Mixed-Method Evaluation of an Israeli Youth Participation Program

Name: **Jenny Kanters, 3010864**
Master: **Education, socialization & youth policy**
Institutes: **University of Utrecht, Ashoka Israel**
Supervisors: **Sophie Verhoeven (Universiteit Utrecht)**
Yael Biber-Aviad (Ashoka Israel)

Abstract

Empowerment is important for the development of adolescents. There are several participation programs that aim to empower their participants. The aim of this study was to evaluate the effect on empowerment that Ashoka's Youth Venture program has on its participants. The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Participants of the program ($N =36$) were asked to fill out a questionnaire about empowerment during one of Ashoka's events. The adolescents indicated that they feel more empowered by taking part in the program, especially by having a coach and working in group. The qualitative data was gathered through four individual interviews with the coaches of the program and one group interview with three coaches. Findings indicate that the main thing participants learned is that they have the ability to make a change in their environment. In addition, important influential elements of the program on the empowerment of the adolescents are demonstrated.

Keywords: youth empowerment, participation programs.

Empowerment is belangrijk voor de ontwikkeling van adolescenten. Er zijn verschillende participatie programma's die als doel hebben jongeren meer te empoweren. Het doel van dit onderzoek is om het effect op de empowerment van de deelnemers van het Ashoka's Youth Venture programma te evalueren. In dit onderzoek is gebruik gemaakt van zowel kwantitatieve als kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden. De deelnemers van dit onderzoek ($N=36$) zijn gevraagd om een vragenlijst in te vullen over empowerment tijdens één van de evenementen van Ashoka. De jongeren gaven aan zich meer empowered te voelen door deelname aan het programma, voornamelijk door het hebben van een coach en het werken in een groep. De kwalitatieve data is verzameld door het afnemen van vier individuele interviews en één groepsinterview met de drie coaches van het programma. De resultaten indiceren dat het belangrijkste wat de deelnemers geleerd hebben is dat ze het vermogen hebben om een verandering te maken in hun omgeving. Verder zullen belangrijke elementen van het programma weergegeven worden.

Sleutelbegrippen: jeugd empowerment, participatie programma's

Introduction

Adolescence is a time of major developmental changes in which individuals for the first time become engaged in community roles and collective struggles (Yate & Yourniss, 1998). However, young people often feel that they don't have control over the developmental processes of concern to them (Roger, 2008). The concept of empowerment suggests that adolescents realize their capacity to become agents of change in issues and causes that they care about (Russell, Muraco, Subramariam, & Laub, 2009). Several empowerment programs have been developed for youth, including Ashoka's Youth Venture program. The general aim of this research is to gain a broad insight in the Youth Ventures program in general and especially in Israel, in order to make a scientific contribution to the further development of the Youth Ventures Programs of Ashoka. At first the organisation Ashoka, Youth Venture in general and Youth Venture Israel will be described. Secondly, a general overview of the theoretical background of the Youth Ventures program will be made. The first and the second part together will result in a program theory. Thirdly, the Youth Venture program will be evaluated

Ashoka and Youth Venture

This section is based on Ashoka's website, conversations with the director of Ashoka Israel, Yael Biber, different powerpoints of Youth Venture International and on the annual report of Youth Venture Israel.

Ashoka

Ashoka has been in operation since 1981 and was founded by Bill Drayton. At this moment its operations span across more than sixty countries over five continents. Since 2008, Ashoka also has a branch in Israel.

Goal: Their main purpose is to create an environment in which every individual has the opportunity to make a change in society. Ashoka believes every person is a potential so called *changemaker*. A community like this would be able to respond quickly and effectively to social challenges.

Course of Action: Ashoka's main mechanism of operation is ventures through which Ashoka finds and supports social entrepreneurs. These are individuals with a system changing solution for the world's urgent social problems. Besides leading social entrepreneurs Ashoka also creates a demand for them. This is done by the fostering of an environment for creating successful ventures and by encouraging institutions to realize their potential by hiring these

entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurs will also recruit other *changemakers* by pioneering and establishing a new field or pattern in society.

Youth Venture

Youth Venture (YV) is an offshoot of Ashoka and was launched in 1996. Currently YV is operating in 17 countries.

Goal: Youth Venture has the same vision as Ashoka which is to change society so that everyone will have the freedom and societal support to take initiative and address social needs. In this, YV especially focuses on enabling young people to learn early on in life that they can lead social change. YV facilitates youth in the developing of a project to enable change. By engaging in a project, these youth will take part in a transformational experience wherein they will learn important life skills. These young *changemakers* will probably continue to take initiative again and again over a lifetime.

Course of action: Youth Venture helps youth to design and launch their project. Every group of participants meets several times and will have at least one coach to guide them during the process. While developing an YV project, participating youth will go through a series of steps. First, participants are encouraged to observe reality in a critical way - in such a manner so as to identify what needs to be changed and to identify opportunities for change and improvement. Next, they will do research in their environment to see where change is needed. Then, the youth will think about who they are, what their passions are and how they can use their passions to create a change. Eventually this will result in a topic for their project. From this point on the youth will start shaping their project. During the shaping of their project the youth *changemakers* will think about how to sustain their project and how to evaluate the results. They will set their goals and make a plan about how to achieve these goals. Furthermore, they need to write a founding proposal. After approval of the founding proposal the project will be launched.

Ownership

An integral element of Youth Venture is that the youth themselves develop and shape their projects. The strongest force causing one to act on an issue is to know the purpose for which he or she is doing it; therefore, participants of the program need to set their goals clearly. It is important for the coaches of the ventures to be very careful not to influence the youth too much while they are creating ideas for the project. The youth should be able to claim full ownership of creating the subject of the venture.

Youth Venture Israel

The Israeli chapter of Ashoka's Youth Venture program was started in September 2009, under the direction of Yael Biber. At the moment YV is operating a pilot version, which started in December 2009 and will continue until the end of May 2010. The program will be further developed and shaped while it progresses.

Since the program's launch, Israel's Youth Venture has made progress by having 17 teams divided in 22 operating projects at the moment. These teams differ in age, culture, nationality, language (Hebrew and Arabic) and socio-economic profile. This diversity illustrates one of Ashoka's principles that '*everybody* can be a changemaker'.

YV Israel has a partnership with Microsoft R&D. Thirteen Microsoft R&D staff members assist and advise the Youth Venture groups along with the group coaches. Apart from working with Microsoft YV Ashoka also co-operates with JDC's AMEN (Youth Volunteer Cities) organization, and with the Mateh Yehuda Regional Council.

The YV Israel program is similar to the Youth Venture program explained before. Further, YV Israel organises three events for all participants to take part in. The first event is the series of workshops with Microsoft. All teams come to the Microsoft building where each team receives individual advice from one of the Microsoft R&D volunteers, after presenting a detailed work plan for implementing the ventures. This event functions as a preparation for the second event, which is the launching panel. During the Launching panel all teams come together to present their venture in groups of three ventures at the time before a panel of three to four panel members. After presenting their project they get approval to start right away, or they receive a few suggestions for improving their venture before launching it. The last event is the closing of the program in which the participants will present their venture. The goal is to encourage the teenagers to continue to work on their venture.

Theoretical Framework

Empowerment and Youth

As described before, the main goal of Youth Venture is to teach young people that they are able to influence their surrounding. This goal corresponds to the concept of empowerment. Empowerment contributes to the youth's development, since elements of empowerment, like identity formation, bounding and social control, are also developmentally important for

adolescents (Chinman & Linney, 1998). Empowerment includes a person's confidence of his or her ability to participate in making meaningful decisions at an individual level, but also to have an affect on institutions, organisations and political systems in the wider community (Walker, Thorne, Powers, & Gaonkar, 2010). Yet, this is a very broad definition of empowerment. Zimmerman and colleagues (1992) specify this concept more by describing three components of empowerment, which are the intrapersonal, interactional and the behavioural component. The intrapersonal component of Psychological Empowerment refers to how people think about their capacity to make a change in social systems (Russell et al., 2009). It concerns one's self-perception, which is a basic element for an individual to act upon (Zimmerman, 1995). The interpersonal component refers to the exchange between an individual and their community which enables one to exert influence in different life spheres (Zimmerman et al., 1992). For a transaction between an individual and its environment to be successful a person needs to have certain skills, knowledge, understanding of resources and an understanding of their own community (Zimmerman, 1995). Lastly, the behavioural component refers to the specific actions a person takes through participation in community organisations and activities in order to influence their environment (Zimmerman et al., 1992). However, it is criticized that most research and literature about empowerment focuses on adults, while specific research about youth empowerment is lacking (Chinman & Linney, 1998; Russell et al., 2009). Therefore Russell and colleagues (2009) carried out a research on the way youth define and experience empowerment. Having and using knowledge and other resources, and a personal sense and feeling of empowerment, are both indicated by youth during group interviews. These two components correspond respectively to the interactional and intrapersonal component described by Zimmerman and colleagues (1992). As a third component participants describe relational empowerment, which refers to group-membership and connection to a broader community (Russell, et al., 2009).

Moreover, external factors, like to feel free of fundamental, physical and emotional threats to one's safety, can influence an adolescent's empowerment. Also a young person's believe that other persons view him or her as a resource is an important element of empowerment (Moody & Childs, 2003).

Participation and Empowerment

The Youth Venture program provides its participants the opportunity to participate in the society. An adolescent can benefit a lot from participating in their society, since participation in positive roles is important for successful development. Opportunities for a young person to

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participate in positive roles can be a stabilizing force in an adolescent's rapidly changing life (Chinman & Linney, 1998). Furthermore, youth participation in social services helps youth in shaping their identity. While engaging in social organizations, youth become members of a collective movement, binding them with the people who share the service activity, not only with those they work with at the moment but also past and future participants. This binding element gives youth an opportunity to develop an identity within a community context (Yourniss et al. 2002; Ben-Arieh & Boyer, 2005). With such an identity adolescents are not only trained to be good citizens in the future; their participation also secures their welfare in the present (Ben-Arieh & Boyer, 2005).

Not only does an adolescent benefit in these ways of participation, youth participation programs also have a great influence on a young person's empowerment process. However, the relation between empowerment and participation might be complex (Itzhaky &York, 2000). Chinman and Linney (1998) proposed a model in which empowerment of youth derives from developing a stable positive identity by experimenting with roles and incorporating the feedback of others. Empowerment results from an ongoing cycle of participation in positive meaningful activities, learning useful skills, and reinforcement. Another explanation is that empowerment connects perceived competence, motivation to take action, and actual participation (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988).

Research has been undertaken on the relation between participation programs and empowerment. A participation program focused on at-risk teens showed that participants built communications, analytic and inquiry skills, developed personal agency and direction, embraced positive peer norms which they reinforced with one another in group meetings, and developed a sense of collective empowerment and self-efficacy in relation to social action (Berg, Coman, & Schensul, 2009). Such a program can also be related to the level of participation of adolescents. Fertman and Chubb (1992) found in their research on a personal empowerment program that the program helped participants to remain involved in activities during a period of possible disengagement due to several transitions in an adolescents life. In turn an increase in participation is found to have an effect on the level of empowerment in a positive way (Holdon, Crankshaw, Nimsch, Hinnant, & Hunt, 2004).

Elements of a Program

There are two elements indicated in de Youth Venture program which are supposed to make a main contribution to the empowerment process. These are the youth-adult partnership and ownership. Both of these elements will be further examined.

The youth-adult partnership is the way adolescents and adults can work concerted for program or community action (Camino, 2005). An adult can have a great influence on an adolescent's empowerment process while taking part in a participation program (Wilson, Minkler, Dasho, Wallerstein, & Martin, 2008). One of the reasons for this is that the adult and adolescent share power by which they have more human capital to benefit of during the program (Camino, 2000; Camino & Zeldin, 2002). In the youth-adult relationship adults can provide the youth participants of an empowerment program; encouragement and advice, specific guidance and directions. In addition, adults can create opportunities for youth to make use of their own potential and reflect their own actions (Hilfinger Messias, Fore & Parra-Medina, 2005). Furthermore, it is the adult's task to help youth to keep their vision clear during the program (Wilson et al., 2008).

Ownership means that youth own the project their working on. It includes a decision-making authority. By this, adolescents own the assets which they work with and the fruits of their success or failure in solving the problem (Camino & Zeldin, 2002). There are a couple of benefits an adolescent can gain from having the ownership of the project. Developing their own projects gives young people an enhanced sense of control and social responsibility. It helps youth gain skills needed for participation and it makes them realize the influence of power dynamics in their lives (Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007).

Conclusion of the Program Theory

Through meaning of the Youth Venture program Ashoka's aim is to empower its youth participants. This is done by providing adolescents with the experience of developing and executing their own project. An important element of the program is ownership by the adolescents. Findings in the literature confirm the theory behind the YV program.

Ashoka Israel requested for an evaluation study to be done to the Youth Venture program. The main questions of this research are: Do participants feel more empowered by joining the Youth Venture program? What do participants learn from taking part in the program? And how does the program influence the empowerment process of the participants? Considering the findings in the literature, it is expected that participants of the YV Israel program will be more empowered by taking part in the program.

Method

This study employs a mixed- method approach, it combines a quantitative analysis of a brief questionnaire with qualitative data from interviews. The questionnaire was used to gain a general

view of the empowerment process from the viewpoint of as much participants as possible. To get a more in dept view about what participants learned, and how the program influenced the empowerment process of the adolescents, seven coaches were interviewed.

Data of this research is gathered during and after the Youth Venture's the selection panel. The projects of the participants at this time were not in operation yet.

Questionnaire

Sample and Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaires were administered during the Launching Panel on the 25th of March. During this day all of the participants who came to the event were asked to fill out the questionnaire voluntarily in a central gathering hall. The youth was allowed to take the forms to fill them out at another place and return them later.

The questionnaire was filled out by 36 participants of the Youth Venture program, which is 36% of the total of participants present during the selection panel. It was expected to collect about 170 questionnaires during this day. However, only about a hundred participants came to the event, and the non-response was large.

The average age of the respondents was 15.9 years (SD = 1.38). Of the 36 participants whom filled out the questionnaire 72.2% was female, and 27.8% male. The participants came from different places, 11.1% came from Ramat HaSharon, 19.4% from Jerusalem, 30.6% from Tel Aviv, 16.7% from Modiin and 22.2% from Um el Fahm. Of the participants was 77.8% of Jewish origin and 22.2% of Arabic origin.

Measures

A questionnaire was constructed for this research in an effort to assess if the participants feel more empowered by taking part in the Youth Venture program (see attachment 1). Constructing measures of empowerment began by identifying components of empowerment followed by identifying items that relate to those components. The components are the Intrapersonal, the Interactional (Zimmerhof & colleagues, 1993; Zimmerhof, 1995) and the Relational (Russel, 2009) component. For each of the components items were selected (see table 1). Items of a similar questionnaire developed by Holdon and colleagues (2004) were used; further items are based on literature about the components. Twenty items about empowerment were asked to which participants could choose an answer on a 5-point likert scale, with 1 meaning 'strongly disagree', 2 'disagree', 3 'neutral', 4 'agree' and 5 'strongly agree'. Two items on the same 5-point likert scale were administered to evaluate the program. The participants were also asked to rate the program on a scale from 1 till 10 in order to evaluate the

program. In addition, participants were asked to reply to a couple of general questions, which were age, sex, subject of venture and place of gathering.

Most of the Youth venture groups started in November or December and met on a weekly basis. Participants were asked how often they attended the meetings. They could choose an answer out of four categories; 1 = I've been to all the meetings, 2= I missed one meeting, 3= I missed two to four meetings, 4= I missed more than 4 meetings

Lastly, two open questions were asked in which participants had to declare the strongest and weakest points of the program.

The questionnaire was made in English and translated to Hebrew. At first, a reliability test was conducted on the Empowerment scale and on the different subscales (see table 2). On basis of the cronbach's alpha one item was deleted from the Relational scale.

Table 1 *Components and items of Empowerment*

Component	Item
Intrapersonal	(1) to be more confident to make a change
	(2) to be more sure to be able to convince people in environment
	(3) to feel that it matters if person participates or not
	(4) to feel more competent to make a change
	(5) to realize how to use skills and passions
	(6) wanting to have as much say in community or school as possible
	(7) to be willing to work more in order to make a change
Interpersonal	(8) to learn more about the needed recourses
	(9) to learn to map out social problems
	(10) to learn more about how to set goals
	(11) to better understand certain norms and values
	(12) to gain new skills in order to use recourses
	(13) to learn more about how to require needed recourses
	(14) to learn how to develop solutions to problems
	(15) to view problems in environment in a different way
Relational	(16) item deleted
	(17) the coach really helped in developing the project
	(18) the value of working together with other people of the same age
	(19) to be able to work with people in the group to get things done
	(20) to feel supported by the coach during the program
Evaluation	(21) the program gave opportunities a participant wouldn't have had else.
	(22) if could choose again a participant would join the program again

Table 2. *Cronbach's alpha for Empowerment and subscales of Empowerment*

	N of items	α
Empowerment	22	.93
Intrapersonal	7	.87
Interactional	8	.90
Relational	4	.74

Analysis

The means for the average attendance, the evaluation of the program by the participants and the score on the different empowerment scales were calculated. Further a Kruskal - Wallis test (Field, 2005) was conducted to examine if empowerment is affected by average attendance. A spearman correlation (Field, 2005) is used to measure the relationship between empowerment and the rating of the program.

Interviews

Sample and Procedure

Seven coaches were interviewed, of which four coaches were interviewed individually and three in a group. The coaches were selected on basis of the degree in which they speak English and the accessibility for the interviewer to visit them. Four of the seven coaches were first approached by telephone to ask if they wanted to be interviewed individually. The individual interviews were done in English and took place at different locations. One coach was interviewed in her own house, two coaches were interviewed in their work place, and one coach at the beach. Three other coaches were interviewed during a meeting they had with the director of Youth Venture Israel, Yael Biber. This interview happened spontaneous, and the coaches were not informed at forehand. These coaches were of Arabic origin, and did not speak English well enough. Therefore Yael Biber translated the questions of the interviewer and the answers of the coaches.

Table 3 demonstrates background information of the interviewed coaches. Three interviewees are coaches of groups initiated by the village committee chairperson in Ein Rafa. These coaches are the same age as the participants of the group and therefore fully take part as participants of the YV program. Three coaches work on daily basis with youth in a community center. One coach works for the American Jewish Joint Distribution (JDC) and works part time with Ashoka in a community center. Accept for the coaches from Ein Rafa, the participants of the program whom filled out the questionnaire are part of the group led by the interviewed coaches

Table 3. *Overview interviewed coaches, setting, origin, group size and subject of venture*

	Setting	Origin	Group(s) size	Subject venture
Coach1	Works in a Community Centre, Yad HaShmona	Israeli	4	Making the environment aware of a way to save water
Coach2	Works in a Community Centre, Tel Aviv	Israeli	- 7 - 7	- Menaston, day-care centre for little children - Green Hope, competition to save the environment
Coach3	Works in a Community Centre, Tel Aviv	Israeli	- 10 - 10	- Campaign against Alcohol - Campaign against Violence
Coach4	Works for the JDC, Jerusalem and Modi'in	Israeli	- / - 15	- Talent bank, to help one another with your talents. - Kir HaIr, graffiti wall, to keep youth of the street
Coach5	Village committee, Ein Rafa	Arab	9	Library in the village
Coach6	Village committee, Ein Rafa	Arab	5	Restoring old ways of archiculture
Coach7	Village committee, Ein Rafa	Arab	4	Numbers for houses and names for streets

Measures

Interviews were conducted in order to clarify the coaches' perspective on the effectiveness of the program to empower its participants. The questions were divided into 5 categories. First, general questions were asked, for example about the subject of the venture. The second category was about the group meetings, the third was about the process of the participants while taking part in the Youth Venture program, the fourth about the influence a coach has on the participants and the last category was about the influence of being a group member has on the participants (see attachment 2). The interviewer felt free to ask the questions in different order, depending on the answers of the coaches. To keep the conversation going the interviewer asked more in depth questions about the answers the coaches gave to the questions.

Analysis

The interviews were analysed with the computer program MAXQDA, using a technique suggested by Boeije (2005). The answers to the different questions of each coach were compared to each other and analysed first on broader recurring themes and patterns and later more precise ones, regarding to what the participants learned on the three different subscales of empowerment and which elements of the program contributed to that.

Results – Questionnaire

Average attendance to meetings

Participants were asked how often they attended the Youth Venture meetings. The highest percentage, 41.7%, of the participants went to all the meetings. 27.8% of the participants missed one meeting, and 30.6% missed two till four meetings. There were no participants whom missed all meetings. Most groups started in November or December and met on a weekly basis.

Perceived Empowerment

To examine if the participants of the Youth Venture program feel more empowered by joining the program the means of the answers of all the questions about empowerment and the questions on the different subscales are calculated (see table 4). On a 5-point likert scale empowerment has a score of 4.18 (*SD* = .59). The scale Intrapersonal Empowerment scores 4.12 (*SD* = .72), the scale Interactional Empowerment 4.10 (*SD* = .70), and the scale Relational Empowerment scores 4.46 (*SD* = .67).

Table 4. *Means and standard deviation of Empowerment and subscales.*

	Mean	SD
Empowerment	4.18	.59
Intrapersonal	4.12	.72
Interactional	4.10	.70
Relational	4.46	.67

Evaluation of the program

Three questions were asked in order to examine how the participants evaluate the program. The first question was if the program gave the participants opportunities they wouldn't have had else. The average score on a 5-point likert scale was 4.36 (*SD* = .76).

Secondly the participants were asked if they would join the program again if they could choose again. The average score on a 5-point likert scale was 4.17 (*SD* = 1.11).

Lastly, the average rate given to the program is 8.66. The minimum rate given was 5, and the maximum rate given was 10.

Attendance in relation to Empowerment

A Kruskal Wallis test was conducted to measure if there is a relation between the attendance to the meetings and empowerment. Empowerment was significantly affected by the degree of attendance ($H(2) = 11.14$, $p < .05$).

Furthermore, the relation between attendance and the subscales of Empowerment have been examined. Interpersonal Empowerment and Relational Empowerment were significantly affected by the degree of attendance, respectively ($H(2) = 12.68$, $p < .05$) and ($H(2) = 7.35$, $p < .05$)

Empowerment in relation to rating of the program

A Spearman's correlation test was conducted to measure the relation between the rating of the program and empowerment. There was a positive relationship between empowerment and the rate given by a person to the program ($r_s = .49$, p (one-tailed) $<.05$).

Moreover, the relation between rating and the subscales of Empowerment have been examined.

As well intrapersonal, interpersonal, as relational empowerment were significantly related to the rating a participant gave to the program, respectively ($r_s = .43$, p (one-tailed) $<.05$), ($r_s = .47$, p (one-tailed) $<.05$), ($r_s = .43$, p (one-tailed) $<.05$).

Indicated strong and weak points of the program

The participants were asked to answer three open questions. Participants were asked to indicate the Youth Venture's strong and weak points, and if they had anything to comment on the program. Most participants only replied to the first question. The adolescents pointed out that Ashoka gave them the opportunity to do something in the environment, and besides that gave them the tools and helped them to learn the skills they needed in order to make a change. A 16 year old girl from Jerusalem stated the following: "*Ashoka young people gives youth a big opportunity to change what bothers and distracts them in the environment. This is an opportunity to discover cooperation with other youth and to learn about the business world.*"

The weak points indicated by most participants were organisational problems as lack of time, disorganisation and not enough financial assistance. One adolescent indicated low attendance and seriousness of the group as a weak point of Ashoka's Youth Venture program. Furthermore, a participant wrote: "*sometimes it is hard to work on a project when you are young because people don't take you serious*". Another participant added to this by saying, that it is sometimes hard to persuade people to cooperate. Lastly, two Arabic participants indicated that the program is not translated into Arabic, while this is the second language in Israel.

Results – Interviews

In addition to the questionnaire, more in-dept knowledge was gained about what participants learned by taking part in the Youth Venture program, and about how elements of the program influenced the participants. Several themes occurred out of the answers of the coaches. These themes can be divided into two sections. At first, the section about the influence the program had on its participants will be discussed. Secondly, influential elements of the program as indicated by the coaches will be examined.

Influence of the program

Personal feeling of having the capacity

Most of the coaches stressed out that the main thing the participants learned from being in this program is that they have the capacity to do something. As a coach said: "*Most of everything they learned that they have power. Many of them, they live here, and this is, eh, a problematic area. And they value their self low. And some of them really got the 'yes I can do it, and I can make a change or I can be proud of who I am, and not like this or that, cause I am doing something*"

However, one coach pointed out that she was not sure that the youth's capacity to make a change in their environment had increased, because their self esteem at that point was not high enough for that. In addition, the coach did say she thought the adolescents would realize more that they have the capacity, after having an experience of developing their own project more often.

Motivation to make a change, in other life spheres and in the future

Some of the participants got more motivated to make a change in their environment. Especially when the ventures got more shaped and after the launching panel, when the ventures got the approval to continue on with their project, the participants got encouraged to be more active in working on their project. Besides that, two coaches also indicated they got encouraged from working in this program. A reaction of a coach in an Arab village, Ein Rafa, after she saw six groups coming out with a venture in her village was: "*And it gave me feeling of courage and confidence and strength and a lot of willing to succeed*".

To the question if the participants will use the things they have learned in other spheres of their life or in the future, the coaches gave different replies. One coach said they have learned few skills which they will use when going to college. Another coach replied that they have learned they have power, and are capable of doing something in their environment. A coach said that they are more aware of

their environment now. And lastly a coach said that it depends on the experience the youth will have during executing the project

Awareness of Environment

The program helped the participants to think more about needs in their environment, but it's questionable if it helped them to be more aware of their environment. Two coaches said participating made the youth more aware of their environment. The other coaches pointed out their still learning to be more aware. A coach expressed her doubts about this subject: "*So I hope it made them more aware of their surroundings, but I think we can work on it more*".

Understanding of Resources

While participating in the Youth Venture program the youth had the opportunity to make more use of the resources in their environment. The extend to which they learned to use these resources individually is limited however, because the lack of experience in it. As a coach, replied to the question if the participant now know better how to use certain resources: "*At some point yes, but maybe we can do it better you know, for this they maybe don't really did it so maybe they could do it more*".

Skills

One of the main skills the participants learned during the Youth Venture program is how to plan and schedule things in order to reach a certain goal. One of the coaches from Ein Rafa said: "*What we do in Ashoka is we write everything before we execute it. If I would have been by myself without talking, without nothing I would just try and if it succeed it succeed and if not than not*".

Moreover, the different coaches indicated a couple of other skills participants learned during the program, which are writing a letter, calling a person, or setting up a meeting.

Influential elements of the program

Youth-adult partnership

The coaches indicated that having a coach is an essential part of the program, because the participants need an older adult to guide them when they have questions or to nudge them towards a specific direction of thinking. A coach pointed it out as following: "*… they are confused they think like something big and they can go lost, and there is something. I'm telling them we're to go if they want something like publicity, open your book and look for something and find three of them and try. So I tell them what to do and they thinking, eh, who to call or…*"

Another important contribution a coach makes to the developmental process of the participants is that the coach stimulates the participants to work on the project. When the children feel like giving up, it is the coach's job to encourage them to continue. In addition, the coach provides the participants of the structure in order to work on the project. At last, the presence of a coach makes the project feel more serious for the participants. An answer of a coach illustrates this: "*And in their eyes makes it* [having a coach] *a legitimate project and it also can give accountability, it can go, you know, run of their time, you know. So even if the person wouldn't do anything, just their presence makes it feel more real, you know*".

However, the function of a coach can threaten the ownership of the participants. The participants might feel that they are not able to work on such a project without a coach. A coach expresses her concern: "*They think I did everything, but I didn't… I don't think they do quite realize how many work they've done*".

Group-membership

The coaches stressed out several advantages the youth gets from working in a group of people around the same age. Because they are the same age it helps them to better understand each other, they feel more empowered by having a group supporting them, and it builds there self esteem.

Nevertheless, motivation during the program often was a problem according to the coaches. There was a difference in the level of motivation between the group members. Often, there was a core group which was motivated. Difference in motivation could be a drain for the motivated ones. One coach indicated that the participants should have the same maturity level.

Ownership

The coaches all pointed out that it is the experience the program provides its participants, which makes the program effective. Because they are working on a project, adolescents experience that they are capable of developing a project. One of the coaches reported: "*Yeay, I think it is important cause today we know more and more that the real learning is coming from experience, you know. Not from, eh, just reading book and doing exam and not meaning nothing to do. And this program is giving the option to be, eh relevant in their life, you know*". The fact that the adolescents develop the project themselves makes the effect of this experience stronger. A coach's answer illustrates the principle of ownership pointed out by the coaches: "*it makes them more stronger by the fact that they really started the process from the beginning. They didn't start in the middle or someone gave them a project. They started really from the need from the thing, till the project, you know, so this something that show them, like a long way but with worth it in the end*".

However, a couple of coaches mentioned that the participants need to have this experience more often in order to internalize the things they've learned.

Influential moments

The coaches were asked if there was one particular part of the program in which they could notice a change in the participants. All coaches referred to the moments the group went out of their normal meeting place. This happened with the workshops of Microsoft and with the Launching Panel. Going out and meeting other people whom also worked in this program gave the participants a feeling of connectedness to the rest of the country, which stimulated them to work on their project. A coach reported about the launching panel: "*And it was nice, cause they met a lot of people, and they we're like really waiting to present their project, and get the bravo. And when they see there a lot of people all around Israel, just doing this, so it gave them, eh, more, eh…It's big*".

Thinking-phase and doing-phase

As noted before, the program consists of a part wherein the youth develops the project, the so called thinking-phase, and the part wherein the project is executed, the doing-phase. All coaches agreed on that both parts are equal in importance. A coach spoke about how both parts contribute one another: "*…eh, also the process and also the results are important, I mean, eh, and you need to somehow give them space for both cause the process is very, eh, a good thing but it can not stay without the other* [the doing part]". However, for the youth it might feel that the doing part is the most important. As one coach said: "*But for them, you know, how it is with kids, they don't think that far. They want just now to do, and here and now.*"

Suggestions for Change

Two coaches pointed out that the current time schedule does not fit the needs of the participants. One coach said the part, in which the participants discuss different theories, is to long in comparison to the time they plan and execute their project. Another coach added to this that the transaction from the thinking phase to the doing phase is too big. According to both of them there should be more "doing" during the thinking phase. The other coaches replied that they did not want to change anything about the program.

Discussion

Adolescence is a time in which individuals become more engaged in their community (Yate & Youniss, 1998). Empowerment is a concept which suggests individuals become more aware of their capacity to become agents of change in issues and causes that they care about (Russell et al., 2009). A mixed-method research, combining a questionnaire and interviews, was conducted on a youth participation program named Youth Venture Israel (YV), which is part of the worldwide organisation Ashoka. The goals set by YV correspond to the concept of empowerment. The questionnaire was administered to obtain a general view of the empowerment process from the point of view of the participants. To obtain a more in dept view of what participants have learned through the program and how they learned this, interviews were conducted with the coaches of the program.

Youth venture gave its participants the opportunity to participate in their community through which they learned several things. The coaches indicated that the main thing participants learned is that they have the capacity to make a change in their environment. The participants felt most empowered on the relational scale, which means by being part of a group and having a coach. The coaches indicated these as being influential elements of the program, through which participants are being empowered. Participants reported to feel more capable to influence their environment and to have learned more about the interaction with their environment in order to make a change. Furthermore, when an adolescent attended more meetings, this person felt more empowered. In turn, when a participant felt more empowered, he or she appreciated the program more.

Having the experience of working on their own project helped youth to become more aware of their own capacity and to experiment with resources needed to make a change in their environment. However, to fully generalise what participants learned during the program with respect to other spheres of their life, participants might need a similar experience more often.

In addition, the youth-adult relationship and being part of a group, other elements of the program are indicated to be influential, which are ownership and the connection to other people in Israel the program provided its participants with. The events of Ashoka made the adolescent realize that they are not working on their own, but that they are connected to a broader society of people working on the same thing.

This research has several limitations. At first, some limitations have to be mentioned concerning the questionnaire. The questionnaire used in this research has not been tested on its validity. It is translated into Hebrew and the answers on the questions are translated back

into English, which could have been of influence to the interpretation of the results. However, the questionnaire and answers are translated by people who are fluently in both Hebrew and English. Moreover, since participants were allowed to fill out the questionnaire wherever they wanted, their answers could be influenced by their peers or coach. Also, the adolescents could have answered more positive out of fear to influence their participation in the program. At last, due to the large non response in administering the questionnaire, the sample used in this research might not be representative of the population of the Youth Venture program. In regard of the interviews, they are conducted in English, which is not the native tongue of most of the interviewee's. This might made the coaches feel limited in answering the questions. Another limitation is the timing of the research. Results were collected when the projects of the adolescents were not in operation yet, which might have influenced the findings.

Despite these limitations the results indicate several of important elements of a participation program that influence the empowerment of adolescents. An important element of the Youth Venture program is that it offers adolescents the opportunity to participate in their community. Through participation a young person can develop an identity within the community context (Youniss et al., 2002). Empowerment can be derived from such a stable positive identity (Chinman and Linney, 1998). The results of this research indicate that it is important for adolescents to meet other individuals working on the same kind of projects: this gives them a feeling of being connected to a broader society. This connection with the community results in being more motivated to make a change in the environment.

Another indicated element of an empowerment program is ownership. Ownership means that adolescents own the assets that they work with and the fruits of their success or failure in working with the project (Camino & Zeldin, 2002). This research suggests that ownership can empower the participants by the experience the adolescents have of working on their project. This experience makes them realize that they are capable of developing such a project. The empowering effect of this experience is intensified by the fact that the participants own the project, by starting it from the beginning and working on it all the way to the end. The effect of this experience also became clear in a research of Morsillo and Prilleltensky (2007) who stated that such an experience can give youth an enhanced sense of control and social responsibility; it can make them realize the influence of power dynamics in their lives; and it helps them to gain skills needed for participation.

According to the literature the youth-adult partnership, which is the way youth and adults can work concerted for program or community action (Camino, 2005), can have a great influence on a young person's empowerment (Wilson et al., 2008). Both participants and coaches

confirmed the importance of the youth-adult partnership. A coach can legitimate the project, because the presence of a coach can make the project feel more real for the adolescents. A coach guides and nudges the participants towards a specific direction of thinking or doing. A coach stimulates the participants to work on their project. Lastly, a coach provides the adolescents of the structure in order to work on the project. However, due to the important influence a coach has on the experience of the adolescents, it can not always be clear for the students that they have the ownership over their project.

Nevertheless, there are limitations to the effect the Youth Venture program had on its participants. In order to fully internalize what participants learned during the program, they need to have this kind of an experience more often. This corresponds to the theory of Chinman and linney (1998), which suggest that empowerment results from an ongoing cycle of experience of participation. Thus, when adolescent will have this experience more often, they will likely become more empowered.

This research reveals the effect a participation program can have on the empowerment of adolescents. It also demonstrates important elements of a program that influence the empowerment process of adolescents. Further studies on this subject would be valuable to add to this discussion. Such research can deepen the perspective of adolescents on their empowerment process, and the way they perceive participation programs. Further, in this research hardly any attention has been given to the effect of the feeling of connection to their community an adolescent can get of a participation program. However, in the interviews it became clear that this is an important element for the empowerment process of the adolescents. More research should be done on this subject.

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Questionnaire, Evaluation Youth Venture program

Thanks for filling out this questionnaire. We hope you're having a good time so far joining the Youth Venture program.

In order to improve the program we would like to hear your opinion about it. The questionnaire is anonymous and will be used to further develop the program. We won't use your name in any case, so feel free to answer honestly and critically.

What is your age?   ……… year

What is your sex?   0   Male
                        0   Female

In which city/town does your group meet?

………………………………………………………………………………………..

What is the subject of your team?

………………………………………………………………………………………..

How many meetings of your group did you attend?
        0   I've been to all the meetings

        0   I missed one meeting
        0   I missed 2 till 4 meetings
        0   I missed more than 4 meetings

Please, fill in how much you agree or disagree on the 22 statements mentioned below by colouring the dot of your choice.

On each statement you have the possibility to colour one out of five dots. The dots vary from strongly disagree till strongly agree. Choose any dot in between that fits most to how you feel about the statement.

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
1. Joining the program didn't help me to be more confident to work effectively against problems I perceive in my environment	0	0	0	0	0
2. Joining the program helped me to feel ensured that I can convince people in my environment to work against problems I perceive in my environment.	0	0	0	0	0

3. I wanted to join this program because I feel I can make a change in my environment.   0   0   0   0   0

4. Joining the program helped me to feel more competent to work against problems I perceive in my environment.   0   0   0   0   0

5. Joining the program helped me to realize how I can use my skills and passions to do something against problems I perceive in my environment.   0   0   0   0   0

6. I enjoy participation in the program, because I want to have as much say in my community or school as possible.   0   0   0   0   0

7. Joining the program didn't encouraged me to work against problems I perceive in my environment.   0   0   0   0   0

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
8. By joining the program I learned more about which means are available in my environment to work against problems I perceive in my environment.	0	0	0	0	0
9. By joining the program I learned to map out social problems in my environment.	0	0	0	0	0
10. By joining the program I learned more about how to set goals in order to work against problems I perceive in my environment.	0	0	0	0	0
11. Joining the program helped me to better understand certain norms and values in my environment.	0	0	0	0	0
12. By joining the program I gained skills which enable me to manage means available in my environment to work against problems I perceive in my environment.	0	0	0	0	0
13. By joining the program I learned how to use the means available in my environment to work against problems I perceive in my environment.	0	0	0	0	0

14. By joining the program I learned to develop solutions to problems I perceive in my environment.

0	0	0	0	0

15. Joining the program helped me to better understand my environment, which enables me to exert influence in my environment.

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
16. I think I could have done the same things without help of the members of my team.	0	0	0	0	0
17. My coach really helped me in developing my project.	0	0	0	0	0
18. Working together with other people of my age is of much value to me.	0	0	0	0	0
19. I can't work with people in my group to get things done.	0	0	0	0	0
20. I felt supported by my coach during the program.	0	0	0	0	0

In general

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
21. Joining the program gave me opportunities I wouldn't have had else.	0	0	0	0	0
22. If I could choose again I would join the program again.	0	0	0	0	0

23. What are the strongest points of the Youth Venture program in your opinion?

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

24. What are the weakest points of the Youth Venture program in your opinion?

…………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

25. What rate would you give the Youth Venture program, from one till then?

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

26. At last, Is there anything you would like to comment on the program?

…………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………

Attachment 2

Interview Questions,

General
- What is the subject of the venture?
- How many participants in the group? How many boys/girls?
- What is the age range of the group, and their origin?

Group meetings:
- When and where did the group meet?
- How many participants attended the meetings, in average?
- How many meetings did your group have so far?
- How would an average meeting look like? *(variety in program?)*
- Is there anything you would like to change if you could redo it?

Process of the participants while taking part in the Youth Venture program
- What is the main thing the participants learned from this program?
- Do you think the participant's abilities to influence social systems has increased? *(How did the program contribute to this?)*
- How did your group got together?
- Do you think participants feel more aware of their environment's needs? *(How did the program contribute to this?)*
- Do you think participants feel they have gained more knowledge about resources required in order to achieve goals? *(How did the program contribute to this?)*
- Do you think the teenagers will benefit from what they have learned, in other spheres of their life? *(What? How?)*
- Was there one specific moment during the program which was an extra valuable lesson for them? *(Why was it extra valuable? how did this specific moment affect the participants?)*

Influence as coach
- Do you feel it's essential for the participants to have an older adult as a coach? *(How could you notice this in your own group?)*
- In what way could you as a coach contribute to the whole process of developing a project?

Being a member of Group
- Do you think it helped the participants to work together with people of their age? *(In what way? What about support?)*