in this study involved reviewing the available material with the purpose of identifying and coding the content under relevant codes. Since it is typical for documents and other types of qualitative sources to contain large amounts of data some of which may not be relevant to the questions being studied (Schreier, 2012, p. 195), the review concentrated on aspects that were relevant for the research objectives. This was achieved first by using the research questions as a basis for developing key thematic areas under which to organize the data. This process helped reduce the volume of data from secondary sources into a manageable form, which was subsequently coded to matching categories developed from the analysis primary data. Select texts from secondary data have been extracted and incorporated in the report to galvanize discussion of the findings.

4.5 Ethical considerations

Adherence to ethical guidelines is an important aspect on any piece of research with human subjects; and as Bryman (2012, p. 130) has noted, ethics cannot be ignored or compromised

because "they touch integrity issues of the research process". To many, quality social research is that in which ethical considerations are integrated in the whole process from inception through to completion (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006; Ryen, 2011; Silverman, 2010, 2001). There tends to be an agreement among researchers within the social sciences on indispensable ethical issues in research with human subjects. Key ethical considerations in social research include: informed consent (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006, pp. 63–72; Silverman, 2001, p. 271), privacy and confidentiality (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 212; Ryen, 2011, p. 418) , voluntary participation (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006, p. 64; Silverman, 2010, p. 153; Social Research Association, 2003, p. 14), and protection from harm (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 213; Silverman, 2010, p. 156).

As part of this study's adherence to the above ethical considerations, a number of steps were taken. To begin with, it is a requirement in Norway that anyone intending to conduct research involving human subjects apply to a statutory agency - the Norwegian Data Protection Official (hereafter NSD) responsible for ensuring compliance with ethical practice in research. The basic specification for any research to qualify for NSD approval is if it will collect and process any personal data. Considering that the initial design did not include collecting and processing such, this investigation did not initially seek ethical approval. However, subsequent to the interaction with ChangeFactory pros, the project was discussed with NSD, and established that it did not require approval. This was on the premise that, no personal data including; names, residence or family history were collected from the pros. additionally, respondents would have the opportunity to approve of the researcher's representation of their views. In compliance, a draft version of this report was sent to ChangeFactory, and participants had the opportunity to comment on the findings.

As earlier mentioned though, ethical research spans beyond merely seeking the ethical board's approval. It is also related to the design; for instance how researchers formulate their questions; how they meet and interact with the participants and ultimately how they work with and utilize the information they have collected. As and when appropriate, this process incorporates issues relating to trust, respect, confidentiality, transparency, honesty and protection (Ryen, 2011; Silverman, 2010). In compliance, the study was clearly explained to each individual participant and their consent obtained verbally. All participants were informed that they were at liberty to or not to participate; and that even when consent had been given, it was still within their rights to withdraw from the study. In all the interviews and discussions, consent to record was sought

and as assured, practical steps have been taken to handle the information with extreme confidentiality. For instance, these interviews were transcribed only by myself in a closed room. There has been no discussion of what transpired in the interview environment with any other person, except my supervisor. Although institutions involved in this study are specified, no personal data such as names, emails or job titles that might increase the risk of linking respondents with particular statements are mentioned in the findings. Similarly, considerations have been made to ensure that the use of secondary material does not reveal and personal data particularly of the children and young people.

While it is generally agreed that that research ethics in social sciences ought to cut across varied populations and settings, there are concerns for adapting these when it is established that those involved are members of vulnerable or minority groups (Silverman, 2010, p. 164). And according to the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committee (2006, p. 16), if children and young people are involved as respondents, special considerations have to be made. This means that the researcher will have to adhere to the above ethical guidelines, further adapting them to the situation of child participants. For this purpose, a set of set of principles for involving children and young people in the research process has been developed. According to Flattore et al (2005, pp. 9–11), these principles encompass: appreciating children's competences, democratic and equal engagement with adults, and communication styles adapted to their individual situations. Conforming to these guidelines, this study took a number of considerations. Firstly, the pros participated voluntarily, upon receiving information regarding the study objectives. Secondly, during the interview process, they had an opportunity to ask questions; and thirdly, they have had an opportunity to comment and approve this research's representation of those views.

4.6 Limitations and delimitations

In terms of access to the study context, I expected delays since virtually all the communications were conducted online. Liaising with my supervisor, our application to the ombudsman received a positive response within just a few months. An early and positive reply in this sense offered ample time to prepare for and conclude primary data collection by end of January.

The other concerns regarding identifying suitable respondents and secondary data were effectively resolved with the support a contact person within the institution, with whom the researcher had correspondence prior to data collection. On the agreed day, arrangements were

made to interview staff, and have access to all relevant information. Where the information was available only in Norwegian, Babylon software was used to obtain an English translation, in some cases having to confirm the result with the help of a native Norwegian speaker. It is possible however that this particular problem limited how many documents were reviewed. In most cases however, the available information in English satisfied the study's curiosity.

Since the study revolves around participation of children and young people, there was concern that not being able to obtain their input might provide biased findings, based solely on the views and opinions of adults; with little regard for the voices of children themselves (Nilsson et al., 2013, p. 1). This problem was resolved by incorporating children's verbatim views found in the ombudsman's reports on expert meetings and groups. In addition to capitalizing on existing reports on expert meetings and groups, the study interacted with child welfare pros from ChangeFactory, whose insights have been very informative. Combined, these two sources provided a complementary children's perspective.

In terms of methodology, concerns are widespread about the adequate number of interviews one should conduct to claim a good understanding of the issues under investigation (Silverman, 2010). Although this has been a concern, this study appreciates that beyond the number of interviews, the strength of qualitative research lies in the richness of data. One strategy to resolve concerns about the adequate number of interviews in qualitative research is to ensure that respondents are purposively selected to satisfy the researcher's curiosity (Silverman, 2010, pp. 192–93). Considering that respondents in this study constituted people with first-hand experience of expert meetings and groups, the researcher is confident that the data collected have exhaustively answered the research questions. Besides, this study had also drawn on documentary evidence to complement primary data.

Regarding conducting group discussions Natasha et al (2005) recommend having a moderator and note taker. Since this research was conducted by one person without an assistant, consent to record interviews and discussions was sought. This enabled the researcher to remain focused and engaged in the discussion; and at the same time provided a true record of the interview. To eliminate a concerns that managing qualitative data usually results into significant paper work (Bryman, 2012), this study used a computer program NVivo to aid the data management and analysis process.

4.7 Quality assurance

Evaluation of the quality of most research particularly in natural sciences, and in quantitative studies tends to draw on concepts of reliability and validity (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The former pertains to the extent to which the findings can be replicated; while validity is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are arrived at; hence the extent to which they can be generalized to a bigger population (Bryman, 2012). Considering the qualitative nature of this research however, adopting common criteria of reliability and validity as a gauge to determine this study's adherence to quality would not have done justice to the range of issues investigated herein. (Denzin, 1988, p. 432; Seale, 1999, p. 7).

As an alternative, Seale (1999, p. 8) suggests that devotion to quality would require that researchers undertaking qualitative investigations follow through very explicit and rigorous methodological and philosophical considerations. This might for instance imply specifying honestly and clearly the methods and techniques for collecting, managing and interpreting data as extensively discussed in the methodological section. It also points to what several researchers have termed "thick description" (Cyrenne, 2006; Denzin, 1989; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Geertz, 1973; Ponterotto, 2006; Usunier and Sbizzera, 2013; Yvonna and Guba, 1985); which is often contrasted with "thin description". According to Denzin (1989, p. 33) 1) gives the context of an act; 2) states the intentions and meanings that organize the action; and 3) it traces the evolution and development of the act. It also presents the action as a text that can be interpreted. A thin description on the other hand, "simply reports facts, independent of intentions or the circumstances that surround the action" (ibid). This commentary emphasizes the importance of paying attention to details of the issues being investigated, considering the subjective meanings of the participants, as well as the need to interpret whatever findings result within the specificities of the research context.

In the interest of adhering to quality standards, this study appreciates the above concerns and has accordingly taken steps to ensure that data on expert meetings and groups are not only discussed in the best possible detail, but also in light of the context. It is not the intention of this study to generalize or replicate the findings to other contexts within which participation of children and young people takes place. On the contrary, the findings present an approach used in one particular context. In achieving this, the research is cognizant of the critical role theory plays in the study of social phenomena, by offering a careful lens through which to organize

and interpret social reality (Silverman, 2010; Yin, 2014). The role assumed by theory in this study however is of a non-directive, context sensitive nature; as opposed to the traditional directive approach common in experimental and quantitative research. As such, although this study initially proposed to adopt five particular theoretical approaches, the four reported herein have been influenced by connotations emerging from the data collected.

In summary, quality assurance in this study is informed by a framework developed by Yardley (2000 cited in (Bryman, 2012, p. 393). Among other things, this criteria emphasizes sensitivity to not just the social setting, but also the relevant theoretical perspectives and ethical issues. The framework also emphasizes the need for methodological rigour and transparency in terms of ensuring that the research methods are clear and well-articulated.

This study further acknowledges that social desirability bias; implying the tendency by people not to give a true picture of themselves or other phenomena associated with them in the interest of preserving a positive image of the self (Chung and Monroe, 2003; Randall and Fernandes, 1991; Sabrina and Maria, 2004) carries implications for the quality of research. However, it is the researcher's observation that participants in this study expressed themselves openly and frankly. This was evidenced by the critical perspective with which they discussed and presented essential elements underpinning children's participation in expert meetings and groups.

4.8 Process of conducting the study

From the inception to completion, this study has been conducted following through multiple phases as elaborated below;

4.8.1 Preparing the research proposal

Aided by a proposal, the main research idea was conceived and shared with the supervisor. This stage was also characterized by a search and in-depth review of secondary literature relevant to the study; guided by key themes developed in line with the study questions. This process facilitated an understanding of the main concepts within the study, the connections between them, and their level of fit with the proposed theoretical perspectives to guide the discussion of the findings. The significance of this phase is also seen in its contribution to the formulation of research instruments. It was during this stage that the context within which to conduct the study was identified, contact made, and access granted.

4.8.2 Field data collection

Collection of both primary and secondary data was conducted at this stage, and in two phases. The first involved attending the presentation, and conducting the discussion with the pros; both which were done at the university premises. The second phase took place in Oslo, and included conducting interviews both at ChangeFactory and the ombudsman. Documentary evidence for subsequent review was also identified at this phase. In addition, the review of literature regarding child participation continued during this stage.

4.8.3 Data management and analysis

This phase was marked by a rigorous process of data management, synthesis, analysis and interpretation. Individual activities included transcribing raw data; after which it was entered into and systematically coded within Nvivo. During this stage, available documentary evidence relating to expert meetings and groups was also reviewed to complement primary data. This phase provided an opportunity to establish that the data collected adequately answered the research questions.

4.8.4 Report writing

This was the final phase of the during which the main findings are presented and discussed in light of the initial research questions, theoretical perspectives and other secondary literature. At the same time, the search and review of literature related to the study continued throughout this stage. Prior to the final report, two drafts were shared and discussed with the supervisor; a tactic which provided an opportunity for gradual improvement. A third and final version was submitted to the University for assessment and grading.

4.9 Period for conducting the study

From its inception, this study has taken a total 6 months to complete. An elaborate time schedule within which this study was conducted is presented in table 1 below.

Table 1 Activity – time schedule for the study

Period	Months	August 2014				December 2014				January 2014				February 2014				March 2014				April 2014			
	Weeks	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Activities	Literature review																								
	Proposal writing																								
	Preparation of research instruments																								
	Field data collection																								
	Data coding and analysis																								
	Draft report (s) writing																								
	Writing final report																								

Chapter five

Findings and Analyses

The aim of this chapter is to present and discuss the results of an investigation on how expert meetings and groups within the ombudsman function as an approach to promote child participation in Norway. The report begins with a brief introduction to the Ombudsman and proceeds to discuss the institution's conception of, and rationale for child participation. Further on, the report addresses expert meeting and groups as a distinct approach; discussing their distinguishing character, significance and challenges to their establishment. The very last segment presents a framework that summarizes the ombudsman's model of child participation.

5.1 The ombudsman for children - Barneombudet

Barneombudet (Children's ombudsman) has a core responsibility to promote the interests of children in all aspects of Norwegian society; public and private alike. Albeit an autonomous and politically independent entity, the ombudsman reports to the Ministry of Children Equality and Social Inclusion. Since its establishment in 1981, the institution has increased staffing levels from four (4) employees in 1988 to a total staffing capacity of twenty people as at the time of the study. The current Ombudsman Dr. Anne Lindboe, a pediatrician by profession took office in 2012; succeeding Reidar Hjermann (2004-2012) and will hold the office until 2018.

5.2 Meaning of child participation

With regard to the ombudsman's conception of child participation, this study has been able to locate different but mutually reinforcing views.

5.2.1 Expression and consideration of children's views

To the ombudsman, participation means that there is adequate and accessible space within which children have the opportunity to express their views, and that there is commitment on the part of line public and private authorities to show respect for these views, and take them into account when they reach decisions affecting young people. Inherent within this view

therefore are two seemingly distinct but complementary perspectives. The first appreciates the need for provisions through which children can communicate their views;

Children in kindergartens at the age of four or five have very strong opinions of right and wrong, how to behave to each other, what they want to play with or what they want to eat. As such, there must be room where children are invited in to say what they want
– Respondent 1; Barneombudet

Another respondent pointed to the ombudsman as a stakeholder in promoting participation;

I think it is important that children can have their voice heard; that we as an ombudsman can help them to be heard – Respondent 3; Barneombudet

This element introduces the aspect of obligations; hence requiring duty bearers to ensure that when children speak, there is active and concerted commitment to consider those views in decision making processes at legislative, policy and practice levels or otherwise;

Both perspectives offer a conceptual window for understanding children's rights in general and participation in particular. Essentially and perhaps most noticeable is that participation of children and young people ought to be seen as a fulfilment of their inalienable rights; and that all duty bearers, primarily the state are "obliged to respect, protect and fulfil those rights" (UNFPA, 2010, p. 47). Moreover, in their own right, participation and inclusion are key principles of a rights approach to development" (UNFPA, 2010; United Nations, 2006).

The second conceptual lens helps appreciate the existence of various approaches to promote children's participation; one of them following a consultative trend (Hart, 1992, 2008; Hinton, 2008; Kirby et al., 2003; Lansdown, 2011; Percy-Smith, 2006; Shier, 2001). Whereas Hart's (1992) ladder has been critiqued for suggesting a hierarchical sequence of participation, Treseder (1997) proposes a cyclical adaptation to stress that although presenting in different forms, the five degrees of participation are of equal importance if applied in a manner sensitive to the practice context.

5.2.2 Collaboration with adults and involvement in decision making

An alternative meaning of child participation for the ombudsman is that adults and children should have the possibility to engage together in an equal and democratic manner, giving due consideration and respect for each other's views in decision making processes;

It also means that children are part of the decision making; not that they are making the decisions, but that those who are making the decisions make an eye on what the children's perspectives... - Respondent 1; Barneombudet

These remarks depict an adult's differentiation between genuine child participation and 'child control' where young people usurp absolute decision making responsibility. As opposed to child control, the conception of participation we see here embraces dialogue, shared responsibility and consideration for the children's perspective. Similarly, UNICEF fact sheet on the right to participation (2014b) clarifies that respecting children's rights doesn't mean that their views subsume those of adults; but that considering their evolving capacities, children's views should be given due weight whenever adults make decisions.

The view that participation should present a collaborative process in which adults recognize children's democratic rights, and the two partner around a common agenda is shared by some young voices as one child was quoted;

They agreed on a deal but never asked me about my opinion. Now I have to go to the child and family protection agency because I'm so 'difficult' - Girl, 15 years; Report on experts with divorced parents

The picture we read from this quotation is of a child who, given a platform to share her views, expresses dismay that a decision had been reached without consulting her, thereby committing her to an undesirable situation. The youngster is also sending a clear message about the negative ramifications resulting from adults' negation of children's views in decision making.

A ChangeFactory pro discussed a possible approach to the practice of participation;

I would prefer that we can speak to them on the same level; when we are not standing on the big platform. We should be able to have a conversation and tell you what we think without having the microphone and 100 people in the crowd... – Pro; 18 years

An important issue raised above is that although ad hoc forums like expert meetings and ChangeFactory presentations might offer children an opportunity to communicate their perspective, the promise of a levelled environment within which participation of children can influence concrete results in their immediate and everyday settings is minimal. Eventually, participation happens at a more abstract macro level, but does not trickle down into the diversity of children's natural living environments. Genuine and partnership-centred participation on the other hand reinforces the idea that participatory practice between adults and children is not necessarily detrimental to the extent that they (adults) do not set the stage within which young

people must struggle to fit (Ciara, 2010; Hart et al., 2004, 2003; Hart, 2008; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). Such an understanding coincides with O’Kane (2003, p. 6) definition of ‘citizenship’ as a process in which children and young people are empowered “to exercise their rights and responsibilities alongside adults in the interest both of their peers and others”. Ultimately, a collaborative approach to participation breeds empowerment outcomes for children and young people. Complementary, the success of empowerment initiatives must be grounded in a “collaborative relationship that encompasses mutuality, reciprocity, shared power and shared human struggle” (Payne, 2014, p. 166).

5.3 The rationale for participation

In arguing the case for promoting children and young people’s participation rights, several different considerations have been advanced. It was this study’s intention to particularly establish the underlying rationale for the ombudsman’s fascination with the issue of participation. In this regard, this study can report the following findings;

5.3.1 Participation as a fulfilment of children’s rights

The overriding impetus for the ombudsman’s work with participation lay grounded in the understanding that children are holders of rights, and that the ombudsman as a duty bearer is obligated to ensure realization of these rights. According to one respondent;

The responsibility for us to promote children participation comes mainly from the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but I think it is in the Act as well that we are supposed to work particularly with the children’s rights – Respondent 2; Barneombudet

Thus, listening to children and creating avenues for their participation is primarily a fulfilment of the rights spelled out in the CRC⁵. More so, there is an obligation on stakeholders like the ombudsman to ensure realization of these rights in practice. According to the Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No.2 (United Nations, 2002); “NHRI...must ensure that they have direct contact with children, and that children are appropriately involved and consulted (2002, p. 4). Other literature explicitly point to the role of independent human rights institutions, particularly the ombudsman in promoting children’s rights to participation (Hodgkin and Newell, 2007; Lansdown, 2001a; Miljeteig, 2006, 2005; Nigel et al., 2011; Rébecca, 2009; Sedletzki, 2012; UNICEF, 1997; United Nations, 2009, 2003; Veronica, 2008).

⁵ Refer to (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child; Article 12

Despite this evidenced relationship between NHRI and children's participation; and whereas much of the ombudsman's work with expert meetings and groups draws on the provisions of the CRC, this study did not find within the Act and Instructions to the Ombudsman any explicit reference to the participation rights; an issue linked by some respondents to the sluggish appreciation of participation, as opposed to other rights to protection and provision. On that basis, and giving due credit to the progress achieved to date, this study calls to mind the pool of legitimacy, credibility and transparency benefits accruing from having a specific clause on participation (Rébecca, 2009). According to Sedletzki (2012),

A legal basis for cultivating child participation provides an institution with the legitimacy it needs to allocate resources in this area of work and to report on it to decision makers (2012, p. 86).

Hence in countries such as Croatia, Ireland, Lithuania, Cyprus Austria and England, the law establishing and regulating the children's commissioner or ombudsman provides explicit obligations for the involvement of children. In Lithuania, Cyprus, Finland, Malta, Scotland and Ireland, the law obligates the ombudsman to ensure that children are heard by other stakeholders (Hodgkin and Newell, 2008). Such cases might be helpful if the ombudsman in Norway wishes to explore such a possibility.

5.3.2 Participation as an appreciation of children's competences

In promoting children and young people's participation rights, the ombudsman is also recognizing their position as competent individuals, able to contribute meaningful insights on how society and decision makers can meet their varied needs;

Children are experts at being children, and children who have undergone unusual experiences are experts in precisely those experiences. As adults, we can try and learn how to understand, but without undergoing similar experiences ourselves, we will never be experts on precisely this subject – Reports on experts with incest

This excerpt brings to the surface two interrelated issues of particular relevance to children's participation rights; one on competency, the other on experience. Thus through their everyday lived experiences, children develop an understanding of the challenges of childhood and possible feasible remedies as one child commented;

You have to talk to those who were there (Utøya). If schools cannot adapt to us, it will be very difficult to find normality again. It is very important that schools can adjust for every student with traumatic experiences – Child; Report on catastrophe experts

The voice of the child in the above quotation resounds the case for harnessing children's competences to inform solutions that are grounded in, and therefore sensitive to the unique experiences of every child. Such an appreciation challenges the underlying resistance to children's participation on the premise that they lack the knowledge needed both to make, and later on take responsibility for complex decisions. To the contrary, assessment of children's rights to participate should be based less on their demonstrated capacity and willingness to accept responsibility; but rather on their evolving capacities (Hart, 1992, 2008; Lansdown, 2011, 2005a, 2001a, 1997).

5.3.3 Participation of children influences feasible recommendations

According to the Ombudsman Act (1981), one of the main duties of the institution is to "propose measures that can strengthen children's safety under the law". The Act doesn't mention that it is the ombudsman's responsibility to formulate laws or implement them. Pursuant to this Act and recognizing that children possess valuable experiences, the ombudsman sees it both important and desirable to consult children on the best possible way to advocate for their interests as one respondent acknowledged;

If we don't facilitate children participation, we lose a lot of very important knowledge because I don't know how it is to be five years today. I knew it once, but that is 50 years ago...; and so I need that knowledge because then we can prepare our laws, our systems and society in a better way so it is more collaborative with the children's needs at every time - Respondent 1; Barneombudet

It therefore follows that by capitalizing on children's elicited views and opinions to inform subsequent recommendations, the ombudsman is indirectly taking the children's perspective as opposed to holding a child perspective (Sommer et al., 2010). Additionally, such a working method ought to be interpreted in light of empowerment and rights based approaches. In itself, the rights based approach requires that all people must be accorded an opportunity to have a say whenever decisions affecting them are made. Besides, adopting the intrinsic premise of a rights based approach, consulting children on matters affecting them can only be the right thing to do considering that they are often excluded from mainstream decision making processes (United Nations, 2006, p. 16). From an empowerment leaning perspective, children as a marginalized group in society, and often lacking decision making power (Hart et al., 2004; Hodgkin, 1997; Lansdown, 1997; Lyford, 2010) can benefit to the extent that their views receive genuine and effective representation from a trusted institution like the ombudsman.

5.3.4 Participation enhances quality decisions and services

This study has established that by promoting children and young people's participation, the ombudsman understands that such an engagement facilitates decision making that is sensitive to the needs of children and consciously feeds quality into systems intended to serve children. One respondent talked about the financial costs resulting from non-participatory practices in designing and executing children programs;

If they had consulted children before, they would find out where children played and what they need... if you don't consult children and know what they think, you end up doing double work and wasting resources – Respondent 2; Barneombudet

These remarks refer to a scenario in which authorities in one municipality in Norway invested in playing facilities intended to serve children, but without consulting them. A subsequent evaluation years later found that several facilities were not being utilized by the intended beneficiaries. The same problem was reported with regard to children's parks and playgrounds in Japan (Haruhiko et al., 2009). Another respondent had this to say about expert groups;

They are meant to contribute to improving the system for other children who might go through the same experience, so that adults know what to do when other children go through such horrible things – Respondent 3; Barneombudet

Thus, consulting children who have experiences of particular situation uncovers openings into the internal workings of the system in question, so that gaps can be identified and systematically corrected. This evidence resonates arguments that genuine children's participation is a major driver of sustainable institutional and systemic changes, and service enhancement (Cloke and Davies, 1997; Crowley and Skeels, 2010; Kirby et al., 2003; Lansdown, 2011, 2005b; Percy-Smith, 2007).

5.3.5 Participation empowers children

Although often used interchangeably, the concepts of empowerment and participation do not necessarily mean the same thing. According to Treseder (1997), one way to differentiate between them is to see participation as a process, and empowerment as the outcome; resulting into tangible benefits in terms of knowledge acquisition, respect for others' opinions and the ability to cultivate user led, democratic and accountable power structures. This study has found a strong relationship between this conception, and the thrust for expert meetings and groups as one respondent alluded;

When children participate, they educate themselves and at the same time, their perception of the environment, the family, the school and the society is more in balance, and they get a chance to understand what is going on, and that is a resilience factor in their life – Respondent 1; Barneombudet

According to these remarks, participation is associated with practical benefits in terms of personal education, a clear and objective understanding of one's surroundings, and resilience.

During the discussion with ChangeFactory pros, the relationship between participation and empowerment was also expressed by a participant who had this to say;

It's very important because when we know our rights, then we can be strong and we certainly have a lot more to say; and the thing is that the other people like in the child protective services don't always tell us our rights, but at ChangeFactory, we have learnt about all these rights – Pro; 19 years

The above remarks exemplify participation as a conduit through which young people's knowledge of their rights is strengthened, thereby empowering them to contribute independent actions and opinions. This resonates Thompson's (2002) understanding that genuine empowerment helps to nurture in people a better sense both of the self and the circumstances within which they interact from time to time. Therefore, the ombudsman's conception of participation as channel through which children and young people can pursue active empowerment is not only desirable, but it also compelling considering the practical value addition; in achieving a respectful and balanced society that gives due regard, and equal consideration for children's views in the same manner as those of their adult counterparts.

5.4 The case of expert meetings and groups

Having unraveled both the meaning and rationale for child participation within the institution of the ombudsman, this section reports on the distinct character of expert meetings and groups' approach to participation.

5.4.1 Groups and meetings -Drawing the distinction

Expert groups and meetings constitute the primary channel through which the ombudsman engages with children and young people. Although in practice these are two distinct approaches and used in different situations, conceptually both are grounded in the same philosophy, and premised on the recognition of children as competent individuals, and experts at being children.

A distinction between expert meetings and expert groups is provided in the ombudsman's expert handbook thus;

When we talk about expert meetings, we mean relatively short, one-off meetings with a group of children and young people...We frequently hold these expert meetings prior to a conference; they can take the form of a meeting at a school, a visit to a youth club etc. Such meetings normally last between one and four hours. Expert groups on the other hand are made up of children and young people with experiences in a particular area, who work for a period of time on important issues together with the Ombudsman's staff. Their duration can be between three to four meetings over the course of two to four months.

Implicit in the above distinction is that expert meetings are best suited when the intention is to conduct a background check on an issue of concern at a particular time. This may or may not be followed up with detailed investigation. If however the intention is to uncover deep seated notions on a less known issue, expert groups become the preferred working method, in a sense that they enable the ombudsman to work for an extended period with children that have particular experience within that field. The premise for both approaches is that although children have valuable insights about their situations, adults often wield the responsibility to make decisions. Expert meetings and groups then become a channel through which adults enlist children's views and take them into account whenever they make decisions.

The observed character of expert groups and meetings appears similar to the nature of forums for young people's involvement reported in the global study of independent human rights institutions for children (Sedletzki, 2012). The findings of that study reported children's participation in NHRI was of two main forms; a) permanent institutionalized mechanisms such as youth councils, advisory bodies and focus groups; which are similar to the expert groups studied in the present study. The second form of participation was through ad hoc consultations, hearings and meetings; which are also similar to the expert meetings that are reported in this study. While both forms of consultation were seen as useful approach to enlist children's views, the study cautioned that "if conducted with improper methodology, ad hoc methods run the risk of being tokenistic" (Sedletzki, 2012, p. 87).

5.4.2 Character of children's participation

This section takes a look at some of the defining features of expert meetings and groups considered in light of the generally acceptable requirements for achieving effective, genuine, authentic and ethical participation of children and young people. Clarity needs to be made here that albeit different methods, the basic considerations for conducting expert meetings and groups largely intersect. Where variations have been observed, these will be emphasized.

Predominantly Consultative

A defining feature of expert meetings and groups is that they assume a predominantly consultative approach, in which the initial idea is conceived by adults, but who see a need to involve children, as one respondent explained;

We are the ombudsman and we won't be able to help you personally, but we would like you to share with us some ideas of how you have experienced your own lives, and what has happened in your life, not so that we can help you, but that we can make good recommendations... – Respondent 2; Barneombudet

The above remarks exemplify an adult in a position to represent children's interests, but who appreciates that this can only be effectively realized to the extent that children are empowered, and have an active input in the process. While a consultative approach may not necessarily represent young people's initiative or confer on them the choice to make decisions, it nevertheless recognizes children's democratic right to have a say in influencing decisions; even in forums to which they may not have direct access (Lansdown, 2011, p. 147, 2010). Other literature acknowledge that when suitably applied, a consultative approach promises real and tangible benefits (Ciara, 2010; Hart, 2008; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010; Sedletzki, 2012). Besides, in particular situations such as violence ravaged settings, adults might have to take a more directive role to safeguard children's safety (Hart et al., 2004, p. 48).

Open, informative and transparent

One of the strategies to ensure that consultative child participation minimizes the risk of being tokenistic, is to provide participants with information throughout the whole process. In this regard, this study has found that information giving is a distinguished element of expert meetings and groups from initiation through to completion as explained below;

All participants must be informed about the purpose of holding the meeting, what you will discuss and how you will go about it. Where possible, this can be done in advance

by sending an email to the school, to a contact person or directly to the children/young people. Re- member to keep the language age-appropriate – Expert handbook

This extract highlights some of the key areas of focus when giving information to children, including the aim and content of the meeting and how the views of children will be elicited. Most importantly, it emphasizes that information to participants should be provided in an age appropriate manner, which is a key requirement for the effectiveness of participation initiatives (Cloke and Davies, 1997; Lansdown, 1997; Sinclair, 1998; Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006). It seems however that while children receive information, they have minimal influence in influencing agenda on the subject of consultation. This raises questions on the extent to which these deliberations reflect and attend to the children's perspective, as opposed to the adults' child perspective; despite a genuine intention to represent the interests of children.

Nonetheless, by providing rich and age appropriate information, the ombudsman is directly empowering children essentially to decide whether to or not to participate, and if they should chose to participate, to make this decision from an informed standpoint. Other than facilitating empowerment, information giving is in direct agreement with a rights based approach which explicitly obligates duty bearers to provide rights holders with access to information (UNFPA, 2010, p. 42) in accordance with Article 13 of the CRC.

Recognizes children's competency

The adoption of the CRC (1989) opened way for the reconstruction of the position of children in society from the pervasive 'becoming' view to a rather different perspective of the child as competent in their own right (Kryger, 2004, p. 166). Today, the notion of the competent child is widespread and several authors refer to the growing use of the concept within the new sociology of childhood and other child centred disciplines (Ellegaard, 2004; Gitz-Johansen, 2004; Kampmann, 2004; Kryger, 2004; Tisdall, 2012). Although associated with varying connotations, the general idea is that of a child who is seen as an individual in their own right, and who should be accorded an opportunity to shape their own life, and exercise their democratic right to participation (Brembeck et al., 2004).

In its investigation, this study has established a close connection between the character of children's participation in expert meetings and groups, and the understanding of a competent child described above. An extract from the children's hearing exemplifies this relationship;

Children and youth are themselves experts on what it is like to be young in Norway in 2009, and must therefore be given the opportunity to participate so that Norway can become a better country to grow up in – Report on the Children’s Hearing, 2009

A representative from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child who attended the hearing had this to say about children’s participation;

It is so interesting to learn that these children are very competent. They see where the problems are, and often they have solutions – Representative from the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009

Both remarks above recognize that children and young people are competent and autonomous individuals; a view that was also confirmed by ChangeFactory pros;

As long as you have been in the system for some time, then you are a pro. There is nothing that defines a pro but just that everybody is a pro even if you are not in the ChangeFactory – Pro; 18 years

An important message drawn from this quotation is that of an inherently competent child, no matter their age, gender, ethnicity, colour, jurisdiction, or other defining features. This means that whether in ChangeFactory, the ombudsman or other similar organizations, all children are endowed with innate agency or the capacity to form independent opinions and initiate action on their own terms, as opposed to adults’ defined premises. As such it is important that adults appreciate this competency, and take deliberate steps to ensure practical realization of children’s democratic right to participation; giving due consideration to their age and maturity.

This study observes that to some extent, the recruitment of children to participate in expert groups recognizes this competency. Essentially, only those with experience of the situation are consulted; but most importantly, the liberty to influence the agenda and nature of the engagement is decided by adults. Nonetheless, expert groups in their own right emphasize a focus on children’s resources, agency and survival skills; their difficult experiences notwithstanding. By engaging those who have experienced difficult experiences such violence, incest and the massacre at Utøya, the expert groups promote a strengths based, as opposed to a problem inclined approach. This approach emphasizes that “rather than focusing exclusively on problems, your eye turns to the possibility” (Saleebey, 2006, p. 1). Such an approach to child participation refutes opposition to children’s participation on the pretext that they lack adequate competence or experience to participate (Lansdown, 2011, 1997).

Safe and risk sensitive

Without disregarding recognition of children's competency, the character of participation promoted by the ombudsman through expert meetings and groups is sensitive and aims to avoid risk to the child's safety and wellbeing. Initiatives to ensure children's safety present in two main forms. Essentially and prior to group activities, the ombudsman ensures that those to participate have achieved a level of stability from the previous traumatic experience;

It is important that those children who come to the meeting have been seeing a psychologist or working through the trauma or that they are not just in the middle of it.

It's not that you can get over it forever, but you have to move on. We make sure that we have children who have been able to move on in some way – Respondent 3; Barneombudet

While appreciating children's inherent competency to participate, the respondent is also conscious of the likelihood for those in the middle of the crisis not objectively share their experiences. While this is an important element of safe ethical participation, it raises questions on whether children working through trauma should be excluded from participation. Ultimately, it should not be impulsively assumed that crisis and trauma necessarily erode children's competency. To the contrary, participation should give equal opportunity, and where crisis has been established, an assessment done to establish if children affected can participate with minimal risk of experiencing negative ramifications.

A complementary initiative is to ensure that during the actual consultations, particularly when the issue to be discussed revolves around a traumatic experience such as incest or combat, provisions are made to have an adult who can competently address any ensuing reactions. In most cases, this is someone with whom children have had a previous working relationship; or if that is not possible, an appropriate professional is availed instead. Thus, during the expert group of children who had a family member in prison, a representative from FFP (a support organization) was present as an observer, but did not actively participate in the actual meeting. In the case of the children who survived the 2011 massacre at Utøya, the ombudsman engaged the services of a professional psychologist in case children needed support given the traumatic nature of the issue around which the meeting was constituted;

The examples discussed above represent an initiative by the ombudsman to ensure that the environment within which children participate is risk sensitive. In any case, prospective participants are usually recruited through support organizations with whom they have had

previous contact, and hopefully received some support. It could therefore be said that such initiatives acknowledge the importance of risk assessment in determining and avoiding possible danger to the child (Munro, 2002, p. 63; Welbourne, 2012, p. 121). Discussing the significance of safe and secure child participatory activities, Lansdown (2011, pp. 155–56) emphasizes both the role for skilled staff to address child protection issues, and the need to pay attention to the needs of particular at-risk groups of children; such as those who have experience of abuse or other traumatic events. From a rights perspective, the CRC (1989, p. 5) in Article 19 provides for the protection of children from “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation ...”

Collaborative and partnership centred

At the heart of expert meetings and groups is a partnership based form of participation in which both young people and adult facilitators engage together in an equal and egalitarian manner, giving due regard and respect for each other’s views. In particular, those who facilitate participatory processes see the importance and endeavor to give children an opportunity to suggest how the consultation will proceed as this guideline stipulates;

Work out some ground rules for the meeting together with the participants and stick them on the wall for all to see and remember – Expert handbook

This extract illustrates existence of a partnership form of participation in which adults are not just making the decisions and imposing them on children all the time, but also recognizing the latter’s own active role in the process; a view that is endorsed by a ChangeFactory pro;

For me it’s not being able to work from 08:00 – 15:00, but rather about getting off from your high table and being on the same level with me. It doesn’t work from here to here (*demonstrating with hands from the top to the bottom*). – Pro, 18 years

Implicit in the above remarks is a call for adults to dissolve their power relations and recognize that young people also bring important insights to the participation process (Davis, 2007; Franklin and Sloper, 2005; Hart et al., 2003; Kimberlee, 2008; Percy-Smith, 2005; Woodhouse, 2003). Thus, Franklin and Sloper (2006, p. 10) conceive partnership working as raising awareness on the objectives, processes and possible outcomes of participation; in turn leading to an open and transparent process that delivers positive outcomes in terms of knowledge building. It has also been argued that partnership based approaches are consistent with both empowerment (Payne, 2014) and strength based approaches (Guo and Tsui, 2010; Natalie, 2011; Saint-Jacques et al., 2009; Saleebey, 2009; Venkat, 2012) in social work. Hence

Saleebey (2002, p. 1) sees the strengths based approach as “a collaborative process depending on clients and workers to be purposeful agents and not mere functionaries”.

Anchored on child friendly methods and logistical support

A key consideration when planning and conducting expert meetings and groups is to provide an environment within which children can be inspired to participate, so as to achieve optimum results. To the ombudsman, this requires both child friendly working methods, as well as adequate material and logistical support. Considering the latter, an assessment is conducted to establish if prospective participants require facilitation for either transport, accommodation or feeding; and during the actual consultations, food and other nourishments are provided to boost the concentration levels of participants as emphasized in a manual;

Will you have to order refreshments? Talk to the young people or the adults around them about the kind of food that would be appropriate. Food is important for sustaining concentration levels throughout the entire meeting – Expert handbook

Provision of these and other logistics shows that the ombudsman appreciates that absence of some of these provisions may have negative ramifications on children’s ability to participate. For instance, lack of transport or accommodation might limit the availability of children who must travel to attend expert meetings. Not only that, it would also be discomforting and unsafe if children were abandoned to negotiate these considerations on their own.

When it comes to the actual conduct of meetings and groups, the ombudsman has a pool of participatory methods each of which applies to a particular phase within the whole process. As such, there are ‘getting to know each other’ activities, those for collecting information and others for evaluating the outcome of the consultation.

Considering the use of appropriate participation methods, this study sees a real opportunity for expert meetings and groups to tap into children’s views and lived experiences needed to inform ombudsman advocacy work. This is because when applied in a manner consistent with the age related development needs of the child, methods provide openings to stimulate young people’s cognitive abilities, hence enabling them to express ideas that would otherwise have been difficult without the use of methods (Harden, 2000; Miller, 2007). Success of this however essentially requires the worker to take on a more facilitative, rather than directive role (ibid). Complementary, Lansdown (2011) argues that the use of participatory methods should empower young people to participate by giving them age appropriate information; and later on involve them in deciding what methods are best suited for achieving a fruitful engagement. In

this regard, this study finds enough evidence attesting that children are given sufficient information, but has not been able to ascertain the extent to which they are involved in developing these participation methods. However, the study has established that most methods were initially developed by the Norwegian Peace Association, and subsequently adapted to suit the purpose of expert meetings and groups.

Ethical conscious

Ethical practice is concerned with “resolving questions that invoke responsibilities for the welfare of others or conflicts among loyalties to different groups” (Schenk and Williamson, 2005, p. ii). On its part, this study has been able to uncover various initiatives within the character of expert meetings intended to inculcate a culture of participation that adheres to basic ethical principles. These include; honesty and transparency, protection from harm, respect for the person of children, their rights to privacy, confidentiality, equality of opportunity and voluntary participation; some of which have already been discussed above.

To these, this study has established expert meetings and groups’ explicit focus on controlled media involvement, children’s rights to participate voluntarily, a focus on the goal and above all, a careful adjournment of participation activities. Regarding children’s right to participate voluntarily, a respondent had this to say;

We have to accept that participation is a right but it is not a must. So if there are two or more students in the group that don’t want to say their meaning, it is acceptable. Of course they have a right to say their meaning and to be heard but they don’t have to if they don’t want and we make this clear - Respondent 1; Barneombudet

These remarks illustrate a culture that appreciates participation as a right, and that children as partners, not passive objects in the process have a say in deciding whether to or not to engage and on what terms.

Another participant drew attention on how information from children should be processed, the nature and extent of media involvement in participation activities;

We have discussed this a lot at the office and we disagree strongly for instance on whether we should take pictures and use them, even if the parents say yes. – Respondent 1; Barneombudet

These remarks illustrates the ombudsman's consciousness to the privacy of children, and the position of the media in that respect. This is of importance as children have themselves expressed concern about the conduct of the media in particular situations;

There is a shock, it has not been talked with either family or friends, but media is everywhere looking for their story. You should not begin to interview someone who is in such an emergency situation – Child; Report on catastrophe experts

The above remarks send strong criticism of the manner in which some of the press conducted themselves following the 2011 massacre at Utøya. Another child gave an example of good and ethical media practice in difficult situations;

The only thing that was human was a British press. They let down the cameras and came up to us – Child; Report on catastrophe experts

As opposed to the previous respondent, this child commends the sensitive, humane and respectful character exemplified by the British press in the aftermath of the tragedy.

Considering the tendency for children to develop emotional attachment with expert groups, it is only ethical and desirable that termination of that engagement be achieved in a manner that both appreciates children's contribution, and encourages them to move on. Commenting on this issue, one respondent had this to say;

We see that some groups get attached and they seem to identify with the cause and want to work with it. However, that is not something that we want to encourage because we want them to give us information and then to move on with their lives – Respondent 2; Barneombudet

It is important that the above remarks are not interpreted as a lack of sensitivity on the part of the facilitators, or a preoccupation with obtaining information; and less about the needs of children. Quite the opposite, the ombudsman understands that children have a life outside these meetings; and if they might require additional support both during and after the meeting, that is provided by engaging and collaborating with relevant service systems. Such practice complies with the institutions' mandate as a rights watchdog, not a provider of services.

The examples discussed above exemplify expert meetings and groups' commitment to the basic principles for achieving an ethical participatory ethos. These principles emphasize a transparent, respectful, voluntary, child friendly, relevant, inclusive, safe, and accountable process; facilitated with a comprehensive and participation relevant training programme (Lansdown, 2011; Lansdown and Penn, 2004; Ponet, 2011). Even so, these considerations are

in direct compliance with the principles fundamental to both the rights based approach (UNFPA, 2010; United Nations, 2006) and empowerment grounded practice (Braye and Preston, 1995). And given the emphasis on respect for young people and their views, voluntary and democratic engagement, these considerations also emphasize the significance of practicing from a strengths perspective (Guo and Tsui, 2010; Saleebey, 2011, 2009, 2008, 2006, 2002).

Accountable and evaluative

Last but not least on the nature of expert meetings and groups is an evaluative component which also stresses obligations on the part of the ombudsman to be accountable to children and young people they invite to participate. According to the expert meetings and groups' participation handbook, this evaluation takes place both during and upon completion of the process. The significance of evaluating expert meetings or groups, and providing participants with feedback on the outcome of the process was emphasized thus;

It is also important at the end that if we produce stuff like this (*pointing to a report on expert groups*), we share it with them in some way. We make sure that when we come up with something that reflects their opinions, we send them a copy so that they know what they have been part of – Respondent 2; Barneombudet

Besides emphasizing the value of feedback, this excerpt also makes emphasis of the obligation of duty bearers like the ombudsman to account to rights holders who are the participants in expert meetings and groups. There are indeed strong voices underscoring the role of feedback and accountability within the field of children's participation. Accountability in form of evaluation and feedback is a basic requirement for ethical participation, but it can only be complete when children are involved as active participants (Lansdown, 2011; Ponet, 2011). It has also been argued that evaluation and children's involvement in the process are key ingredients of a genuine rights based approach (Johnson, 2010; Kirrily, 2010); helping to "promote young people's control over their own projects and enable them to critically appraise their progress and refine objectives ..." (Johnson, 2010, p. 155).

5.5 Significance of expert meetings and groups

This section identifies and discusses the practical significance of expert meetings and groups not only for children participants, but also adult facilitators and society at large.

5.5.1 A mechanism for the fulfilment of children's rights

As independent and active citizens, children have an inalienable right to participate. On the other hand, it is the obligation of duty bearers like the ombudsman to ensure practical realization of these as one respondent alluded;

I think the main reason why the ombudsman is working with participation is that it makes a lot of sense because in many ways, we see that the greatest contribution we can make is to uphold the values of the CRC... - Respondent 2; Barneombudet

Other than recognizing the ombudsman obligation to promote participation, the respondent also recognizes the guidance of the CRC on the subject. Thus by working with expert groups and meetings, the ombudsman is essentially fulfilling the provisions enshrined in Article 12 (United Nations, 1989) of the Children's Convention. Besides, the Article 4, requires ratifying states to "undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of children's rights". Thus by establishing an ombudsman for children, the Norwegian government appreciates the importance of an independent institutional mechanism and watchdog, with a primary responsibility for ensuring that national legislation, policy, and practice are in compliance with the provisions of the CRC. More so, the role of independent human rights institutions like the ombudsman to advocate for and promote realization of children's rights, participation in particular has been emphasized in General Comment No. 2 (United Nations, 2002), but also in other literature (Hodgkin and Newell, 2007; Lansdown, 2001a; Miljeteig, 2006, 2005; Nigel et al., 2011; Rébecca, 2009; Sedletzki, 2012; United Nations, 2009; Veronica, 2008). Precisely, promoting children's participation through initiatives like the expert meetings and groups represents a deliberate, conscious, rightful, desirable and noble action to fulfil their fundamental human rights (Lansdown, 2001b).

5.5.2 Opportunities for children's empowerment and learning

The expert meetings and groups are associated with direct and tangible outcomes for children, giving participants an opportunity to learn, but also empowering them to take responsibility for directing their own lives as we see below;

Many of these girls didn't know that incest was wrong until they were 15 or 16. Many of them could sense that something was not right, but they also thought that this was ordinary. These children got exposed because they were not informed that it was so wrong – Respondent 4; Barneombudet

The respondent highlights that lack of information is a risk factor for aggravated abuse and exploitation of children, even by their primary carers. While expert groups might not have been the children's first source of information that incest constitutes an abusive act, they still deserve credit for offering children an opportunity to further explore the gravity of the problem, thereby empowering themselves and others who risk exposure.

One of the ChangeFactory pros hinted on the link between participation and empowerment;

It's special because it gives you a chance to speak louder and be your own person. Since I was a little child, I always felt like I was a burden to everyone, and I always wanted to be invisible, but now that I am in ChangeFactory, I get to have a voice, to be myself and to have my own story and do what I want – Pro; 20 years

Participation according to this respondent gives a voice and helps one to shape his or her own destiny, which bears connotations of empowerment. In separate interview, a respondent at the ombudsman saw expert meetings and groups as an opportunity for adult facilitators to nurture children's democratic competences;

Grownups must teach children that when you say what you want, sometimes you get what you want, but some other times you get what another wants. That is part of the democracy learning, but next time, you should still say what you want because it can be taken into consideration – Respondent 1; Barneombudet

The respondent above envisages that through expert meetings and groups, children learn to appreciate that although they have a right to participate, it doesn't always automatically follow that their views will take precedence over those of others, but that they are given equal weight; and that the ultimate decision has ensued from a democratic process.

This evidence invites us to appreciate the role of participatory processes in developing children's confidence, self-esteem and personal responsibility (Burke, 2010; Caraveo, et al., 2010; Ciara, 2010; Haruhiko et al., 2009; Jamieson and Mukoma, 2010; Malone and Hartung, 2010; Sedletzki, 2012). Expert groups in particular offer a real opportunity for members to form a collective mass around which to point out and challenge abuse, exploitation and other forms of injustice (Lansdown, 2001b, p. 21). Participation in expert meetings and groups then becomes a channel through which to realize other rights to provision and protection (Lansdown, 2010, 2001b), and for children facing particular disempowering processes, participation offers a viable tool through which to challenge firmly rooted oppressive tendencies, thereby promoting empowerment and liberation (Healy, 1998). Elsewhere, the

significance of participation in enhancing children's democratic participation, an understanding of their rights and the internal functioning of institutions mandated to fulfil these rights was reported in a one Dikwankwetatla children's project in South Africa (Jamieson and Mukoma, 2010). Similarly Kranzl-Nagl and Zartler's study (2010) on children's participation in school and community reported several benefits for participants including; an increasing understanding of democratic decision making processes, and appreciation of the equal status of both adults and young people.

5.5.3 Openings for adult learning and reflection

The expert meetings and groups not only provide an opportunity for young people's opportunities for self-reflection, but by sharing their experiences, children provide opportunities for adults' learning and reflection as one respondent admitted;

Whenever we conduct these meetings, I always learn something new; they always give me another angle to look at something and they always have the solution which is quite simple – a solution which we haven't thought of. Many of their advices challenge us and get us thinking why we haven't been acting like that...; Respondent; Barneombudet

Another respondent saw expert groups and meetings as providing an alternative window through which to consider the world, particularly when working with children and young people. This brings to light those trivial issues often neglected by adult professionals, but with carry significant meaning for children as another respondent mentioned;

The children in their recommendations to the police said that they are never asleep when mummy and daddy are fighting..., and that for many years, that was the practice, but suddenly a bunch of some nine children with experience of the problem point out something that all the professionals and adults didn't see – Respondent; Barneombudet

The respondent above is talking about how children's advices changed the manner in which the police in Norway respond to issues of domestic violence. He further explained that for a longtime, the police never inquired about the welling of children whenever they were alerted of a possible domestic scuffle. But subsequent to the advices of an expert group with experience of the problem, there has been a practice shift requiring the police to talk to children whenever cases involving domestic violence have been reported in a particular home.

This is evidence suggesting the positioning of expert meetings and groups as an opportunity for adults' reflective learning and positive adaptation. Children's participation also provides adults with an array of benefits, primarily appreciation of the working methods appropriate for

engaging young people (Clark, 2004; Kränzl-Nagl and Zartler, 2010; Lansdown, 2005b; Steinitz, 2009a, 2009b). For instance, Kränzl-Nagl and Zartler's (2010) reported that through participation, adults understood the extent to which dissolved power relations serve as a driver for a successful encounter with children and young people.

5.5.4 Enhances the quality of decision making and system functioning

In many ways and considering that children tend to be alienated from mainstream formal decisions making processes, this study finds strong evidence supporting the argument that promoting children's participation through expert meetings and groups presents a viable alternative through which children can constantly feed quality into predominantly adult managed systems, even though these are expected to work in children's best interest. The ombudsman approach is not that children are making the decisions, but that drawing on expert groups and meetings, adults have the possibility both to make child sensitive decisions, and adjust systems so that they are responsive to the best interest of children;

As a result of the recommendations from the hospital experts, we know that many doctors have changed the guidelines on how they talk to children. In terms of families in prison, their advices have guided renovation of the visiting rooms to make them more family friendly all over the country – Respondent 2, Barneombudet

This quotation illustrates that advices from expert groups and meetings are helping to shape a more child friendly environment in Norway.

In one case, an expert group of children with a family member in prison did not only express concern on the appalling conditions in children's play rooms in several prisons, but also suggested how visiting rooms might be made more child friendly. The study learnt that these recommendations were later taken up and implemented in several prisons around the country. Another child from an expert group on bullying shared the following experience;

I walked around alone, sat down and thought. There was no one who came up to me. Not even the teachers. None of the adults are concerned about what's happening - Girl, 12 years; Report on school experts

The message we read from the above quotation is of young person in need of, but doesn't get the support of adults following an experience with bullying. Messages like this challenge adults in positions of responsibility to take extra care in identifying and responding to children in need, thereby improving system responsiveness. Besides, the ombudsman as an independent

voice for children capitalizes on the experience and insights from expert meetings as a resource for informing subsequent recommendations on what actions government and other stakeholders can implement to better realize children's rights, in a manner consistent with their needs and experiences. For instance, this study has learnt that in collaboration with other members of the civil society, the ombudsman sometimes draws on expert meetings and groups to inform the alternative reporting process to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. In 2009, a 'Children's hearing' was organized in which select expert groups together with other children from around Norway, met and shared their experiences with a representative from the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Commenting about the Children's hearing, one participant had this to say; "This hearing is for real, it's not some fake thing adults do." – Child, 16 years; Report on the Children's hearing

This participant contrasts the children's hearing with other adult led initiatives in which children are called to participate. In her view, the hearing provided a real opportunity for children's genuine as opposed to the fake tokenistic participation. Such approaches promise to "enhance legitimacy of decision making, the responsiveness of service, and claims by marginalized and disadvantaged people to have their say in issues that affect their lives" (Barnes et al., 2004, p. 1). And considering that children themselves are excluded from mainstream decision making (Hodgkin, 1997; Lansdown, 2010; Theis, 2010), having established channels such as expert meetings and groups through which they can express themselves impacts on the quality of legislation, policies, services and institutional practices (Crowley and Skeels, 2010; Lansdown, 2011, 2001b; Mannion, 2010; Ponet, 2011). Ultimately, "decisions that are fully informed by children's own perspectives will be more relevant, more effective and more sustainable" (Lansdown, 2011, p. 5). This is in agreement with the view that a rights based approach to child participation enhances "better and more sustainable human development outcomes" (United Nations, 2006, p. 16).

5.5.5 Promotes a culture of participation

Premised on the success of expert meetings and groups, the ombudsman reported a growing need and appreciation among different institutions and stakeholders both public and private to consult children and involve them in decision making. According to one respondent, some institutions have already established forums through which professionals can consult children;

In some hospitals, they are making their own youth panels that give advice on how to arrange the medical treatment, how to arrange the rooms and that is a big change that is coming up in almost all Norwegian hospitals as a result of the children's advices to hospitals – Respondent 1; Barneombudet

Although the above development does not represent a legislative change, it is nevertheless reflects a practice shift from a predominantly “know it all” professional perspective, to one which appreciates that the other has insights too (Saleebey, 2011).

Additionally, the ombudsman also reported that a number of institutions had openly expressed interest in learning how to promote participatory practice in their activities;

What we have seen though is that there is a lot of people on the outside who are interested in how we do this and then want to learn. So we have tried to organize a course and we do many lectures... - Respondent 2; Barneombudet

This communicates a positive development within society in terms of attitude change, and a recognition of the benefits of child participation. Most importantly, these institutions appreciate the strategic role of education and training in achieving effective engagement with children.

Beyond Norway, the experience and success of expert meetings and groups has seen the ombudsman, as part of the institution's international missions, travel to and conduct expert meetings with children and young people in countries like India, Georgia, Nepal, Hong Kong and Czech Republic. The important lessons from this development are varied: Essentially it stresses the need for more collaborative work, not just between children and adults, but also among key stakeholders and actor networks on children's rights issues. It also points out that children's rights are not limited by geographical boundaries, and while realization of these rights in other countries is beyond the ombudsman's mandate, sharing experiences and best practices helps others improve their own initiatives to promote young people's participation (Farrar et al., 2010; Kirby and Laws, 2010; Ray, 2010). Such a partnership approach is founded in the rights based approach with its emphasis on the universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of human rights (UNFPA, 2010, p. 533). Beyond the need for collaboration, the ombudsman's experience highlights the need for participation methods to be backed by a sound training programme, so as to promote their effective implementation (Lansdown, 2011, 2001b; Ponet, 2011). “Adults need preparation, skills and support to facilitate children's participation effectively, to provide them, for example, with skills in listening, working jointly with children and engaging children effectively in accordance with their evolving capacities” (Lansdown, 2011, p. 155).

5.6 Challenges facing expert meetings and groups

This section discusses some of the challenges encountered by the ombudsman in planning and organizing successful expert meetings and groups.

5.6.1 Identifying prospective participants

A key challenge reported in planning and executing expert groups and meetings was in relation to the identification and recruitment of prospective participants. The reasons for this were mainly twofold: Firstly, respondents emphasized that young people tended to have other commitments such as academic life and other social related obligations. Secondly, it was reported that some adults were reluctant to give consent to allow their children's participation;

Another challenge is to find the right children because the grownups are very protective and this includes the professional grownups. They keep arguing that children cannot talk, and if you ask if they have asked the children, they say no, but still emphasize that they think they don't want to talk – Respondent 1; Barneombudet

The respondent's remarks point to the problem of gate keeping, whereby those with power usually adults impede opportunities for children to participate (Lansdown, 2005a; Mannion, 2010). This problem is also related to the unrelenting controversy between guaranteeing children's safety and protection on one hand, and on the other, respecting their autonomy and independence (Lansdown, 1997; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010; Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006). In other cases, children are considered too young and therefore excluded from decision making processes, even though evidence indicates that such might express their views through a third party advocate (Kirby and Laws, 2010).

Although protection in itself may not a negative motive, the problem is that its overemphasis restricts children's opportunities to participate and be heard (Sedletzki, 2012).

5.6.2 Termination of expert groups

The concern of ensuring that there is a smooth termination of expert meetings and groups has already been partially discussed as an ethical consideration for the ombudsman. As one respondent emphasized, this issue is more pervasive in expert groups which involve repeated engagement with young people, than in one off expert meetings.

I think the main challenge is to be constantly aware that an expert group is not therapy, and you have to remind yourself and the children that the purpose of this engagement

is not therapy, but that the children should teach the adults about how to improve situations for children; respondent 1; Barneombudet

Thus given the extended contact between children and facilitators at the ombudsman, close relationships are usually formed, hence “death of the group becomes an extremely important issue to many of the group members” (Tuckman and Jensen, 1977, p. 426). The greatest task is to ensure that termination of engagement is conducted in an ethical manner; that respects the views and wellbeing of children. The ombudsman’s first response towards this direction is to avail a professional or contact whom children can contact as and when required. The other is to provide participants with feedback which provides reassurance that their participation has been of value and is appreciated (Lansdown, 2011).

5.6.3 Evaluating impact and following up recommendations

Although expert meetings and groups provide a channel through which the ombudsman can challenge government and other stakeholders to work in children’s best interest, this study is concerned about the lack of strong mechanism to measure and follow-up on the uptake and practical implementation of the institution’s recommendations. A respondent expressed concern on the inadequate follow up and evaluation of the outcomes of expert meetings;

Our job is just to give recommendations to politicians and other authorities about what they should change in the laws and policies. So then we tend to give these recommendations, but then it stops there and we don’t really follow up to see if it has changed – Respondent 2; Barneombudet

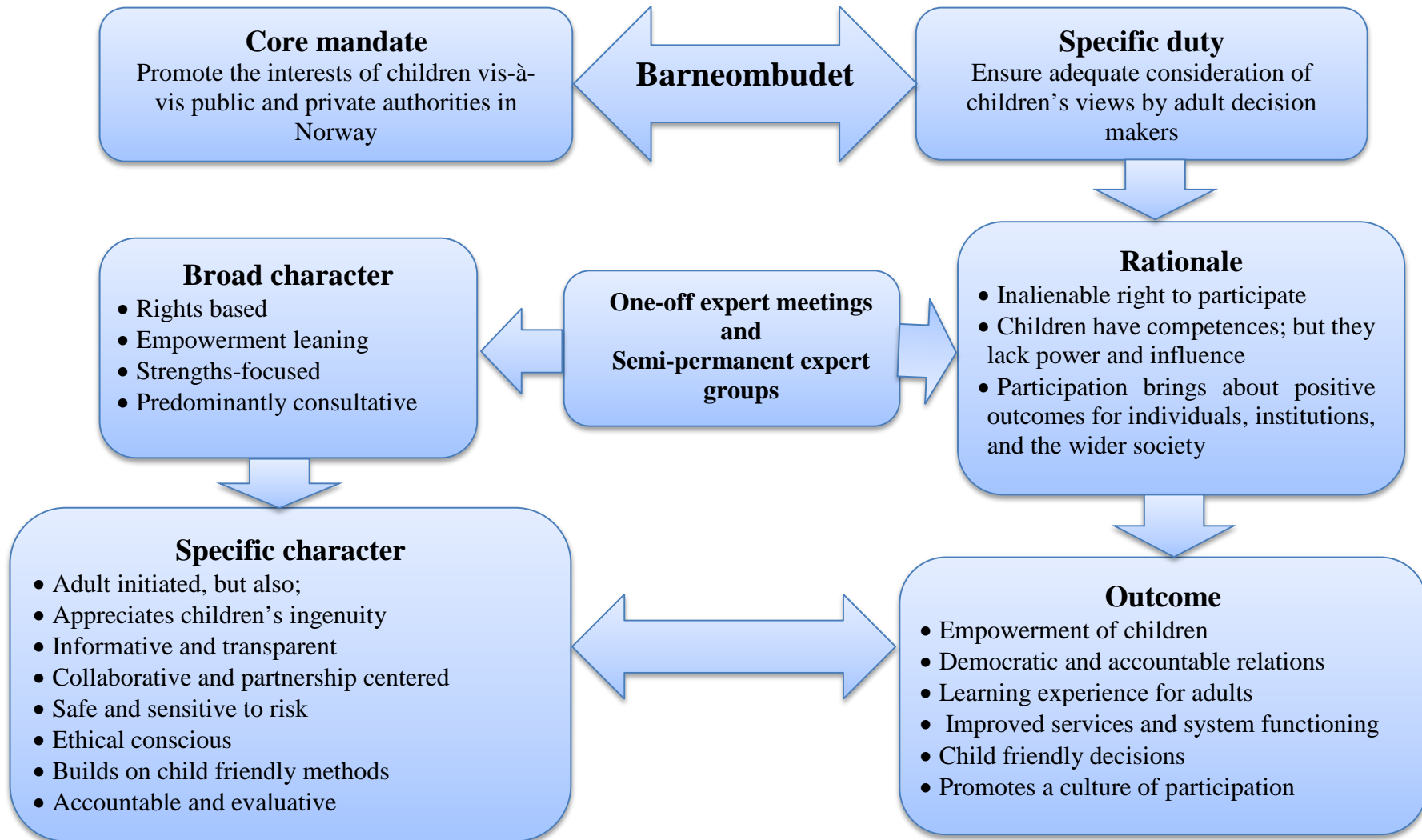
An obvious reason for this dilemma is that the Act regulating the ombudsman is not explicit on whether the institution should follow up on recommendations or complaints that are brought to its attention. Similar challenges related to follow up particularly of complaints brought to the attention of ombudsmen institutions were reported in the global study of independent human rights institutions for children (Sedletzki, 2012). The challenge then as in this study, is that the institutions lack mandate for that purpose; not to mention that the process is time consuming and often yields minimal results (Sedletzki, 2012, p. 124). A possible redress this problem would be for the ombudsman to form strong partnership engagements with NGOs, other child centered organizations and the broad network of civil society agencies involved in child rights work (Sedletzki, 2012). The greatest mantle however is on the national governments including parliaments, to take appropriate measures to follow up on the institutions recommendations. This includes among other things allocating sufficient resources

for that purpose (ibid). Eventually, lack of robust and routine follow up mechanism makes existing participatory initiatives fall short of the requirements of a rights based approach (Johnson, 2010).

5.7 A representation of child participation

The final part of the findings presents a summary framework illustrating fundamental elements underpinning the ombudsman's approach to child participation as described above. Since the model (see figure 7) is built on concepts and phrases employed in discussing the findings, no additional explanation has been provided.

Figure 7 The ombudsman's model of participation



Model developed by Musinguzi (2015)

Chapter six

Discussion, Lessons and Conclusion

In this last segment, the study reflectively comments on the findings on the expert meetings and groups' approach to child participation; and drawing on the elicited discussion, the study highlights key learning points and draws a conclusion of this investigation.

6.1 Discussion and reflections

Although well intentioned initiatives like the ombudsman's expert meetings and groups or the ChangeFactory pros represent innovative approaches through which to realize children's participation rights, this study has established a greater risk for such to promote a rather ideal as opposed to concrete organic participation. Essentially, agenda setting for consultative activities is predominantly a preoccupation of adults, with little opportunities for children to influence what is ultimately deliberated. Without discounting that information giving and collaborative engagement help dissolve undemocratic participatory processes, children's influence on agenda setting would if encouraged, significantly add value to, and improve the practical outcomes of adult dominated initiatives. The study observes that it might be possible that issues raised by children through online forums like "Ask the ombudsman" can influence the subject matter in consultative expert meetings and groups. However, to what extent they are effective for this purpose begs us to question: the level of children's awareness of their existence; if so, which particular groups (the needy or the well-off, those in urban areas or rural settings, immigrant children or native Norwegians, children in home environments or those in alternative care), and what proportion? Again, one would need to understand who decides on what issues ultimately come to the centre stage in expert meetings or groups (is it adults at the ombudsman or a select panel of children representatives)?

Ideally, initiatives such as expert meetings and groups should offer children equal opportunities for participation, depending on their age, evolving capacity or other factors. Originating from the children's convention, this is a matter of principle; not a privilege. On the other hand, the same principle requires protection measures in situations where negative physical or mental harm on children is a likely consequence of participation. Thus in the case of expert meetings and groups, the 'right or fitting' participants must be selected to avoid the risk of harm. By the

end of this selection process, some groups of children, such as those in the middle of a crisis may be excluded from participatory activities. As in the previous scenario, this issue raises questions regarding: who are the right children? Who defines and selects them? Using what criteria? Does the experience of a crisis necessarily erode children competency to participate? While resolving this dilemma lay outside the scope of this study, yet again it illustrates that the fundamental premises of child participation are very much constructed by adults, not the primary beneficiaries who are children. On the other hand, protection of children where potential or actual harm has been established is a principle of effective and ethical practice. Besides, adults like facilitators of expert meetings and groups must account for whatever actions they do or do not take. Realities like these expose conflicting loyalties with which workers within in the field of participation are constantly grappling. It also exposes the likelihood of greater criticisms towards individual adult practitioners, with little regard for broader contextual factors in explaining challenges to the effectiveness of expert meetings and groups or similar participation initiatives.

As one respondent hinted, critics often argue that given their limited participants' constitution, expert meetings and groups cannot be used to inform recommendations that embrace Norway's political, economic, social, and cultural diversity. Indeed, with the greater need for statistical information and quantifiable measures of social progress and wellbeing, criticisms of this nature are likely to be even more pervasive. Whereas this study acknowledges that expert meetings and groups may not be representative of the scope of views from children all around Norway; by and large, such a criticism is inherently impartial and blind to several realities which make it rather difficult to organize quantitatively representative consultations. First and foremost, organizing large scale activities must take into consideration the associated time, financial, and staffing implications. Secondly, whereas the ombudsman is mandated to involve children and promote their participation, this role should not be stretched or misinterpreted to mean conducting extensive research or gathering views from all children. At the same time, one must appreciate that by adopting a qualitative lens, expert meetings and groups help to uncover underlying system malfunctions. These can then form the foundation for detailed investigation, follow-up and possible redress by other relevant stakeholders.

While this study does not discount the practical achievements of expert meetings and groups, it raises fundamental questions on the extent to which children's views influence agenda setting in these participation initiatives. An even greater observation is that consultative forums like expert meetings and groups provide participants an opportunity to communicate a children's

perspective, yet they fall short of providing a balanced dialogue. At the end of the day, participation is largely maintained at an abstract level, with minimum spillover effects on children's natural settings. This may also be true for the consultative youth panels that are being established in hospitals and similar settings. While these certainly represent a positive development, they are still manifest of a macro level initiative that does not offer adequate opportunities for children to enjoy a levelled interaction with adults, later on influence an ethical participatory culture in real life situations.

As such, Treseder's (1997) conceptualization of the degrees of participation as "different, but equal, forms of good practice" ought to be interpreted and measured against the extent to which the approach in question succeeds in relinquishing opportunities for participation from select experts or pros to the collective mass of children, all who have competences, and an equal need to participate in accordance with their age, evolving capacity or other individual circumstances. Initiatives like expert meetings and groups are certainly good because they help to bring forward tacit questions affecting children's wellbeing in particular circumstances. However, the major thrust should be for participation to become a norm in every aspect of children's interaction within the diversity of political, economic, social, cultural or religious contexts. These may include families, schools, welfare institutions, political parties, justice systems etcetera. Public institutions like the ombudsman and private organizations like ChangeFactory might as and when necessary promote children's participation in their activities, but the greater challenge is to nurture a participatory ethos among those with whom children interact in natural settings or seek services routinely. Most importantly, to what extent the work of the Ombudsman and of organizations like ChangeFactory can generate tangible outcomes will very much depend on the demonstrated commitment by other micro level actors to ensure active concerted follow-up and uptake of resulting recommendations; in pursuit of democratic and accountable relations with children under their auspices.

6.2 Lessons for policy and practice

The following lessons can be drawn from the experience of expert meetings and groups.

6.2.1 Children are experts, they should be involved

Responding to the question on what was unique about the character of expert meetings and groups, all respondents emphasized the magnitude of competences demonstrated by children;

For me, it is the most important thing that there is no issue that you cannot talk to children about; it is more about how you talk to children. You can involve children in almost every question about life; but it is more about how you do it that can make boundaries to not get in dialogues – Respondent 1; Barneombudet

In agreement, and premised on resulting evidence discussed, this study believes that children and young people are competent individuals whose democratic rights to participation should be observed in a manner consistent with their age and presenting situation. Whenever adults work with children, the primary outlook should be that of a competent individual. Thus, respect for children and appreciation of their competency is the breakthrough towards a successful, effective, genuine and ethical engagement. Though important, the appropriateness of participation methods is secondary. And beyond appreciation of competency, adults must both learn and show commitment to share power with children (Kränzl-Nagl and Zartler, 2010).

6.2.2 An exclusive participation strategy makes a difference

While participation of children can occur, and certainly deliver results drawing on the provisions of general law such as the CRC or domestic legislation; there is added value if the institution in question has developed a sound and explicit policy framework and strategy on how to achieve genuine, ethical and sustainable engagement of young people. Such a strategy provides a reference point for all staff, gives legitimacy to participation, and ensures that there is a standard upon which to evaluate subsequent performance, which in itself is a positive step towards building accountable relations (Sedletzki, 2012). Without such a solid base, it is tempting and often too easy to forget about children, who in many respects already comprise an excluded and marginalized population category (Lansdown, 2010; Theis, 2010).

6.2.3 Achieving a quality protection-participation balance

Considering that the threats to children and young people's wellbeing are rapidly increasing in contemporary society, the need for protection cannot be underscored; but so is the need for participation. The world is witnessing an increase in situations involving violent combat, hunger, pornography, sexual exploitation, child trafficking, HIV/AIDS related orphans and other problems (Ager et al., 2010; Conradi, 2013; Tiefenbrun, 2007). While these and other problems call for greater protection measures, the value addition of children's participation in enhancing the quality and relevance of response mechanism should not be underestimated. It is important therefore to ensure that the desire for protection should not be achieved at the

greater expense of children's opportunities to exercise their democratic rights to experience meaningful participation.

6.2.4 Independent NHRI for children are important and desirable

A number of countries have established national human rights commission responsible for following up on the extent to which states are observing both international and national human rights frameworks. Where there is no dedicated NHRI for children such as an ombudsman or children's commissioner, these general commissions are also responsible for monitoring the observance of human rights specifically relating to children. However, considering the gravity of the problems that have historically and continue to face children today, establishing a national watchdog institution for children adds value to their rights campaign (Miljeteig, 2005). It shows that the signatory to the CRC is explicitly committed to protecting, promoting and fulfilling those rights. Once established, it is important that NHRI inculcate a participatory culture within their broad activity plans. One way to ensure that the institution is child friendly is for children themselves to be involved in recruitment processes for the ombudsman or children's commissioner (Sedletzki, 2012) as the case was in the last appointment for the current ombudsman in Norway.

6.2.5 Recommendations require active follow up

One of the challenges identified in this study is that there is limited follow up on the recommendations made by the ombudsman to promote greater realization of children rights. The main source for this challenge is that the ombudsman lacks mandate for that purpose. It should be noted however that children's interpretation of listening and therefore participation goes beyond just eliciting their views, to taking action on those views (Welbourne, 2012); hence gaps in follow up may imply inadequate redress of children's concerns. If this happens, the risk that children will lose trust in the institutions' capacity to represent their views cannot be overemphasized. It is therefore important that effective measures for following up and taking action on the recommendations of non-service delivery institutions like the ombudsman and ChangeFactory be explored. In this regard Sedletzki (Sedletzki, 2012) envisages the role of government structures, Parliaments in particular.

6.2.6 Foster robust partnerships engagements

A feasible and certainly promising solution to the challenge in following up recommendations by ombudsman is to form or harness vigorous alliances with other child centred organizations that might have both the resources, and the mandate to monitor actions of government. In any case, functioning as an effective watchdog for children's rights requires that the ombudsman "draw on the broadest possible base of information relating to the living conditions for children" (Miljeteig, 2005, p. 7). These embrace governments, the civil society, labor unions, professional bodies, media, academics as well as children (ibid). A well thought alliance with such organizations carries insurmountable benefits for the children's rights movement, among others, to ensure that recommendations that are provided are actively followed up; and implemented in pursuit for a more just, equitable and child friendly society.

6.2.7 Sharing best practices helps others to learn and develop

Although achieving genuine and effective participatory methods for children and young people essentially requires an ethos that takes cognizance of the contextual, realities (Healy, 1998), sharing information on what has and what has not worked helps countries to "benefit tremendously from exchanging experience and hard-won solutions with one another" (WHO, 2008, p. 1). Specifically within the field of children's participation, learning from others' experience helps to improve the quality of initiatives (Farrar et al., 2010; Kirby and Laws, 2010; Ray, 2010). This study therefore observes the significance and commends the ombudsman initiative to share with others the experience of expert meetings and groups. Part of the purpose for conducting this investigation was to report on a method that works in one place, not present a 'one size fits all' model, but so others can draw implications suitable for their own practice realities.

6.3 Conclusion

The main objective of undertaking this investigation was to interrogate the premise, character, significance and bottlenecks of expert meetings and groups as a distinct approach to promoting children and young people's participation rights within the institutional establishment of the ombudsman for children in Norway. Capitalizing on the resulting findings, the study would then draw key learning points for policy and practice within the field. The findings presented above exemplify that expert meetings and groups have a firm grounding in the principles

required for achieving an effective and ethical participatory ethos. The findings further point to an array of individual, organizational and wider system benefits accruing from these initiatives. Outstanding benefits include; providing a platform for the realization of children's rights, propelling active empowerment for participants, and learning outcomes for adults; while consciously challenging the system to effect quality and more child friendly services.

Amidst such gains, the ombudsman acknowledges that the promise of participation lies in the power to inculcate within society an all-round value system that both celebrates children's competency, and demonstrates genuine commitment to engage with them respectfully as equals. Such a model of participation should not be restrictively interpreted in view of tokenistic information giving and collaborative engagement; when the fundamental premises for according young people an equal opportunity to influence the agenda for consultation or other forms of participation largely remain an adult monopoly. Even more pertinent is that participation should not be constructed as a magic wand wielded by adults to exterminate problems in particular situations where the wellbeing of children is threatened. To the contrary, participation must be visibly seen, felt and robustly encouraged in natural settings within which both adults and children are in routine interaction. It must be a norm which all children everywhere can experience for a right, anytime, anywhere. Nevertheless, practical realization of a participatory ethos of this nature in many contexts presents real, conflicting and daunting dilemmas with which both children and adults must collaboratively grapple.

For anyone interested in increasing awareness about practical participation solutions, this study puts something at table, but also poses reflective questions for research, policy and practice. Essentially, it draws on the pool of benefits reported here to argue the case for establishing independent national human rights institutions for children; and for concerted efforts among duty bearers to develop pragmatic solutions for realizing their participation rights within the diversity of natural settings. A key question certainly is how to follow-up on the uptake and redress of recommendations by the ombudsman, ensuing from expert meetings and groups. More importantly, it is how to achieve a participatory culture described above. Resolving these dilemmas lay outside the scope of this study, but will nevertheless be important for maintaining the institution's relevance as a credible voice and watchdog for children's rights. More importantly, it is a question to which children everywhere merit valid, honest, quick, respectful and uncensored accountability from across civilizations world over.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide for Ombudsman staff

1. What are the main functions / responsibilities of the ombudsman?
 - a. What is your role in the process / in this organization?
2. What does child participation mean to you / to the Ombudsman?
3. What do you consider as critical factors / conditions / requirements for ensuring children's genuine, true and authentic participation?
4. Of what significance is it to involve children in your work; why is child participation important to you? What do you seek to achieve by involving children?
5. What different approaches / methods do you use to promote child participation?
6. How do you employ expert meetings and groups to promote child participation?
 - a. In what various ways / situations / settings are they used?
 - b. How are they organized / conducted – where are they conducted, how long, who participates, who facilitates, how often, what logistics are needed, what kind of support do participants receive?
 - c. What issues are discussed, how are they determined; what categories of experts?
 - d. What ethical issues do you consider when planning/conducting these meetings?
7. Assessed against the different methods of involving children in your activities, how do expert meetings rank? What are their strengths, what are their weaknesses?
8. What have you achieved by using expert meetings; how successful have they been as a method of promoting or achieving the objectives of child participation?
9. What factors affect the effective functioning / conduct of expert meetings and groups?
10. What are you doing to address these challenges?
11. What important lessons have you learnt from your experience using expert meetings as a method of involving children?
12. In your opinion, how best can these initiatives be improved upon to promote effective, meaningful and ethical child participation? What could be done better / differently?
13. On the whole and in your own words, what is it about expert meetings and groups you find interesting / different? What makes it a good method of engaging with children?

Appendix 2: Interview guide for ChangeFactory pros

1. In your own words, who is a Pro (what unique attributes or experiences do Pros have? How would you describe a Pro? What makes someone a Pro? (Probe on issues of age, gender, family background, religion etc.)
2. Tell me a little about yourself and your encounter with ChangeFactory i.e. when and what situations influenced your contact with ChangeFactory?
3. Why is it so important for young people to participate in everyday life decision making? What benefits does such participation bring?
4. How are you engaged in the work of ChangeFactory; what is your role / nature of your involvement?
5. In practice and using examples, how does this work? (Probe on what forums are used, who facilitates, who do you meet, where, how often, what do you talk about, how are you supported?
6. What values are crucial in your engagement with ChangeFactory; and of what significance are they? Why these values in particular?
7. From your own experience and citing examples, what have been the benefits (to you, other young people and broader society) resulting from the work of the Pros and ChangeFactory?
8. If there was anything you would like done differently in your engagement with ChangeFactory or your work as Pros, what would that be and how differently should it be done?
9. Generally, what is so special / different about the approach to child participation used by ChangeFactory; and what can others learn from this method of engagement with young people?

Appendix 3: Supervision Agreement

Agreement MA-Dissertation

Master level 30 credits

Following agreement is settled between the department of social work, University in charge, and Polycarp Musinguzi.

The department of social work appoint a supervisor for each dissertation.

The student is entitled to 20 hours of supervision (student and supervisor together). This amount of time is individual supervision. If the student chooses to change subject no extra time will be allocated to supervision.

If the student is not able to submit the dissertation on time he/she has to, in cooperation with the supervisor, set up a new and realistic plan for the rest of the work.

University in charge:

22/04/2015

Date



Student signature



Supervisor signature

Appendix 4: Non plagiarism declaration

I hereby declare that the assignment submitted for the course:

DISSERTATION IN SOCIAL WORK WITH FAMILIES AND CHILDREN ... 30 ECTS.

Has not been submitted for any other course during this or previous semesters

Has not been used as a form of examination at any other Institute/University/College.

Contains proper references and citations for other scholarly work

Contains proper citation and references from my own prior scholarly work

Has listed all citations in a list of references

I am aware that violation of this code of conduct is regarded as an attempt to plagiarize, and will result in a failing grade (F) in the course.

Date (dd/mm/yyyy): *22/04/2015*

Signature: 

Name (in block letters): *POLYCARP MUSHI*